

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

NEWSLETTER 194



THE BSFG MEETS ON THE
THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH
MONTH IN THE LADBROKE
INTERNATIONAL HOTEL,
NEW STREET, IN THE
CENTRE OF BIRMINGHAM.
DETAILS OF THIS MONTH'S
MEETING ARE GIVEN
OPPOSITE.
MEMBERSHIP OF THE
GROUP COSTS A MERE £5.50
PER YEAR FOR ONE PERSON
£8.00 FOR TWO PEOPLE
AT THE SAME ADDRESS.
ALL CHEQUES AND POSTAL
ORDERS PAYABLE TO BSFG
AND SENT TO THE
TREASURER CHRIS CHIVERS
AT 51 BOUNDARY ROAD
STREETLY SUTTON
COLDFIELD WEST MID'S.

This month's meeting will be on 20th November
at 8.00pm and our guest will be:

HARRY HARRISON

Well, what can one say about Harry? Honorary
President of the BSFG - along with Brian Aldiss,
and for a long time one of the best SF writers
in the world.

Harry's work was first published in 1951 in
Damon Knight's Worlds Beyond. Several Slippery
Jim DiGratz/Stainless Steel Rat along with other
more serious novels have made Harry a well
respected and admired SF author. He has recently
had volume 2 in the West Of Eden series published
and appeared on TV's 'Mavis on 4' (which was
highly entertaining!!)

His work in SF both as editor and prolific writer
will make for an interesting evening - having seen
Harry on other occasions he himself will make
for an entertaining one. BE THERE.

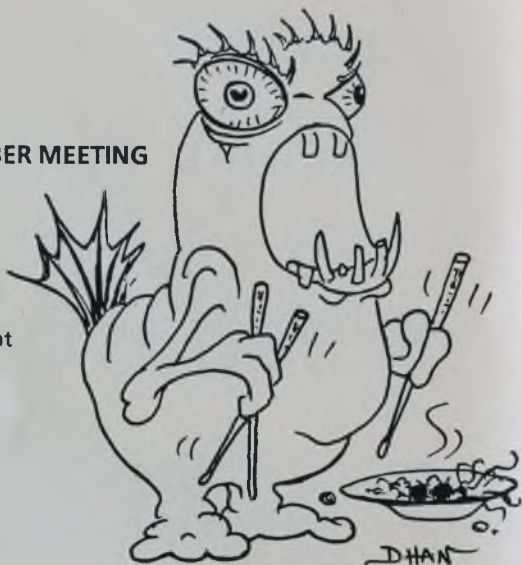
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BSFG NEWS

REMINDER:

PLEASE NOTE -THERE IS NO DECEMBER MEETING

As there is no December meeting, the Committee thought some of us would like to get together for a meal. The **FORBIDDEN CITY**, a Chinese restaurant in the city centre was approached and can cater for a large number of clients. Anyone interested please contact **DAVE HARDY** on 777-1862



DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

We have decided to produce a 'bumper' edition of the newsletter for Christmas as there is no meeting. Anyone wishing to contribute please make sure it's with the newsletter editors (address on this page) no later than **DECEMBER 5th.** to ensure time to process it in the christmas rush!
Contributions can be anything SF related - puzzles, crosswords, jokes, artwork, short story; in fact anything you think will entertain (or bemuse) members.

Thank you's this month go to :-

Pauline Morgan, Chris Morgan, Anne Gay, Donald Thompson, Steve Jones, Glynn Jackson, Bethan Davies, Chris Chivers and Tina Hewett for their reviews.

Dave Hardy for the artwork on pages 2,3,6 and 7.

Mark Spires for his Novacon Report.
'Ten Grand' for the article on page 4

And Chris Chivers for the use of his typewriter.

This newsletter was produced by Tony and Carol Morton, 45, Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Mids.

Deadline for next months newsletter is 5th December.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

Bob Snaw.

The evening was split into two distinct parts :-

Firstly, Bob entertained us with a 'Serious Scientific Talk' - a second telling of his triumphant Brighton Talk. Briefly, this enlightened the audience as to how he and the erudite Von Daniken aided the 'unique genius' of Euclid, Columbus and Shakespeare with the aid of a time machine of disputable ability and Dixon's bargains.

This had all and sundry giggling (and at times groaning) that by the finale a short break was called to allow us to 'collect ourselves'.

Part Two of the evening was devoted to a question and answer session, in which Bob gave us an insight into his own unique genius as an SF writer.

He revealed that he tended to write a synopsis of a story as he "doesn't have the courage to write a book and sell it" (!). This, he pointed out, does have advantages -if accepted it means the idea is good ; he gets paid in advance for the book : this, however, means he has to :-

(1) give the money back (2) go to gaol or (3) write the book (the third option being preferable). He writes everything down and then assess it, writing a first draft only but only writes 1,000 words per day because of this process.

His pleasures in writing SF are (a) Thinking of good monsters and (b) Having awful things happening to characters! Bob explained that his nightmares tend to get into his books (ie the ballbearings in One Million Tomorrows).

Bob is currently working on the sequel to The Ragged Astronauts which is to become a trilogy - a 'new experience' for him as he tends not to write sequels or trilogies.

We thank him for a very entertaining evening full of variety and interest.



Compared to the 50's and 60's the last two decades have seen no profound progression in 'hard science' fiction. The classic form of SF, based on the exploration of technological themes, has been in relative decline since the days of the 'golden age', becoming stale and ironically outdated in recent years. Just over ten years ago the ailing body of hard SF suffered a particularly significant - blow Sci-fi came up from behind, mugged it, ripped off its surface features and is now Masquerading as 'Science Fiction all over the field of popular culture. Meanwhile, 'true SF' and 'True fandom' has limped further into an elitist, pseudo-intellectual ghetto where it can sneer with impotent condescension at its more shallowly entertaining imposter, Sci-Fi.

The relationship between science and the literary/intellectual conscience has also become more uneasy since the 60's, causing a paralysis of negativity within hard SF. with the rise of soft-left liberalism, the right-wing ideal of taming and controlling the galaxy with science, on behalf of truth, justice and the American way, began to go out of fashion; science became the enemy, the evil accomplice of crooked corporations and militaristic combines. Whilst Niven and Heinlein recycle cold war dreams of a right-wing technocratic future (with Arthur C. Clarke remaining the last of the scientific idealists), the 'radical hard SF' now favoured by INTERZONE hasn't moved on from the late 60's stance, restating some liberal pessimism but in relation to more recent scientific developments.

Hence the 80's have seen a proliferation of cyberpunk novels set in a world where microchip technology and corruption go hand in hand - all very slick, contemporary and cynical, but that's not the same as being radical, visionary and imaginative - the kind of adjectives good SF should aspire to. Although the surface imagery is up to date (all that street-beat neon and casual, computerised corruption), on a thematic and human level cyberpunk has yet to say something new. The philosophical implications of microchip technology remain unexplored with the same depth of vision seen in BRAVE NEW WORLD, CLOCKWORK ORANGE or practically any Phillip K. Dick novel. New hard SF writers now tend to re-interpret elements of Dick's vision to the point of cliché, urban decay and technology-as-part-of-daily-life becoming the stereotyped hard SF scenario. As a friend said recently on reading the blurb of a cyberpunk novel: "Why don't they just put 'it helps to have seen BLADE RUNNER'?"

Hard SF still suffers from its age old failing - few characters seem like real, ordinary people; most lack an essential element of humanity. As a deliberate comment on science, society and dehumanisation this type of characterisation is still inaccurate - human characteristics can't be pushed aside as easily as some authors might like. Any realism in cyberpunk tends to be scientific, plus an attempt at a realistic social surface (eg. people swear and have sex more) but psychological realism is still rare. If NEUROMANCER type characters are streetwise then it's a fairly improbable street where everyone talks in terse cynicisms, no one is silly or naive, and no one has a mum who can't work the video or a mate who's a wally in his BLADE RUNNER equivalent of a Ford Cortina. In other words people are too cool and stylised to be any more realistic than your average Lt. Starbuck from Sci-fi town.

As separate entities neither hard SF or Sci-fi offer much of a future for imaginative literature and entertainment whilst the fantasy field suffers a similar lack of originality - it's all five book epics about the sword of X, set on the ancient world of Y, in a quest headed by rebellious hero Z. Rigidly defined genres can breed sterility, whilst real progress takes place on the borderlines where fantasy, SF, Sci-fi and the mainstream merge without the restriction of classification. The best exploration of human reactions to imaginative situations seem to be emerging far from hi-tech centres of SF, with writers like Stephen King, Ramsay Campbell, Iain Banks or even Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams managing to stress (with comedy and horror) the human side to fantastical scenarios. These authors have shown that both the appeal and effectiveness of true imaginative fiction can only benefit from a move away from the cold hi-tech accuracy of scientific realism towards a more accessible form of human realism; in the end people, not science, are the most fascinating, fantastical and unlimitingly diverse basis on which to build radical, visionary and imaginative fiction.

Comments anyone ?

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'TEN GRAND'

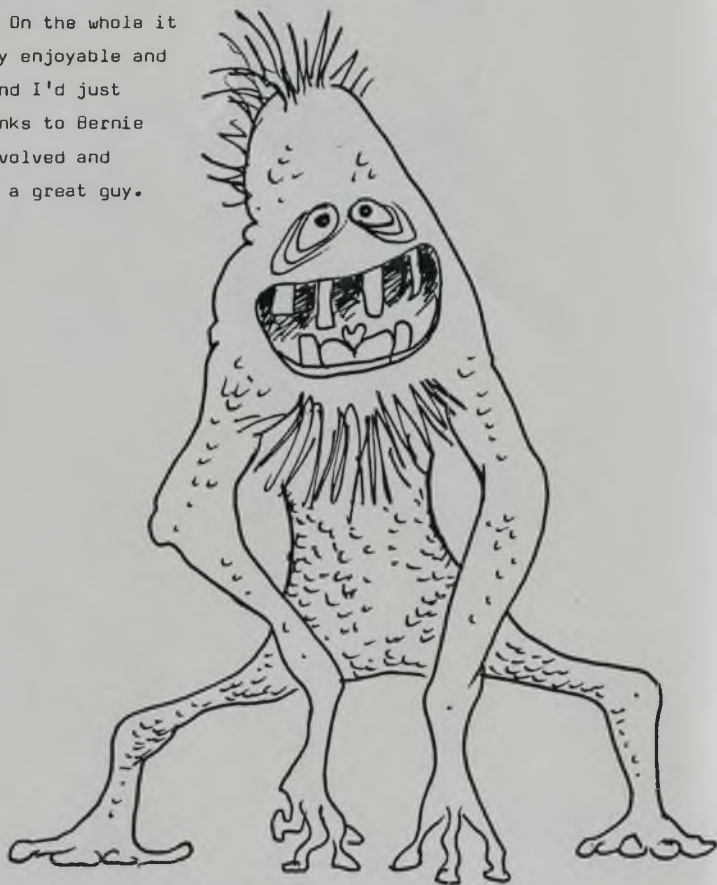
MEMBERS' FORUM

On this page YOU have the opportunity to share with fellow-members your comments, complaints, praise (?), reviews of favourite books, new films or videos, information, articles on pet SF-related subjects, artwork, cartoons, computer graphics, short fiction, anecdotes — whatever. We will also accept small-ads for sales and wants. As explained in the last Newsletter, if this page is empty it is because it is waiting for

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Novacon 17 was the first convention I've ever been to so I really didn't know what to expect, hoards of dedicated SF buffs indulging in completely serious arguements perhaps?, but no. Thankfully I found the atmosphere generally very friendly and relaxed. As regards the programme I thought everything was extremely well organised and it all seemed to go very well. The events were nicely varied, of particular interest to me was the art show and auction and the highlight of course was to have sold two of my own paintings for the first time. I thought though it was a shame the art show had to be stuck away from "it all" on the sixth floor.

I also enjoyed the Flash Gordon series, great stuff, and the excellent and very funny talk by Jack Cohen, amongst others. Not forgetting the free drink on Friday night. On the whole it turned out to be a very enjoyable and entertaining weekend and I'd just like to give a big thanks to Bernie Evans, eveyone else involved and of course Iain Banks - a great guy.



DHAN

WHATYA MEAN THEYVE
CLOSED THE BAR !

I am ashamed to say so but Novacon 17 was only my second Novacon, the first being Novacon 15 and the less said about that the better .

When Bernie said she wanted to Chair the con we were pleased; even better when she said she wanted to bring it back to Birmingham, but we had reservations about the Angus thinking it was too small. But I must admit it was great. The atmosphere was very relaxed and friendly and many people told me that it was just like the "Good Old Novacons" that were held in the past - This should please Bernie as it was precisely this feeling she wanted to achieve. I think the Idea of having only one programme stream was good; there was a fan room if anyone wanted to use it but it stayed empty for most of the weekend - so, are fan rooms necessary at Novacons?

The (rather brief) opening ceremony gave us the chance to see all the committee members sitting still in one place; this was a rare sight all weekend as most of them - especially Bernie - seemed to be in at least two places at once. Next came Andromeda's party (and we actually got a free drink out of Rog!)

I missed most of Saturday **morning's** programme due to a far too convivial Friday night spent in the bar.

I particularly enjoyed "The Wrong Stuff" (SF call my bluff) and the "Is Fantasy the Mills and Boon of SF" panel which considering it was his first attempt was ably chaired by Geoff Williams. The Art Show was dissapointing and sparse but after Worldcon it was no surprise, and the book auction seemed to go on for ever. Apart from these items mytime was spent in the bar(or creche). Incidentally the committee asked the management to bring in some real ale, they did so but only two firkins (Bernie thought we'd need twelve) the management thought that two would be enough for the whole weekend - they ran out half way through friday night. That was possibly their only miscalculation.

All in all it was a very good weekend and I would like to give my personal thanks to Vicky -Bernie's Daughter - who looked after the creche she did a great job. Well Novacon 17 was great well done Bernie and committee.





BOOK REVIEWS

WINTER IN EDEN By Harry Harrison, Grafton, £3.50, 430 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This, the sequel to West of Eden, is of the same high quality - Harry Harrison at his best.

There is a theory that a giant meteorite struck the Earth 65 million years ago and caused the extinction of many species, including the dinosaurs. This is the world that might have evolved if it hadn't. In West of Eden the intelligent saurians had grown a city on the shores of Gendasl (N.America) only to be driven from it by the Tanu (humans). Between the two species there is only hatred.

In Winter in Eden Vainte, one of the few survivors of the destroyed city, is determined to return and wipe the Tanu from the face of the world. Kerrick, brought up by the saurian Yilane and able to speak their language, despairs of being able to save his people from her wrath- the Yilane have a sophisticated biology-based technology whereas the Tanu are no further advanced than the Stone-age.

With the help of experts such as Jack Cohen, Harry has developed a very believable saurian culture, which has been extended in this volume. Tom Shippey has helped him create a truly alien language based on colour and movement as well as sound. This is also a very well written book, with plenty of characterisation and a plausible, complex plot. It also has originality, something lacking in some of Harry's more recent, though commercial, books. Don't buy this book because Harry is an honorary president of the BSFG, buy it because it is a book of quality.

FOUNDATION AND EARTH by Isaac Asimov, Grafton, £3.50, 510 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

All I can ask is, WHY? Why did Asimov continue the Foundation books after all this time (surely not for financial reasons???) Why has he tried to tie all his books together as one (fear that L. Ron has a ten book series and he doesn't?) Why did he bother to write this? I found it incredibly long, occasionally boring and not a particularly good story. With Foundation's Edge and Foundation and Earth Asimov has supposedly continued the FOUNDATION saga, however all he's done is create a couple of new characters 500 years after Second Foundation in the same universe and cashed in. Avoid.

FROM WONDROUS TALES - 1988 by Rodney Matthews, Picture Sales £6.95
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is not a book but a calendar---a superb scallop-shaped calendar for 1988 containing twelve of Rodney Matthews' paintings in full colour. If you've seen Matthews' previous calendars you'll know how good they are. But this is the best yet, with stunningly attractive pictures illustrating some of the most-loved classic novels of SF and fantasy---particularly the latter. The Narnia books, The War of the Worlds, Dune and Titus Groan are all featured, though the pick of the bunch is a picture of Tolkien's Rivendell. There's an introductory note from ex-Python Terry Jones.

VENTURE 14 - THE TIMELINER TRILOGY by Richard C. Meredith, Arrow, £3.95, 712 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

This trilogy of Tales revolves around Eric Mathers, who is an agent for the Krith a non-human race that have the in-built psionic ability to "scud" across the "lines between parallel worlds. A message sent back from the future tell that all the parallel worlds will be destroyed by ravening hords. So the Krith have developed the technology to allow other races to cross these "lines". But, are the altruistic Krith all they seem?

On the whole the Venture series is an excellent idea and the novels in the series are generally good but this one is, well, substandard, it seems dated, the plot is stodgy and drawn out and Mr. Meredith's treatment of women in the plot will be offensive to most people. If you collect the Venture books the buy it - otherwise don't bother.

VENTURE 15- COBRA by Timothy Zahn, Arrow, £2.95, 346 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

Two colony worlds have been invaded by the alien Troft forces and an on-going underground resistance is being fought, but with very little progress. The Dominion (of Man) Council decide to infiltrate into the resistance some augmented soldiers - COBRAS - so that the resistance can have at least a chance of winning their planet back.

Once again Mr Zahn writes of augmented humans (as he did in BLACKCOLLAR - VENTURE11) Interestingly he takes the concept of augmented humans right through to their middle age and deals with their failure to integrate themselves back into society. This is more like a proper venture novel and one that I highly recommend.

THE POWER by Ian Watson, Headline £2.50, 232 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It's always interesting to scour novels for autobiographical elements. In this graphic horror novel, set in an English village in the present day, are many aspects of Watson's life and interests. The real village where he lives has made fictional appearances in some of his recent stories. Here it is represented as Melfort Parva, with a USAF base close by, allowing just the odd mention of Watson's CND beliefs. In fact, several of the main characters are nuclear disarmers. There are even flashbacks to the college days of the protagonist, Jeni, at Oxford University (where Watson also went).

The story of an ancient power returning to life in such a village is well told with excellent characterisation and, especially in its later stages, extremely gruesome descriptions. It's more literary and occasionally more original than most horror novels these days. Compulsive reading for necrophiliacs.

Wintermind, by Marvin Kaye and Parke Godwin, Orbit, 297 pp., £3.50, Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Wintermind is a death-threat to the fragile linking of Circle magic from the deepwoods with City technology. But it is coming closer.

The Goddess Shalane hated leaving her covenstead to live in the City, especially after her daughter showed nothing but revulsion for life in the backwoods. But her husband Arin rewarded Shalane's patience with a trip to the coast. And what they found there was Wintermind.

This is the sequel to **The Masters of Solitude** and would probably make much more sense if you'd read that first. As it is, **Wintermind** is bewildering but impressive until about half-way through. then it's just impressive. It's not one of the world's greats, but with some intriguing and likeable people making their way through tricky plotting, it's certainly a cut above the average.

WHAT MAD UNIVERSE? by Frederic Brown, Grafton, £2.95, 233 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

Originally published in 1949, this version brings to life the American SG 'thinking' of the day. While being a 'period' piece the author by-passes known science by removing his 'hero' to a parallel universe and thereby changes the rules! Keith Winton as a SF magazine editor/hero finds life difficult getting into terrible trouble by being mistaken for an Arcturan spy; he flees to find help only to be confronted by further dangers. I liked the ideas and found the story entertaining, though a little far-fetched (we know better nowadays) a good read if you like 'historical SF' - that is, set in its own period.

RUINS by Brian Aldiss, Hutchinson, £7.95, 85 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is a new novella, part of a series of hardcovered novellas. Its 85 pages include a few black & white illustrations, too, so it's not a long read. What Aldiss has done is to deal with a big subject ---ten years or so of a man's life in the US and UK---that would normally fill a novel of 250 pages. But he has picked his words, cutting out everything superfluous. The result is a beautiful piece of writing, Aldiss's best written book to date.

Hugh Billing (an Englishman still living off his Hit Parade songs of ten years before) is drifting in New York, then London. He moves from woman to woman and job to job as if in a dream, haunted by his inability to achieve any kind of permanence and disturbed by a childhood memory. This may not sound very exciting, yet in Aldiss's masterly economic style it becomes a joy to read. Poetic phrases and witty observations abound. Billing's unplanned journey through life and his gradual drift into middle age will strike chords in many readers' minds.

Perhaps you guessed: this isn't SF or fantasy. But it is a brilliant and touching piece of work by a major author at the height of his powers.

THE RAGING by Tim Stout, Grafton, £2.50, reviewed by Donald Thompson.

This is a fairly interesting horror story concerning itself with the ability of a stone statue of a celtic Goddess to spark off virtually uncontrollable furies during which the possessed finds himself with the urge to kill, maim, rape and generally abuse any poor soul who gets in his way, ie. comes within about 15 feet of him or somehow annoys him. This somewhat anti-social behaviour is explained by way of a hotch-potch of ideas from para-psychology, Lovecraftian borrowings, and the mysterious properties of an object carved from meteoric stone that follows its own rules. In addition, although the protagonist himself is shown to be a reasonably sympathetic if somewhat two-dimensional character, his helpmeet and the major female character shows none of these traits. A university-trained electro-psychologist turned probation officer (and still only 30)! she is so fanatical in her determination to prove her theories correct thereby vindicating her stance and almost incidentally providing a major advance in human knowledge that one could believe she would help eagerly in Nazi-like medico-psychological experiments in the name of science and the relief of future pain. By the end of the book I felt sorry she had come through relatively unscathed. Mildly horrific, but not at all terrifying.

MELVAIG'S VISION by Richard Ford, Grafton, £2.95, 446 pages, reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the second book in a loosely linked trilogy. The first book was a sort of 'Watership Down' clone, while this one is the more traditional fantasy quest. Melvaig's village is destroyed and his wifw and son kidnapped by the bad guys, and he sets off to rescue them. The trouble is the book is not very well written, and I found myself cheering along the Bad Guys more than the Good Guys. Save your money.

THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD by Patricia A. McKillip, Orbit, £2.50, 217 pages reviewed by Glynn Jackson.

This book is concerned with Sybel; daughter of the wizard Myc and granddaughter of the great wizard Heald. Sybel lives alone on Eld mountain and rules a kingdom of magical beasts including the treasure-hoarding dragon, Gyld; the black cat, Moriah - whose knowledge of spells and secret charms is legendary; the deadly falcon, Ter; and the monster of fear, Blammor. Neither beast nor man can resist the call of Sybel, except for the great white bird, Liralen. Sybel wants the bird but this cannot be summoned until Sybel has been awakened to the human emotions of love and hate. Her peaceful existence is unexpectedly shattered when the knight Coren enters her kingdom seeking refuge for the babe Tamloren (son of Dreede, the King of Eldwold). Sybel rears the child as her own, coming to love Tam. One day, under Tam's insistence, she calls Dreede to her home to visit her. Tam, albeit reluctantly, leaves Sybel to live Dreede and Sybel is left alone again. She marries Coren; and the story unfolds as Sybel is torn between supporting Coren, who wishes to avenge himself for his brother's death by killing Dreede, and not wanting to hurt Tam (who has come to love his father). The book is well written, a worthwhile read and an excellent way to spend a Sunday afternoon!

THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD by Patricia A. McKillip, Orbit, £2.50, 217 pages, reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a reprint of the first novel by the author of THE RIDDLE-MASTER OF HED trilogy. The sorceress Sybel lives on Eld mountain alone except for her collection of magical animals. She doesn't bother anyone and no-one dares bother her, until one day a knight comes to her and asks her to look after his baby cousin, who has the misfortune to be the illegitimate son of the king. From then on the affairs of mortal men intrude on her life rather more than she would like, but not entirely for the worse. Quite good.

SERVANTS OF ARK - BOOK TWO. THE CENTRE OF THE CIRCLE by Jonathan Wylie, Corgi, £2.95, 351 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

This, the second in THE SERVANTS OF ARK trilogy deals with the next 16 years after Amarino's defeat and death, more particularly with Luke, Mark and Fontaine's son, and the girl he comes to love, Julia, who was found on a remote island, washed ashore in a casket and she has lovely violet eyes! This is a much better novel than the first in the trilogy. The plot seems tighter the characters more believable, the whole thing is much better written. I particularly liked Feragamo's bickering with the other wizards and the interaction between the human and the feline characters. Much, much better.

WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE... by Joanna Russ, Women's Press, £3.50, 177 pages, reviewed by Bethan Davies.

An interesting novel which explores the human reaction to death and survival. An escape vessel from a colony ship crash lands on an unknown planet, they have enough material to survive for six months before they need to use the planet's resources. Of the motley band of would-be colonists only one woman questions the reason for survival, and points out the futility of even trying to live on a hostile planet. The 'story' as such follows this woman's attempts to escape from the others who brand her as insane, and leads finally to her killing the others and then herself. The first part of the novel sets the scene for Russ's psychological investigations and is rather boring, but the second half more than makes up for it. It acts as a type of diary, recording the woman's thoughts as she slowly starves through reminiscences of her life and philosophical discussion, until she finally decides to commit suicide. As a book, it is hardly a light read, but it is worth looking at merely for the thought-provoking second half.

THE SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH by Arthur C. Clarke, Grafton, £2.50, 230 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

The novel version of the short story of the same name, SONG OF DISTANT EARTH, is a good read, the Thalassa topography, flora and fauna is believable and the characters well thought out. Once the ship from Earth arrives the story really opens up - the interaction of 'natives' and 'spacers', the problems arising and being overcome and mostly the technology used by both sides tell a good story. The interspersed 'history' of the final years of Earth blend well to compliment the story giving the reader an insight into the Magellan crew's thinking. I enjoyed it from cover to cover, highly recommended.

THE HIGH KINGS by Joy Chant, Unwin, £3.50, 200 pages, reviewed by Steve Jones.

The author of RED MOON AND BLACK MOUNTAIN turns to a very different form of fantasy. These are the scanty and fragmented legends of the Ancient Britons before the Saxon invasions, which she has expanded into readable stories. They include the tale of how Britain was colonised by survivors of the destruction of Troy, and how Julius Caesar's invasion was repelled far more dramatically than Roman history records! The frame of each story is that it is being told by a Bard in the court of "historical" Arthur, the Romano-British general who drove the Saxons back temporarily just before England was overrun and their culture was destroyed. Highly recommended.

STARHAMMER by Christopher Rowley, Century, £11.95 (hardcover) 297 pages, reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Billed as the third epic story set within an interstellar empire, Starhammer has no obvious link with The War For Eternity or The Black Ship, but Christopher Rowley's third book is certainly an epic story. For over a thousand years the human hegemony had been dominated by the Lowan Imperion. Into this stable state is launched Jon Iehard on a mission to find a terrorist leader Eblis Bey. Jon Iehard's search for his quarry brings him into conflict with his human superiors and their Lowan overlords, with the outcome the overthrow of the Lowan Imperion. Christopher Rowley has spun a fine tale of epic proportions. The story moves at a crisp pace and has left enough room to recreate the character of Jon Iehard in future volumes.

THE SHORE OF WOMEN by Pamela Sargent, Bantam, £3.95, 469 pages, reviewed by Tina Hewett.

Although the story is a bit slow in places, the book reveals a Universe in which one can, with a little vision, believe. The story revolves around the female domination of the world after the human race was almost destroyed. It also shows that in trying to preserve the world, the women are guilty of committing some of the offences, that they believe to be unique to men. The characters of which there are three main ones, show a gradual maturity throughout the book, reminiscent of life itself. The other characters in the book range across the whole spectrum of characterisation, each skillfully done. All in all, with a little perseverance, the book makes worthwhile reading, although due to the nature of the story some male readers might be deterred from reading it.

TALKING MAN by Terry Bisson, Headline, £2.50, 192 pages, reviewed by Bethan Davies.

This book is abysmal. I cannot find anything good to say about it, apart from the fact that it is short and easy to read. The 'story' is pathetic, it involves a sort of 'quest' which is basically a long car drive along the highways of America to the North Pole (!?) and beyond that, not a lot happens. It does include a few 'spells' and mystic occurrences, but when you do reach the end of the novel, you are left with one question, why did I bother?