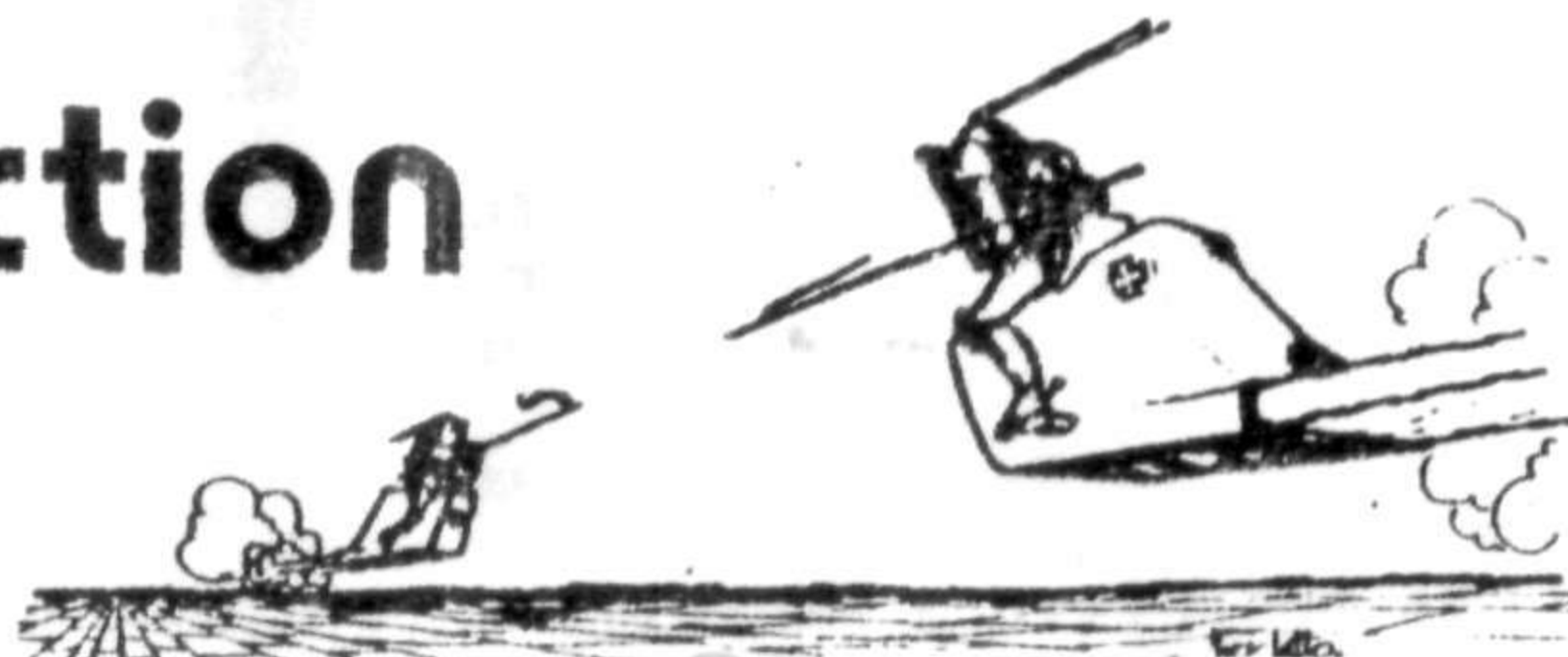


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 130

JUNE 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-months subscription is £3.50.

JUNE MEETING - Friday 18th June at 7.45 pm

DAVE LANGFORD is coming to tell us a fairy story. He is one of the wittiest and most amusing writers in SF today. Few British writers have ever been nominated for the US-dominated Hugo awards, but he has been a short-listed nominee four times, for fan writing, and his fanzine Twil Ddu has been short-listed once. He is also a former TAFF winner and Eastercon fan guest-of-honour, but has now turned professional, and is one of the youngest full-time writers of SF in Britain. His first SF novel, The Space Eater, is being published as an Arrow paperback this month, and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that he will have a few words to say about it. (Such as "Buy a copy!") Another of his books, Facts and Fallacies (co-written with Chris Morgan, of whom some of you might perhaps have heard), is re-emerging later this month in the guise of a Corgi paperback. This will almost certainly be the most hilarious meeting of the year. Don't miss it.

Admission this month: members 60p, non-members £1.00.

MAY MEETING

Ken Bulmer couldn't make it. The best alternative your committee could come up with at short notice was a quiz, for which the audience was divided into teams of four. The questionmaster was Chris Morgan (who was responsible for setting all the good questions), and the winning team was captained by Rog Peyton.

FORTHCOMING

* July - Beer and Skittles evening at the White Swan, Harborne. There will be a buffet and a bar extension. Tickets are now available at £3.50 per person from Margaret Thorpe by post (cheques payable to Birmingham Science Fiction Group; her address is at the top of the page), at the June meeting, or from Andromeda Bookshop. Numbers are limited. Buy your ticket soon to make sure of getting one.

* Later - BSFA National Mastermind Quiz, Midlands regional heat. We still need another couple of volunteers for this. Contact any committee member.

* Even later - Toby Roxburgh, the SF editor at Futura, will visit us in late summer or early autumn to talk about the problems of making a profit out of publishing SF.

DAVE LANGFORD and CHRIS MORGAN will be signing books at Andromeda Bookshop on Saturday 19th June, from 1.00 pm.

...NEWS...

CHRIS PRIEST has won the 1982 Australian "Ditmar" award for best international SF/fantasy novel with The Affirmation. It just shows how much more perceptive the Aussies are than British or US voters for SF awards.

THE 1982 BALROG AWARDS (for fantasy) were presented recently. Katherine Kurtz won the novel award for Camber the Heretic. The short fiction award went to C.J.Cherryh for "A Thief of Korianth".

EUROCON '82 in Switzerland has been cancelled due to the collapse "from nervous exhaustion" of Pascal Ducommun (who was meant to be organising it all but had given a masterly impression of total inefficiency right from the start). If you sent money to Switzerland, write and ask for it back. However, the UK bid for Eurocon '84, spearheaded by John Brunner, is still on. More details later.

HARRY HARRISON, our joint honorary president, seems to be a very popular guest-of-honour at forthcoming conventions. He'll be appearing at Faircon (July 23-26 1982), Novacon 12 (Nov 5-7 1982) and Ra Con (Feb 4-6 1983).

ARTHUR C.CLARKE has sold the serial rights to 2010: Odyssey Two to Playboy for \$50,000. The novel will be published simultaneously in hardcover by Ballantine Del Rey (US) and Granada (UK) in November 1982.

LIONEL FANTHORPE was interviewed on Radio 4's "Midweek" programme on Wed 2nd June. Also he is reported to have sold his book on Rennes-le-Chateau to the US for a huge advance.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP's top ten best selling paperbacks for May 1982 were: 1.Dr Who & the Keeper of Traken - Terrance Dicks (Target), 2.Dr Who & Warriors' Gate - John Lydecker (Target), 3.The One Tree - Stephen Donaldson (Fontana), 4.God Emperor of Dune - Frank Herbert (NEL), 5.Oath of Fealty - Niven & Pournelle (Futura), 6.The Claw of the Conciliator - Gene Wolfe (Arrow), 7=King Kobold - Christopher Stasheff (Granada), 7=Worlds - Joe Haldeman (Futura), 9.Eclipse - Margaret Tabor (Hamlyn), 10=The Shadow of the Torturer - Gene Wolfe (Arrow), 10=Master of the Five Magics - Lyndon Hardy (Futura).

SOLIHULL SF GROUP still meets on the fourth Sunday of each month at the Red House, Hermitage Road (off Lode Lane) from 7.00 pm onwards.

CASSANDRA SF CIRCLE meets at the Brookside Community Centre, Northampton, on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month. They are interested in the writing side of SF. For details contact Bernard Smith, 8 Wansford Walk, Thorplands Brook, Northampton.



"GETTING THOSE
B.S.F.G. MEMBERS
OUT OF THE PUB
EACH MONTH USED
TO BE DIFFICULT?"

DAVE HADEN '82.

Lord Mayor's procession

- 5th June 1982

After weeks of hard, dedicated work by a small group of stalwarts, the BSFG float, representing a sea monster arising from the ocean and threatening the occupants of an inflatable dingy, went on display. To considerable crowd approval and applause it roared (literally) on its way in the Lord Mayor's Procession, much to the satisfaction of those who had laboured on its construction.

Alan Cash, who master-minded the building, wishes to personally thank those who offered him their assistance and encouragement, namely: Vernon and Pat Brown; Chris Suslowicz (for electronics); Jan Suslowicz (for transport and materials); Kevin Easthope; Richard Johnson and his father (for transporting the construction team about at short notice); Linda Hales (whose costume added the finishing touches); Bernie Morton (for materials); Peter Weston (for driving the float); Mike Field (for making the advertising signs); Mike Meakin (for construction aid); Eileen Weston (for transporting the dingy); Dave Martin (for loaning the van to the Group); and A.&D. Marine (for the loan of the inflatable dingy). He is especially grateful to Dick and Anne Gay who loaned their garage as the construction site, who patiently offered assistance, and supplied coffee and beer to the workers. Also thanks to Mr and Mrs David Streeter for encouragement, use of ladders, coffee and sundry nails. Thanks and apologies to anyone who has been inadvertently left out.

Collecting money and handing out publicity fliers on the day were Mike Millward (who took pictures), Pauline and Chris Morgan, Dave Fairhurst as well as Linda, Pat, Vernon, Richard and Alan.

The Group would like to take this opportunity to thank Alan Cash for his valiant efforts and magnificent work.

DRAGONSLAYER

- Steve Green reviews both the book (Fontana £1.25, 218 pages) and the film

There's an eerie parallel between Ulrich, the Obi Wan Kenobi clone portrayed by Ralph Richardson in Dragonslayer, and the movie in which he features; both are anachronisms, fading echoes of another, far simpler time, when aging sorcerers had no need to rely on teenage assistants with upstate New York accents to rid the English countryside of its indigenous reptile population, and Disney films came complete with an automatic audience of wide-eyed juveniles. With an irony no doubt lost on its producers, Dragonslayer signals not only the death knells of an innocent age of stiff-upper-lipped heroes, blow-waved princesses and top-rate special effects, but Disney's recognition of its own loss of innocence, an evolution from its standard "cute kids and animals" product begun somewhat half-heartedly three years ago with the abysmal The Black Hole.

Newcomer Peter MacNichol registers reasonably well as Galen, the Roger Daltrey lookalike hero, but like Wayland Drew, author of the workmanlike adaptation, he faces almost as much of a struggle against the vagaries of the plot as he does against Vermithrax, villain of the piece. Both battles are won. Just.

Dragon slain, Galen and love interest (not the princess---now that's a twist) gallop into oblivion as mediaeval Christianity rears its head over the horizon and heralds the dawning of a New Age, replete with its own absurdities and prejudices. Another parallel, intentional this time, for a New Age at Disney? Considering Dragonslayer's appalling box office returns in the States last summer, I rather doubt it.

NOVACON

5TH-7TH November 1982
ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL, BIRMINGHAM

Guest of Honour: HARRY HARRISON

Organised by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Membership £3.00 (supporting) or £6.00 (attending) to Eunice Pearson, Apt 2, 1 Broughton Rd, Handsworth, B'ham 20.

Vernon Brown



The current chairman of the BSFG, Vernon is the kind of person who goes out to buy a garden fork and comes back with an antique trouser press. (He only did so once, but surely once is enough.) His first tentative contact with fandom was in 1965, when he saw a newspaper article about an Eastercon held in Birmingham and wrote to the address given. In reply he received a silly letter about playing monopoly (which is the sort of thing the BSFG did in those days!) which he ignored. Rog Peyton claims to have written the letter.

It was when the Aston University SF Group started in 1968 that Vernon Brown and fandom truly met, and his first convention was at Oxford in 1969. Since then he has attended innumerable others, in Britain and abroad. He was a European delegate to Poland in 1976, has been to many continental conventions (at Ghent and Liege, for example) and has attended three world conventions: Heidelberg in 1970, Florida in 1977 and Brighton in 1979.

It was through fandom that he met Pat, whom he married in January 1981. She remembers him from early Brum Group meetings and from a weekend SF course at Woburn in 1973---"he was the one who drank vodka all night and arrived four hours late for the first seminar next morning".

Vernon spends much of his spare time reading and discussing the meaning of words. (That's what Pat says!) He prefers fantasy to hard SF, liking books to be technically accurate, or at least coherent if fantasy. Although his favourite authors include H. Beam Piper, Clifford Simak and early and middle period Robert Heinlein, he also enjoys the Modesty Blaise books and such authors as Georgette Heyer and Gerald Durrell. He is a collector, not just of SF books and memorabilia but also of travel books. He surreptitiously visits jumble sales and charity shops on the pretext of going shopping. By profession he is a Senior Technician in the Pharmacology Department at Aston University.

Vernon is well qualified to be our chairman, having been one of the founder members of the present Brum Group. He was on the organising committee of Eastercon '71 at Worcester, and he started the successful series of Novacons by running the first---with a little help from his friends. He was the BSFG Newsletter Editor from May 1972 until January 1978 and he has been spending time recently helping in the construction of the BSFG's entry for the Lord Mayor's Procession.

At BSFG meetings Vernon is easy to spot. His staple diet is beer, peanuts and crisps, and you will probably find him with a pint in one hand and a packet in the other. Despite this, Pat assures us that he is very loveable.

BOOK REVIEWS

DUH ALIEN MAT SAT
ON DUH CAT....



WORLDS by Joe Haldeman, Futura £1.75, 262 pages

Reviewed by Chris Suslowicz.

Subtitled "A Novel of the Near Future", this is the story of Marianne O'Hara, who was born in one of the asteroid colonies, and of her visit to Earth. Set in 2085, it's well written and fast-moving, with a lot of background information that adds to its believability. As usual, a very depressing picture is painted of future America, although Europe appears to come off better (as long as the world lasts, anyway). After getting involved in various problems, including an underground movement with the motto "Power to the people", (which ironically destroys the American electricity system during its takeover), she eventually escapes the end of the world on the last outbound shuttle. There's plenty of action, and as a possible future it's very believable. Highly recommended.

SYZYGY by Frederik Pohl, Bantam distributed by Corgi £1.25, 248 pages

Reviewed by Jane Tietjen.

A return to the "usual" Pohl, yet certainly a book with a message. The story revolves around two scientists and a month in their lives during which they are brought together to evaluate disasters that may result from an alignment of the planets. The morals of knowledge and its use are discussed as politics, religion and greed take their toll. It contains a lot of scientific evidence that the author has cleverly made very readable by interweaving short paragraphs of it with the diary format of the novel. The whole underlying theme is anger at man's blind arrogance and stupidity as he fails to see how completely Nature could sweep him aside unnoticed. At the end, hope is extended, if we mend our ways. The novel is a sobering, stimulating experience.

QUEST FOR FIRE by J.H. Rosny-Aine, Penguin £1.25, 143 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

I haven't seen the film yet but I understand that it is a multi-million dollar extravaganza filmed on three continents with erudite contributions from Anthony Burgess and Desmond Morris. All I can say is that there must be an awful lot of embellishment in the movie because, subjectivity aside, Quest for Fire is a simple tale of prehistory. Set in the far distant mists of time the novel tells the story of two tribes, the Oulhamrs and the Kzams. The former possess fire and the latter do not. The jealous Kzams decide to steal fire from the Oulhamrs, who then select three warriors to set out and recapture the fire without which their tribe will die. The message of the book, in which fire is seen as a Pandora's box, bringing forth many evils, is probably conveyed more vividly on film, but the novel remains eminently forgettable.

THE CAPTIVE by Robert Stallman, Granada £1.50, 240 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

In this second book of the Beast, Robert Stallman certainly improves on the first. Much of it is original, or at least puts a new slant on the very hackneyed theme of werewolves. The first book dealt merely with the were-identity trying to survive in its human alter-ego. This book gives the impression of being more accomplished---the Beast is sure of its ability to survive, and is now trying to understand complex human emotions and motives. In a new human identity, the Beast is still attracted to the Nordmeyer family, but his love for his wife and step-child makes both man and Beast vulnerable to the inhumanity of Man when they are kidnapped by his enemy. Much more entertaining than the first book, for ideas, plot and characterisation.

THRESHOLD by Ursula K. LeGuin, Granada £1.25, 176 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Ursula LeGuin has a quietly elegant prose style: warm without being over-emotional, sensual without edging into the purple, subtle without becoming obscure. This time her themes are escape (from routine, from the awful triviality of modern urban life) and the overcoming of fear. A young man and a young woman separately find a gateway to another world (an old idea handled with sufficient skill to make it seem original) which is peaceful and unspoilt yet not without problems of its own. This could have been a much longer novel, but after 130 pages the author seems to have decided to narrow her field of view, resolving the plot swiftly and at a personal level only. It's minor LeGuin, but still very enjoyable.

OATH OF FEALTY by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, Futura £1.95, 328 pages

Reviewed by Jane Tietjen.

As the title suggests, the book is about loyalty and the way in which its burdens change attitudes. Set in the near future, it concerns the management of the daily lives of the quarter million people who live almost totally inside a new and vast towering city. The benefits it both gives and receives breeds discontent and resentment in the "old" city outside. Completely autonomous, it is perhaps an early look at the often prophesied, self-contained domed cities and the dangers inherent in becoming isolated from the outside world. Technology and dependence on it are used widely, especially an interesting innovation in computer terminals. The novel has the authors' usual blend of complex characters, who all receive a fair, sympathetic treatment, and while containing many timely warnings it does end on a hopeful note. Very enjoyable.

EXILES AT THE WELL OF SOULS by Jack L. Chalker, Penguin £1.95, 335 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Mavra Chang is a pocket-sized Modesty Blaise hired to rescue Nikki Zinder from the clutches of Antor Trelig, an interplanetary drug merchant. He is using Nikki as a hostage to force her father to hand over his computer design, which will enable Trelig to gain control over any planet. This straightforward plot is complicated when Obie, the computer in question, becomes part of the Well-World complex. Mavra's plan to rescue Nikki from her addiction and from Trelig is thwarted when one of the Guardians persuades her to put a stop to Trelig's new plan to take control of the whole of the Well-World complex. Innovative, well-written and highly entertaining, Exiles at the Well of Souls need not be read as a sequel to Midnight at the Well of Souls, but it's a pity not to enjoy two of the best SF novels so far this year.

SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL by Brian Aldiss, Granada £1.25, 190 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

To most members of the BSFG, "Stan" means Stan Eling, founder member and long-serving committeeman. But in the Aldiss household, "Stan" is an affectionate acronym for this, the first Aldiss book. You must have read it (but if not, do so at once!). It's a collection of fourteen beautifully written stories from the mid 1950s dealing with traditional SF themes, accompanied by no less than three introductions by the author. Every collection of SF should include a copy.

DARK IS THE SUN by Philip Jose Farmer, Granada £1.95, 400 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

Farmer is an able writer, but you'd hardly think so from most of his recent output. This far future fantasy adventure includes some potentially interesting alien characters and situations which suffer from a lack of polish. The multiple-quest plot jerks along unevenly across a dying Earth, with some episodes obviously thrown in piecemeal to keep things moving. On the whole the writing lacks conviction, as if Farmer could not quite bring himself to believe in his barbaric world, either. Only the indiscriminating will enjoy following the adventures of Deyv, Vana, Sloosh and the rest, and despite anything I say I expect Farmer will write a sequel.

THE MAKING OF THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR PLANET 8 by Doris Lessing, Cape £6.50, 145 pages
Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

When individuals or societies reach a crisis point they either succumb or rise above adversity, becoming transformed. This slim novel concerns such a crisis. The paradise of Planet 8 is suddenly transformed by the arrival of an Ice Age. The doubts that I have of the scientific feasibility of the situation are quietened by the skilful way in which the plight of the people is described. This volume is linked to Shikasta, the first in the Canopus in Argos: Archives series by Johor, who is the Canopan representative both on Shikasta and on Planet 8. It was on Shikasta that the people of Planet 8 were offered refuge before disaster struck there. As well as being a study of people in adversity, this is also a tribute to the members of Scott's Antarctic Expedition, which, as the long afterword explains, inspired this tale.

INSIDE OUTSIDE by Philip Jose Farmer, Corgi £1.25, 135 pages

Reviewed by Bernie Morton.

Inside Outside is set in a world which we are initially lead to believe is Hell. The main protagonist, Jack Cull, a sort of civil servant, becomes involved with a religious fanatic and an opportunist female. This ill-assorted trio, during their search for truth in the tunnels beneath this world, find themselves in a series of dangerous situations, encountering monsters, demons and earthquakes. Religious theory is freely scattered throughout the book, which I found rather difficult to read as it is not divided into chapters. Not one of Farmer's best, some of the ideas were later used in the "Riverworld" series, to much better effect.

OTHER WORLDS by Paul Davies, Abacus (Sphere) £2.50, 207 pages

Reviewed by David A. Hardy, FRAS, FBIS.

This is not, as you may assume from the title, a book about the latest discoveries on the planets of our Solar System. The author's intention is to show the impact of the quantum theory on our conception of the world---and to progress from the peculiar behaviour of sub-atomic particles to such wide-ranging and eternal questions as "What is man?", "Why are we here?", and "Is our Universe a mere accident or the result of some process of selection?". In other words, it attempts to give scientific answers to what were once purely questions for theologians. Pretty heavy stuff, you may think, and it is (in parts), but there is food for many a science fiction story amongst its parallel universes and 'tunnelled space' if you stick with it.

THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION LISTS by Mike Ashley, Virgin £1.95, 190 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

The indefatigable Mike Ashley has assembled a book containing 166 lists connected (though not always very closely) with SF or fantasy or horror. A few categories provide useful information---award winners, novels on specific themes---although that information is available elsewhere. Many more categories are concerned with opinion (Forrest J. Ackerman's 14 Favourite Artists, Jack Williamson's 10 Favourite Works of H.G. Wells), obscure achievements (The 10 Longest SF Writing Careers, The 4 Shortest SF Story Titles) or oddities (7 SF Writers Who Have Appeared in Films, 8 SF & Fantasy Writers Who Took Their Own Lives). The sheer triviality of it all is fascinating, and I'm sure the book will sell large numbers of copies.

CRUISER DREAMS by Janet E. Morris, Fontana £1.75, 316 pages

Reviewed by Eunice Pearson.

This could have been a very enjoyable novel, with its basic theme of an unsophisticated Earth girl in charge of a complex and sentient space-cruiser. However, Ms Morris felt it necessary to include a millennium of sub-plots; corruption in high places, rebellion, civil war and "Dream Dancers", all intricately interwoven. (All this is not helped by the fact that the girl loves a man with the same name as her ship, yet is married to a sexual glutton.) Ms Morris' style is appalling. Many of her sentences run to at least ten lines and her prose often verges on the deepest of purples! I found this novel too derivative of McCaffrey, or trying to be. Not recommended.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE STATUES by Robert Holdstock, Faber £6.95, 223 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Robert Holdstock's stories---there are eight of them here---are more impressive than his novels. They are not printed in chronological order, but if one looks at them that way---using the dates supplied in the copyright information---two things become clear. The first is a general improvement of control with passing time---the gradual suppression of purple passages and heightening of writing skills. The second is a tendency to move from science fiction towards fantasy. While the earlier stories, like "Ashes" and "The Graveyard Cross", are entertaining, Holdstock's more recent work, such as "Earth and Stone" and "Mythago Wood", is of the highest class. "Mythago Wood" was the worthy winner of the BSFA award for the best short fiction of 1981. This is a very good collection, marred only by the worst cover illustration of the year.

THE INFERNAL DESIRE MACHINES OF DOCTOR HOFFMAN by Angela Carter, King Penguin £2.25, 221 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is the most highly evolved of Angela Carter's fantasy novels. Within a familiar SF framework (mad scientist with beautiful daughter threatens to destroy the world) she presents a fantastic journey through different cultures. That journey is an educational exercise for the protagonist, the rather naive Desiderio. There are many references amongst the plot and characters to the life and works of the Marquis de Sade, and a reading of Angela Carter's non-fiction work on the subject, The Sadeian Woman, will help one's comprehension of the finer points of The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman. It's a marvellous novel, rising to great heights of wit and absurdity---a joy to read.

THE NAMELESS by Ramsey Campbell, Fontana £1.25, 253 pages
Reviewed by Paul Vincent.

The young daughter of literary agent Barbara Waugh is kidnapped from playschool, her almost unidentifiable body being found shortly afterwards. Nine years later Barbara begins receiving phone calls from someone claiming to be her daughter. Believing this to be a cruel hoax she enlists the aid of an investigative journalist, and comes directly into conflict with a secretive cult whose 'religion' revolves around the sadistic torture of random victims. This story has certain parallels with the Charles Manson case, but taken to the extreme. Believable characters and an evocative style keep the reader absorbed throughout. Well worth buying.

THE MALACIA TAPESTRY by Brian Aldiss, Granada £1.25, 293 pages
Reviewed by Peter Day.

Re-issue of Aldiss's tale of an age-old city-state lingering under the enigmatic influence of its magicians---Malacia, where change is forbidden---and the exploits there of Perian de Chirolo, actor and adventurer. A skilfully-written, evocative fantasy with some elusive, slightly disturbing undercurrents of mystery, yet full of action and teeming, jostling life. Somehow, though, it lacks a sense of immediacy, distancing itself as if it were something preserved under glass. I found it an enjoyable piece of reading, though not entirely effortless. An interesting, subtly-devised curio of a book.

BRING BACK YESTERDAY by A. Bertram Chandler, Sphere £1.50, 153 pages
Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Written in 1961 and reissued several times since, this novel, although not one of Chandler's best, makes quite good reading. A spaceship officer, having missed his ship, gets a job investigating a scientist reputed to have developed a time machine. Becoming embroiled in local politics he ends up, after several near misses, in a time loop, from which... but that would be telling. Good clean fun and a cut above your usual space opera.

Editorial Notes

Thanks to Locus, Ansible and John Brunner for news items. Thanks to Mike Millward for the photo on p.4 and to this month's artists: Ivor Latto (p.1) and Dave Haden (pp.2 and 5). Produced & edited for the BSFG by Pauline E. Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, B'ham 29.