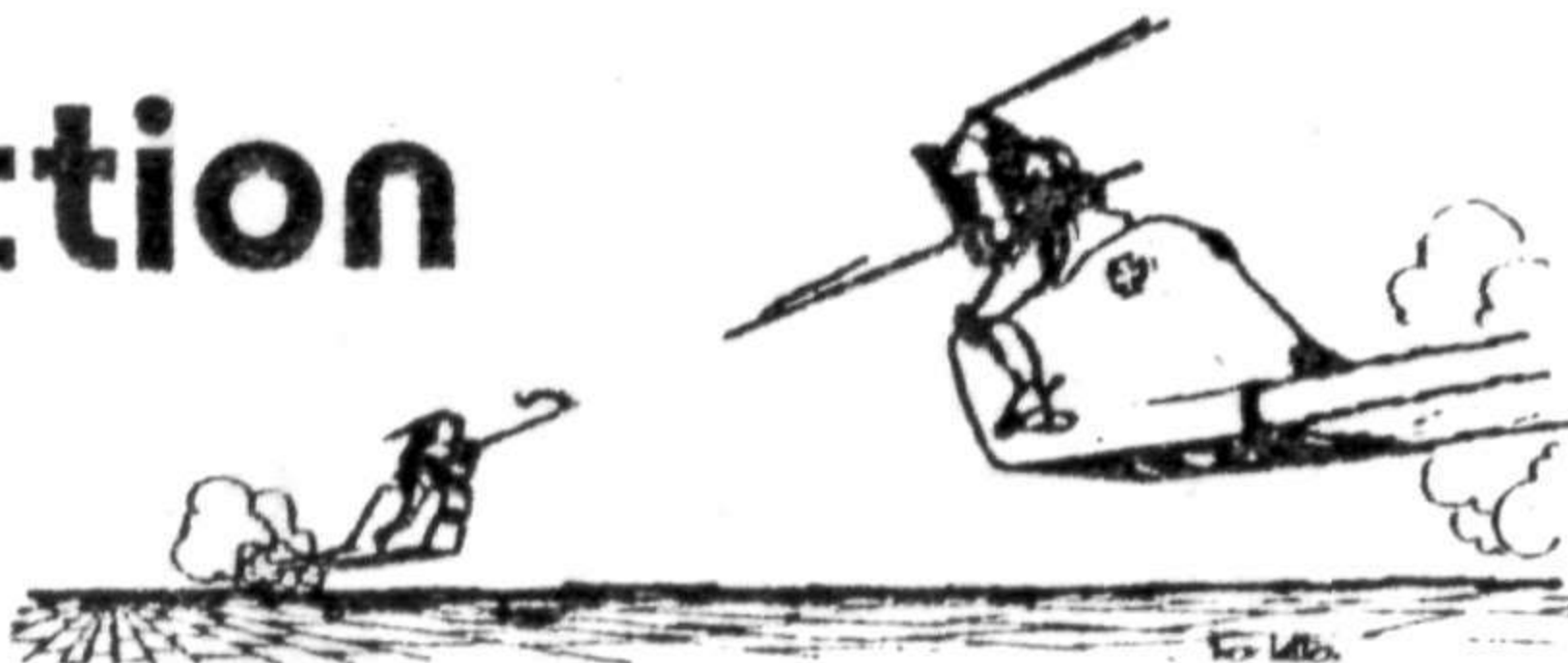


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 131

JULY 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 (but not this month---see below). 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 welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-months subscription is £3.50.

JULY MEETING - Friday 16th July at 8.00 pm

This month is our annual summer social evening. This time we are holding a BEER AND SKITTLES evening at the WHITE SWAN/DIRTY DUCK pub, Harborne, not our usual venue. There will be a buffet and a bar extension as well as the exclusive use of the skittle alley which is housed behind the pub. The WHITE SWAN is near the Hagley Road end of Harborne Road. If you travel by bus, numbers 3, 10, 12, 22, and 23 all go past it. If you have not yet got your ticket there may still be a few left if you act fast. They are £3.50 from Margaret Thorpe (send cheques payable to Birmingham Science Fiction Group to the above address) or from Andromeda Bookshop. Come and join us! The last Beer and Skittles evening was enjoyed by everyone!

JUNE MEETING

An extremely entertaining evening. DAVE LANGFORD was on top form, regaling us with the saga of his "first novel" (these are the ones that usually never do or never should get published) and how The Space Eater came to be (Peter Weston wishes to take partial blame). After this Dave read the Group a fairy story. At least, it had a beautiful princess, an enchanted frog and magic mirrors, but anything else conventional was merely a slip of the pen. The audience was left rolling in the aisles.

FORTHCOMING

- * Late summer or early autumn - Toby Roxburgh, the SF editor of Futura, will give a talk on "Why science fiction books cost so much".
- * November - BSFA National Mastermind Quiz, Midlands regional heat. Contestants will be Peter Weston, Roger Peyton, Alan Cash and Michael Jones.
- * Sometime - a debate "This House Believes That There Is Not Enough Sex In Science Fiction".
- * Autumn - Tanith Lee should be coming to Birmingham to sign copies of her fantasy novels at Andromeda Bookshop. Your committee will do its best to persuade her to come along and speak to us.

DON'T FORGET: DOUGLAS ADAMS WILL BE SIGNING COPIES OF HIS NEW NOVEL, LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING, AT ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP ON 13TH AUGUST.

Mythcon

1982 - 2nd-4th July - Grand Hotel, Birmingham

..... a con report by Chris Morgan

Formerly known as Fantasycon VIII, this was a small con aimed at fantasy fans. It was organised by the lovely Anne Page and the equally lovely (but smaller) Penny Hill. They kept control with their whips, leaving male fans standing open-mouthed behind them (or in front of them, or in any other position providing a good view of their provocative costumes). But the two of them couldn't be everywhere at once (unfortunately!), and occasionally there was no committee member present at the end of a programme item to propose thanks or lead applause.

The programme was quite a full one for a small con, though in the main con hall speakers often competed unsuccessfully with the loud rumbles of buses in Colmore Row. Tanith Lee was the g-o-h, giving us an amusing autobiographical talk before leaving on the Saturday evening to catch a train. Eddie Jones, the artist g-o-h, spoke interestingly about art in general and Hannes Bok in particular. (Both Tanith Lee and Eddie Jones may well be BSFG guest speakers later this year.) Quite a lot of writers were present, most of whom lectured or participated in panel discussions. They included Ken Bulmer (who was nearly a BSFG guest speaker earlier this year), Anne McCaffrey, Lionel Fanthorpe, Ramsey Campbell, Peter Tremayne, Brian Lumley and Dennis Etchison.

Saturday evening entertainment was provided in the form of a heroic playlet in which a half-naked Anne Page (as Vanilla, the ice cream princess) killed sundry varlets with her magic wand in order to save the race of hedgehogs from a death worse than fate (or something similar). There was no fancy dress competition as such, though many con-goers seemed to be wearing fancy dress throughout the weekend. Most of the other con attractions which you would expect were there, including a book room, an art show and art auction, films (video only, but well attended), D&D games and at least one room party.

Watch out for Mythcon 1983, in July next year.

CONVENTION NEWS

FAIRCON '82 Jul 23-26 at the Central Hotel, Glasgow. G-o-h Harry Harrison, Special Guest: Naomi Mitcheson. Attending membership £8. Details from Faircon '82 c/o 1/R 39 Partickhill Road, Glasgow, G11 5BY.

UNICON 3 Sept 10-12 at Keele University. G-o-h Richard Cowper, Fan G-o-h LeRoy Kettle, Guest Author Robert Holdstock. Attending membership £6. Write to John Wilkes, Unicon 3, 18A Ivel Gardens, Biggleswade, Beds.

FANDERSONCON '82 Oct 8-10 at Bloomsbury Centre Hotel, London. Details from Pam Barnes, Fanderson '82, 88A Thornton Avenue, London W4 1QQ.

ECONOMY (Shoestring 4) Oct 9-10 at The Elephant House, Hatfield Polytechnic. Attending membership £4 to Economy. c/o 4 Ryders Ave., Colney Heath (Nr. Hatfield), St. Albans, Herts.

FENCON Oct 16 at Cambridge. Membership is £3.50, to Fencon, 27 Newmarket Road, Cambridge, CB5 8EG.

NOVACON 12 Nov 5-7 at the Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. G-o-h Harry Harrison. Attending membership £6.00. Details from Phill Probert & Eunice Pearson Novacon 12, Flat No.2, No.1 Broughton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham 20.

CYMRUCON II Nov 27-28 at Central Hotel, Cardiff. Attending membership £5. Details from 28 Claude Road, Roath, Cardiff, Wales.

RA CON Feb 4-6 1983 in Edinburgh. G-o-h Harry Harrison. Details from Chris Anderson, 77 Baron's Court Ter., Edinburgh EH8 7EN.

EASTERCON 1983 - ALBACON II in Glasgow. Full details from Albacon II, c/o 1/R 39 Partickhill Road, Glasgow G11 5BY.

ALAN

CASH



Alan is a solicitor and a native of Birmingham, born here in 1950. He was first turned on to science fiction at about the age of seven by Dan Dare. It seems that Eagle comic was responsible for many converts to SF. He read avidly such authors as Clarke and Asimov, and followed TV programmes like Dr Who and Thunderbirds. It wasn't until 1979 that a notice in What's On started him on the trail of the BSFG and fandom---but Alan can't remember the name of the author who spoke at the first meeting he attended. Since then, Alan has rapidly worked his way through the ranks to be elected Publicity Officer of the Group. The secret of his success he says is his ability to volunteer.

Alan's first convention was Novacon 10, and he has since become addicted, attending many others including Cymrucon last November---where he won a prize in the fancy dress. This was a direct result of his interests outside SF. As a member of his local Dramatic Society, he has performed and directed plays and been on the committee as Publicity Officer---this is where he got his training for the BSFG post.

In connection with this artistic side of his personality comes his interest in film-making. He is producer, director, cameraman, continuity girl etc. for Trachodon Films, and has made four amateur SF films including The Door Home which was shown at Novacon 11 and the BSFG 10th Anniversary party. Now that he is planning another he is on the look-out for Talent. If you have Talent let Alan know---he has a place for you in his organisation.

Alan is also an aspiring writer, being a regular attendee of the BSFG Writers Group meetings, and is a reviewer for the Newsletter. He reads a wide range of SF and fantasy and in particular likes the work of Thomas Disch and Eric Frank Russell. He likes humour in what he reads, deploring the lack of it in so many books. His tastes are tending towards fantasy. He regrets the passing of the days when the hero could build his space ship in the back garden, and is disenchanted with what is now being produced. Even films fail to impress him since the heady days of 2001: A Space Odyssey; Star Wars is a fantasy of cowboys in space, catering for the Perry Rhodan mentality. Films and books should, he believes, take more issues by the throat.

Alan has already made his mark as Publicity Officer, having been the driving force behind the sea monster that represented the Group in the Lord Mayor's Procession last month. Watch out; you will be hearing more from this man. You may be his next volunteer!

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SPACE EATER by David Langford, Arrow £1.75, 301 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

High technology, adventure, an exaggerated style, great erudition and, above all, humour: yes, David Langford's first novel is just what you'd expect if you've encountered him or his earlier written work. The Space Eater features a matter transmitter, capable of transporting things instantly to other solar systems. The trouble is, its maximum gate diameter is 1.9cm. Narrating the novel is a professional soldier who's used to dying and being regrown in perfect form from his badly damaged or incomplete remains. He gets the job of being minced very finely and sent through the matter transmitter. (Yes, some of the humour is decidedly black.) Along the way scientists, security systems and military thinking are sharply satirised. It's a very good first novel.

FRIDAY by Robert A. Heinlein, NEL £7.95, 380 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Heinlein's latest novel begins promisingly in the spy thriller mould, then degenerates into a woman's romance. It's full of the revolting tweeness which marred Heinlein's Podkayne of Mars, although the eponymous heroine of Friday is in her twenties and is, effectively, an android---laboratory designed from selected genes. She's a superwoman with enhanced senses and great strength and speed. On the first page she kills a man just for following her. She's a good character, and the high-technology future she inhabits has been well thought out. But the novel's great fault (apart from the tweeness) is a lack of plot for most of the middle 200 pages. On the whole it's better than Heinlein's previous couple of novels. There are just occasional flashes of action, satire and deeper meaning to remind one of how good a writer Heinlein used to be.

THE SCIENCE FICTIONAL SOLAR SYSTEM ed by Isaac Asimov, Martin Henry Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh, Granada £1.50, 317 pages

Reviewed by Elizabeth Farr.

Take a trip through the Solar System, from the Sun to its outermost reaches, with your favourite authors. Each of the thirteen stories by such as Blish, Niven, Clarke and Asimov is not new but is worth reading again. All the stories are preceded by an introduction from Isaac Asimov updating the information on which the original was based, thus combining top quality science fiction with well presented science fact.

ONE HUNDRED PAGES FOR THE FUTURE by Aurelio Peccei, Futura £1.75, 192 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The author of this is a neo-Malthusian, which means that he is a preacher of doom and gloom about the future, especially due to Earth's speedily increasing population. His presentation is very woolly and wandering, his English is less perfect than he imagines, and despite his frequent use of italics to stress his more important remarks the book is boring to read. Peccei's recipes for the avoidance of disaster are platitudes referring to "the development of the human individual" and so on. This is a very one-sided view of the future, barely referring to the opposing technological optimist theory. Nor is birth control mentioned as a solution to the population problem. But what else could one expect from an Italian?

THE TERROR VERSION by John Lymington, Hale £6.25, 158 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Professor Odds, having discovered that normal mental processes cannot follow an indefinite series of turns in three planes, strolls around Stonehenge until his mind cannot take it any longer and teleports him to Echo, a replica Earth exactly opposite us in orbit and transparent to lasers, radio, or other means of detection. There he finds a female-dominated, technologically-advanced decaying society which finally, after some dalliance, rejects him because he's not golden skinned. Unless you are a masochist or a Lymington fan I suggest you give this one the go by.

JESUS ON MARS by Philip Jose Farmer, Granada £1.50, 237 pages

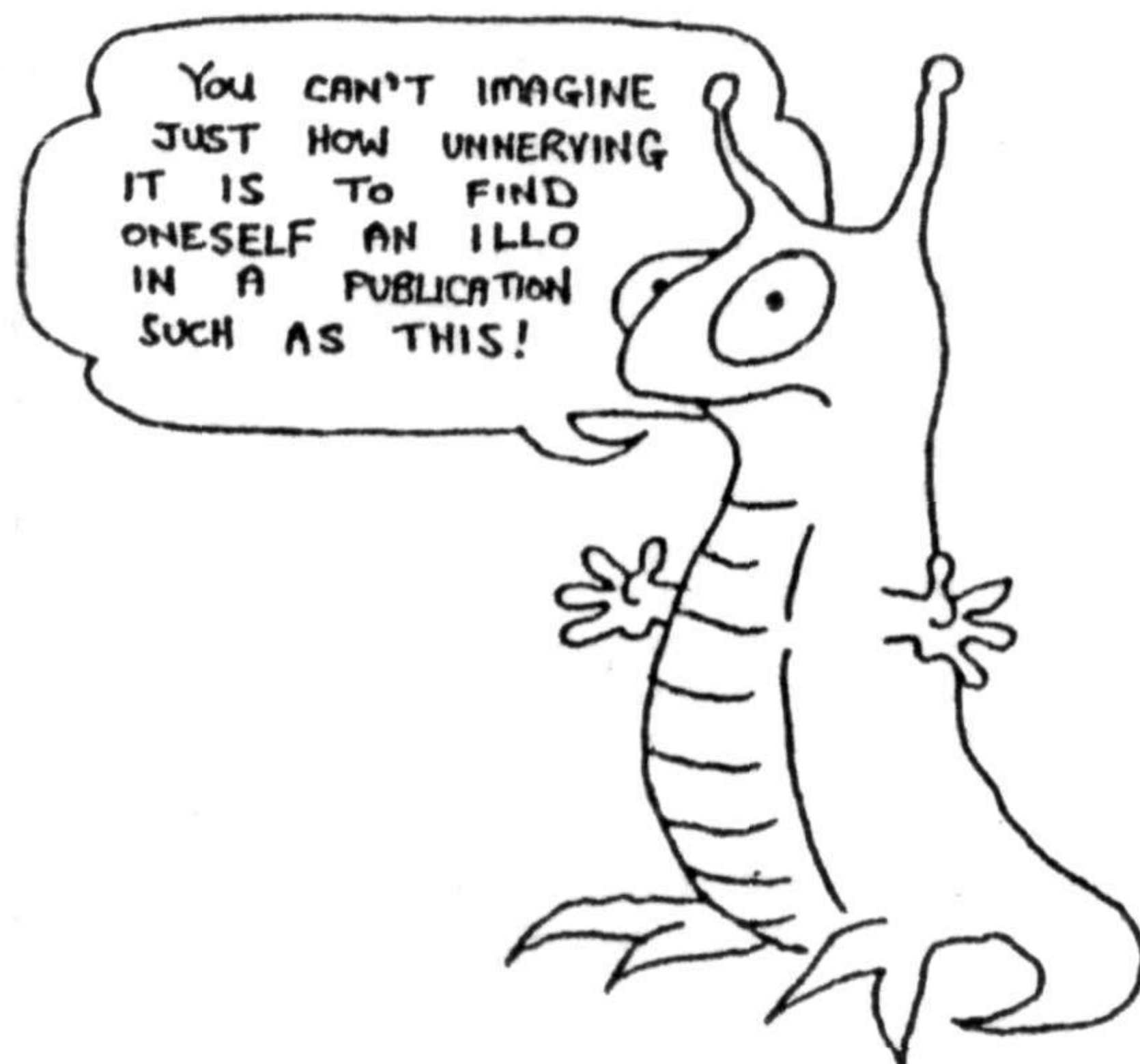
Reviewed by Bob Vernon.

For 230 pages this appears to be a remarkably simple novel, and it does indeed have scant characterisation and only a handful of ideas, but its subtle and provoking ending tipped the critical scales in its favour. A Mars expedition discovers an advanced underground colony of aliens and humans established 2000 years ago and living in an Orthodox Jewish theocracy ruled by the living Messiah, Jesus---or not, as the case may be. Four stereotyped Marsnauts (sic) wrestle with the challenges and doubts raised by this "Messiah", each batting out of their own philosophical/religious corner, while plans proceed for His (his?) return to Earth to establish The Kingdom. Well researched, with a surprising, radical sting in its tail. Such a relief after the endless "Riverworld" series. Recommended to the open-minded believer or religious sceptic.

OPUS by Isaac Asimov, Granada £2.50, 672 pages

Reviewed by Stan Eling.

Opus is actually two books bound together: Opus 100 and Opus 200, each of which represents a hundred other books. Asimov first appeared in print with "Marooned Off Vesta", in the March 1939 issue of Amazing Stories, when he was just 19. There followed a steady stream of magazine stories, novels and, in particular, non-fiction books covering almost everything. So prolific was he that by 1969 the one hundred mark was attained with Opus 100, but he did not stop there. Having got the hang of it, he took only another ten years to complete the next hundred, which he celebrated with the joint appearance of Opus 200 and In Memory Yet Green. Opus comprises samplings from these many and varied works. It is a pocket Asimov, guaranteed to delight all his fans, and is a must for every thinking person.



STRATA by Terry Pratchett, NEL £1.50, 192 pages

Reviewed by Alan Cash.

In the future planets will not just be terraformed but built from scratch with machines found in the ruins of an alien culture that has mysteriously died out. The idea of building and settling manufactured planets is to prevent the Human Race stagnating. After all, Earth has had a long history---the fossil records prove it. Then THE Earth is discovered out in space---and it is FLAT. A weird threesome of two aliens, one multi-armed and bloodthirsty, the other a huge hairy reformed (?) cannibal, and a genetically life-prolonged earthwoman, set out to investigate. Quite funny and moderately gripping in parts. The end is, unfortunately flaccid.

MINDFLIGHT by Stephen Goldin, Hamlyn £1.35, 185 pages

Reviewed by Jane Tietjen.

This is a vast improvement on Goldin's rather vacuous Star Trek novel. It is, however, very slow at first, especially in the muddy waters of the typical power struggles within Earth's government. The Terran Intelligence Agency have a very definite policy whenever one of their top telepathic secret agents becomes ill with telepause. That policy is death. When protagonist Alain Cheney takes his symptoms of violent headaches and increased sex drive to his doctor, he is warned of assassination and goes on the run in search of freedom. Along the way he meets a female telepath, falls in love, and so on... If you make it through Part One, the action scenes are rewardingly brisk and vivid. Overall, an enjoyable book.

MANIFEST DESTINY by Barry B. Longyear, Futura £1.75, 285 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

Four stories brought together to chronicle stages in Man's development towards his destiny among the stars as he expands ruthlessly through the Galaxy. Besides the Nebula-winning novella "Enemy Mine", there is "The Jaren", a heavily poignant study of an unconquerable warrior race and the impact on them of Earth's victory; "Savage Planet", a slightly glib defeating of the forces of commercial exploitation; and "USE Force", yet another boot-camp-to-hero routine. Longyear's work has a tendency towards that particular brand of gooey sentimentality thinly disguised as tough-mindedness which seems to be so peculiarly American. Nevertheless he is an extremely capable writer, and this book can be recommended as a good read---especially for anyone with a sweet tooth.

CIRCUS WORLD by Barry B. Longyear, Futura £1.60, 219 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

I gather that Mr Longyear has been getting quite a bit of stick in some quarters lately. I don't really know why; while this isn't the greatest work of literature I have read, it's quite an entertaining story ---or, to be precise, series of stories, as it is an episodic novel (the individual stories having appeared originally in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine). Centuries ago, the spaceship City of Baraboo, loaded with circus performers, crashlanded on Momus and was virtually cut off from the Federation (yes, well...). The whole culture is therefore based on the circus and its traditions, and this forms the background to a series of encounters with the politics and military machinations of the Ninth and Tenth Quadrants---who don't have it all their own way. I found the book often amusing and not unoriginal.

THE DANCERS OF ARUN by Elizabeth A. Lynn, Hamlyn £1.50, 256 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

Second volume in the trilogy The Chronicles of Tornor and follow-up to the winner of the 1980 World Fantasy Award novel, Watchtower. A pleasant story but a bit slight and, I would say, more likely to appeal to the younger reader. Kerris, savagely mutilated in a childhood incident, joins his brother's troupe of chearis---the dancing warriors of Arun---and journeys to his birthplace, the witch-city of Elath, where trouble is brewing. Stripped of its fantasyworld trappings this reduces to a very run-of-the-mill tale about an enclave of individuals with psychic powers, in a world of normals. I can't help feeling that those who, unlike me, have already read, and enjoyed, the first volume of the series, might possibly get more out of this book than I did.

334 by Thomas M. Disch, Magnum £1.50, 248 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Set against the background of 21st century New York City this subtly linked collection of stories revolves around the apartment building 334. The city-dwellers of 334 inhabit a dystopia where the government's attitude to individualism is one of indifference. Socratic dialecticism is discouraged in favour of cold cynicism, death and birth are purely impersonal, and one garners snippets of knowledge from local cinemas. Yet at the same time these are real people with aspirations, fears and frustrations who try to eke out some kind of existence amidst the trappings of entropy. Disch's portrayal of human life in decay is profoundly moving, but above all it is sociologically relevant today.

SONGS FROM THE STARS by Norman Spinrad, Arrow £1.60, 275 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

Post-atomic hippies cling precariously to life in the Rocky Mountains. Striving for good karma, they forbid any form of science which may cause pollution or involve atomic energy. They are divided up into tribes and live in communes; individuals (indeed, the protagonists) bear such hip 1960s names as Sunshine Sue and Clear Blue Lou and travel by helium balloon. But a few scientists still inhabit the Mid-West, and their corrupting influence provides the plot. The last few chapters fail to convince, but Spinrad always writes enjoyably. This is his latest novel, in paperback for the first time. Worth trying.

