

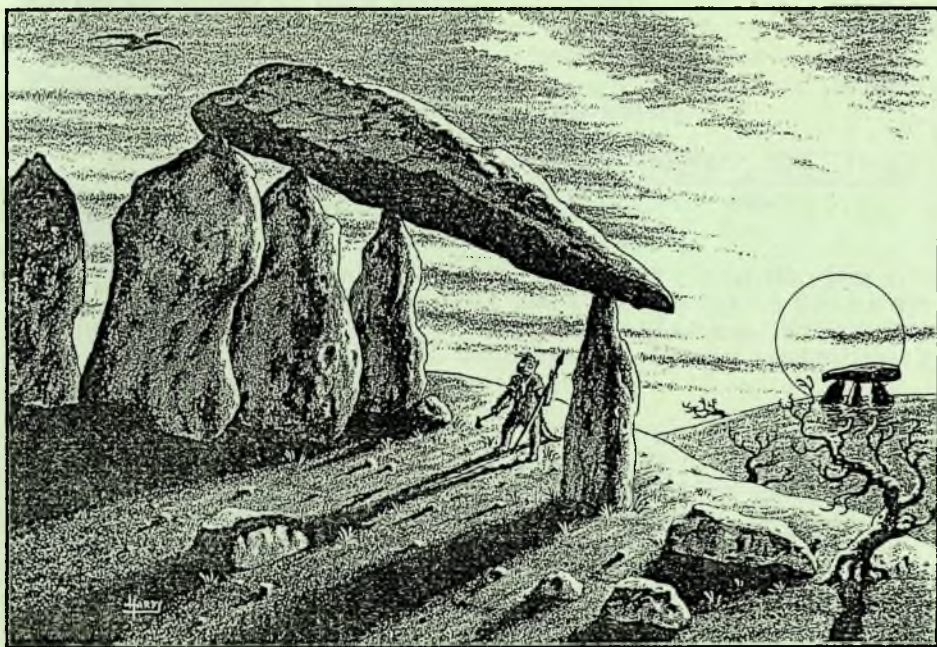
BRUM GROUP NEWS

February
1988

Issue
No.197

The monthly Newsletter of the
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1988 Committee: Chairman - Bernie Evans Secretary - Chris Murphy
Treasurer - David Wake Newsletter Editor - Dave Hardy Reviews Editor -
Mick Evans Publicity Officer - Andrew White Novacon 18 - Tony Berry



*The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified)
at the LADBROKE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham.
Membership costs only £5.50 per year (£8.00 for two people at the same address).
Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer at:
160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham B30 1NY*

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME. Please ring (021) 777 1802
for further details.

This Month's Meeting is on:
Friday 19 February at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

Our Speaker this month is

FREDA WARRINGTON

Freda is a most unusual author: she *doesn't write trilogies*. In fact, she writes her books in pairs. It took her 10 years to get her first book published, in January 1986. This was *Blackbird in Silver* (NEL), and it was followed in October of that year by *Blackbird in Darkness* - the second of that pair. You'll notice that 'Blackbird' features in all her titles, as the next, published this month, is *Blackbird in Amber*, and the second in this pair (set 25 years after the first pair) *Blackbird in Twilight*, is currently with her publisher. If you want to know why Freda has this thing about blackbirds, be sure to come along!

In addition to being an author, Freda is a Graphic Designer, and paints excellent frogs! Her first con was *Fifteencon*, and she has attended every *Novacon* since. Despite the long wait to get published she is young, unmarried, and lives with her parents in Leicester.

Last Month

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At a rather sparsely attended AGM the new 1988 Committee (see front page) was elected, after an exciting and closely-fought battle between Bernie Evans and Chris Chivers for the post of Chairman. Several items were debated, for which there is not room here: Minutes are available on request for anyone who wants them.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORMS: AN APOLOGY...

If you are one of those members whose renewal fell due in January, you may have received a letter which seemed to suggest that you had already received one renewal notice, and had failed to respond.

This was sent out in good faith by the then Newsletter Editor, as it appeared to be the only letter referring to renewals. The Committee (old and new) apologises for this, and a new set of forms has been drafted - one of which may be enclosed with this Newsletter if you actually haven't renewed by now!

We hope that this apology and explanation will be accepted by anyone we offended, and look forward to having you all with us for many years.

THE CHRISTMAS QUIZZES

A rather poor response to these (but thanks, Stan, for your hard work!) Both the Word Quiz and Captain Red Flame Puzzle were won by Steve Jones, who wins the £5 Andromeda voucher and a free pint. Sorry there isn't room to publish the answers here, but they are available to anyone interested.

The (New) Chairman's Bit

Hello BSGF Members! I am, in case you are not already aware, Bernie Evans, your new Chairman. Don't worry, you are not expected to read my rubbish every month - I just wanted to introduce myself to those of you who were not at the AGM in January.

First a few words of apology for my appalling presentation at the AGM, for those who were there. That particular week we had a crisis day, seriously, including a father-in-law who had a stroke and a grand-daughter who had been in hospital with suspected meningitis. As you can imagine, quite apart from the fact that it was touch and go whether Mick and I even got to the AGM, the last thing I was in the mood for was "public speaking", which I don't enjoy at the best of times. To those who supported me, I should like to say a sincere "THANK YOU", and to those who didn't, I hope you won't be too disappointed with me by the end of the year.

In common with all new chairmen, and indeed all new committees, we are all full of revolutionary new ideas. This is known as the "New Broom" Syndrome, but in many cases these so-called new ideas turn out not to be as new as their originators would like to think. I hope we'll be different!

At least some of these new ideas will be in evidence as you read this Newsletter, if the samples I was shown at the Committee Meeting live up to their promise.

Other ideas will show themselves as the year progresses; but one idea I'd like to resurrect is "MEMBER PARTICIPATION". In the past some of you have either NOT told the committee what you want, and then grumbled, or else told of what you want, and then NOT TURNED UP when whatever it was had been arranged...

Maybe some of the longstanding members feel they've already done their bit. Maybe some of the newer members feel it's not their place to say anything. RUBBISH - this is YOUR Group, run for YOUR benefit and YOUR entertainment, using YOUR money.

Longstanding members have the benefit of years of experience, newer members have the advantage of a fresh viewpoint, so LET'S HAVE YOUR IDEAS, YOUR OBSERVATIONS, YOUR REQUIREMENTS !!NOW!!

One final point: SMOKING. Many members have expressed growing concern at the lack of consideration for non-smokers, both in writing to the Newsletter, verbally at the AGM, and privately to me when they knew I was standing as Chairman. (What a pity other aspects of running the Group don't generate the same amount of interest among members!)

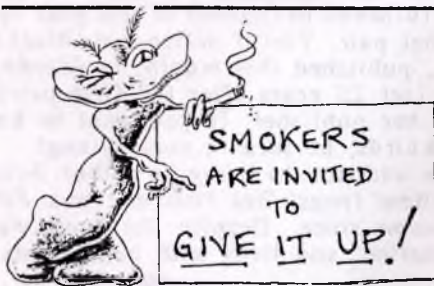
Speaking as (probably) the heaviest smoker in the Group, I do agree that the needs of non-

smokers should be considered. On the other hand, smokers have also paid their door-money and (except visitors) annual subs, and are entitled to their pleasures also.

The worst time for non-smokers is during the 'formal' part of the evening, when they can't move away without causing a disturbance. Also the noise of the fans, which don't clear the air efficiently anyway, can drown out much of what is being said.

As a compromise, therefore, I intend to put up the following notice, or something very similar, at all meetings. I hope this will be satisfactory to everyone.

SMOKERS ARE REQUESTED TO REFRAIN FROM SMOKING DURING THE FORMAL PART OF THE EVENING



CLONESPIRACY

A Convention report by Mick Evans

Clonespiracy was held in the Belmont Hotel in Leicester, over the weekend January 15 - 17. Organised by Ian Sorenson, mainly for those people who were too busy working on *Conspiracy* to actually enjoy it, this proved to be a delightfully informal weekend, attended by about 75 fans.

The scene was set at the Opening Ceremony, where a hand-held laser was played onto a darkened ceiling to the accompaniment of pompous organ music, played on a portable cassette machine. The programme was full of audience participation, with such games as 'Pin the Brain on the Hotel Manager' (no explanation needed) and 'The Hubbo Awards' (for L.Ron). My own contribution here was "Writer most deserving to be dead".

Anne Page organised the Masquerade, with a difference: the contestants were cuddly toys. Of course, we couldn't have a Worldcon without a banquet, and this took the shape of a tea party at which everyone had a name tag pinned to their back (well known SF names), and much amusement resulted from guessing who you were.

All in all, thanks to the Chairman, Ian Sorenson, and to the Committee, Anne Page!!, for a splendid weekend.

ON THE
BIG
& SMALL
SCREEN

A round-up of the latest (and some not-so-new) releases which may be of interest to members who can afford an evening at the cinema or have a VHS video and belong to a local Video Library.

Members are invited to send in their reviews of films/videos that they have loved/hated...

IN YOUR VIDEO SHOP NOW

Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home (CIC): If you don't enjoy this there's no hope for you! Trekkies please note: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (85 years on) is released by CIC Video on February 19.

Short Circuit (CBS/Fox): A high-tech military robot is struck by lightning (shades of Frankenstein) and achieves 'true intelligence' - which is more than can be said for his would-be captors when he escapes. A young girl believes him, and spends much of the film trying to convince his (also young) creator. The robots are designed by Syd (*Blade-runner*) Mead and help to make this one worth a watch.

Labyrinth (Nelson): Muppets creator Jim Henson has fun with fairies and goblins - king of whom is David Bowie. It helps if you saw the programme about the making of this film, on TV last year.

Amazing Stories (CIC): Three *Twilight Zone* type stories, produced by Spielberg. Nice opening graphics.

Solar Warriors (MGM/UAUMV): An inappropriate name for a film about a bunch of roller skating teenagers living in a future where water is strictly rationed. A young deaf boy stumbles on a mysterious living ball which first gives him back his hearing, proves to have remarkable powers - then allows itself to be captured by the authorities and almost dissected. It's the kind of movie that is more exciting visually than intellectually - but worth viewing for the special FX.

Terminal Entry (Braveworld/IVS) is a *Wargames* clone. Three boys and three girls tap into a computer game which

involves killing *real* politicians and blowing up *real* places. Naturally, the kids find themselves as targets for elimination (by a group of terrorists somewhere in the desert). There is a sub-plot of romance, lots of sex and guns; yet the overall effect is quite boring - not to say far-fetched.

Space Camp (CBS/Fox): This is actually a very well-produced film, made on location at the real NASA Space Camp (where some teenagers from Brum went a year or so ago). Great pains have been taken to ensure accuracy in the special effects. The scenario - a bunch of clean-cut, all-American kids get 'accidentally' launched in the Shuttle - is highly improbable, but would be more believable without the cute talking robot which is responsible... Worth a look; but why do all 'sci-fi' movies these days seem to star teenagers...?

FEBRUARY VIDEO RELEASES

Director Roger Corman's *Munchies* (MGM/UA) sounds very much like an attempt to jump on the successful *Grem-lins* bandwagon. A small talking creature is discovered in a Peruvian cave by an archaeologist, whose brother then steals it and for some reason chops it into pieces. Surprise! It regenerates into lots of new critters, who become beer-drinking, chain-smoking yobbos and terrorise a sleepy town...

Survivor (New Dimension Home Video) on the other hand, is in the *Mad Max* mould. An astronaut returns to Earth after a nuclear war to find barbarous savages living in an inhospitable desert. Below is an underground kingdom called Paradise by its evil ruler - Kragg - who intends to rule the whole Earth. Our astronaut has to fight the king's attempts to become 'father of a new >

mankind'. Wait 18 months until it's on telly.

In *Defence Play* (Virgin/PVG) a boy is drawn through his computer into a high-stakes gamble between the USA and USSR for power in space, 'where there are no rules'. Oh, really?

Space Island (CBS) stars Anthony Quinn and Ernest Borgnine, and is the story of 'one boy, two distant planets, the search for the ultimate prize (?), and a battle on the frontiers of space against outlaws from Earth, in 2300AD'. The Earth is (you guessed!) a desolate nuclear wasteland. This film cost \$20 million to make; if only that sort of money could buy an *original* idea for once...

Project X (CBS/Fox) was described by David Aldridge in *Film Review* as 'Short Circuit with fur'. It stars Matthew Broderick - and a monkey - in a scientific research establishment.

FEBRUARY RELEASES IN SHORT

The Delos File: 'Under the sea lurks the greatest monster of all ... Man'.

Mindkiller: a young librarian learns how to expand his mind - and uses it to control his environment and other people.

Hellraiser: not exactly SF, but Clive Barker turns director for this gruesome offering.

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace is due for release on February 15.

Prison Ship Star Slammer: 'Space Angels Break Out'. One for sexists to avoid, to judge from the ad!

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN '88

Spaceballs (no comment) - directed and starring Mel Brooks - September. *Robocop* - a *Terminator* clone - Autumn.

An American Tail - Spielberg animation - no date yet. *The Boy Who Could Fly* - by the same director as *The Last Starfighter*, Nick Castle - July. *Flight of the Navigator* - May. *The Fly* - directed by David Cronenberg - March. *Innerspace* - produced by Spielberg, directed by Joe Dante of *Explorers* fame. Based on ideas from *Fantastic Voyage* - October. *Masters of the Universe* - live action based on animation - July.

Thanks to Armchair Video, Hall Green, for providing information for the above



To get you started, my caption might be:
"Dave! This +1\$#[?c0ll-ling's leaking again!"

But I can't win anyway, so let's have yours...

the Caption Contest

Each month (as long as there's enough support), we shall feature a picture of someone (perhaps more than one) who should be well known to you - either because he/she is a Group member, or appears in SF films, TV, etc.

All you have to do is to write a suitable caption on a piece of paper, with your name, and hand it to a Committee member (preferably Dave Hardy) at the next meeting, or post it to arrive by then. At the next Committee meeting the winner will be decided, and will be surprised by having his/her admission money *refused* at the next month's meeting. OK? The winner's name and caption will be announced in the next Newsletter.

THE

ANDROMEDA

TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks in January were:

1. *Dr Who: The Rescue*
2. *Mage Born Child* - Jonathan Wylie
3. *Death is a Lonely Business* - Ray Bradbury
- 4- *Eyes of the Dragon* - Stephen King
- 4- *Robocop* - Ed Naha
6. *Wyrms* - Orson Scott Card
7. *Bloodthirst* (Star Trek novel)
8. *Chanur's Venture* - C J Cherryh
9. *Nightmares on Elm Street* (movie tie-in)
- 10- *Blood of Amber* - Roger Zelazny
- 10- *Lost Boys* - Craig Shaw Gardner

Top 5 Hardcovers.

1. *2061* - Arthur C. Clarke
2. *Weaveworld* - Clive Barker
- 3- *Bones of the Moon* - Jonathan Carroll
- 3- *Espefair Street* - Iain Banks
5. *Mort* - Terry Pratchett

NEWSFILE

News and Gossip from the world of SF - even including Birmingham: incorporating *The Jophan Report* by Martin Tudor. If you have any information, don't keep it to yourself - send it in!

THE JOPHAN REPORT #014

January saw the appearance of Ed Naha's novelisation of the movie *Robocop* (now on release and shortly to become an animated US TV series) and Jonathan Wylie's *Servants of Ark 3: The Mage Born Child*. *The Tommyknockers*, the latest doorstep from Stephen King, appears this month from Hodder & Stoughton. Also appearing in February is Sheri Tepper's *Jinian Footseer* - the first part of yet another trilogy; *The Bones*, sequel to her *Blood Heritage*, will appear in March. Jack Vance fans will be pleased to hear that March will also bring *Araminta Station* - the first volume of his 'Cadwal Chronicles'. April also brings Stephen Gallagher's *Oktober*.

Forthcoming conventions: *LUCON* at Leeds University with Bob Shaw and Duncan Lunan as Guests of Honour (details from *LUCON* c/o LUUSF Society, Leeds University Union, Leeds University, Leeds LS2 9JT) and *MICROCON 3*, a small campus con featuring mainly RPG and videos (details from the Students Union Building at Exeter University), both of which will be held over the weekend 26-28th February.

Later in the year comes the 39th annual National British SF Convention, *FOLLYCON*, to be held over the Easter weekend (1st - 4th April) at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool. Guest author Gordon R. Dickson, British guest author Gwyneth Jones, comics guest Len Wein, fan guest Greg Pickersgill and guest artist Fox. (Further details available from *FOLLYCON*, 104 Pretoria Road, Patchway, Bristol BS12 5PZ.)

Last, but by no means least, we have *NOVACON 18*. Yes, this year *NOVACON* comes of age - at the Royal Angus Hotel in Birmingham city centre over the weekend of 4th to 7th November. Guest of Honour will be Garry Kilworth. Membership £10 to Bernie Evans (yes, her again!) at the BSFG meeting or to 7 Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7UY. This year the Brum Group's own convention will be organised by Chairman Tony Berry with the aid of Bernie Evans, Rog Peyton, Greg and Linda Pickersgill and myself. [Thanks, Martin. For more news and info, get Steve and Martin's *Critical Wave*.]

THE 1988 TAFF BALLOT

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find a sheet with the above heading. For anyone who doesn't know what TAFF is, the sheet should be self-explanatory. As far as the Group is concerned, though, it would be a feather in our cap if Martin wins, since only one other member has ever won TAFF - Pete Weston. (Rog Peyton was nominated once.) The sheet was originated by Greg Pickersgill, but we have reproduced it over Bernie's name, for the BSFG. *Do put your hand in your pocket and send your £1 to Greg.*

GROUP NEWS

We are delighted to announce (after a long and nail-biting wait) the birth to Helen and David Wake of a beautiful daughter, Rachel Roma, on 29 January. She weighed in at 9lb 4oz (that's 4.193kg in new money). Congratulations!



Cartoon by Tim Groome



A more-or-less regular feature which looks at developments in the fields of science, space research, etc., that may have been predicted by SF-- or probably will turn up in future SF stories...

At a Day School on Alien Life in Oxford last November I met Alan Bond; I tried to persuade him to give a talk to the Brum Group, but he is too busy - not to mention the fact that he is likely to be leaving the country for good...

Who is Alan Bond? He is the Englishman (from the Derbyshire town of Ripley) responsible for the HOTOL spaceplane concept, with its promise of placing payloads in orbit at a fifth of present-day costs, using his revolutionary air-breathing rocket engine.

Back in the halcyon days of the 1950s, when Brum boasted a branch of the British Interplanetary Society, we used to dream that Britain would play a major part in the future of space exploration: after all, we had the brains. For a start there was Arthur C. Clarke - to name only three. Alan Bond could have put us into space with HOTOL, but Mrs Thatcher, despite giving lip-service to Science, is attempting to veto ESA's plans for an independent space vehicle, competing with the USA, Soviet Union and Japan.

UK'S SPACE WEAPON?

In a hard-hitting article in *Spaceflight News*, Alan claims that the Minister of Trade, Kenneth Clarke (what's in a name?) has single-handedly torpedoed European space science, having referred to ESA as "a hugely expensive club". Having refused to contribute to the ESA programme, Clarke is now in danger of handing over our hard-won technology to the USA or Japan, who will give us very little in return. And it means that he now cannot ask Europe to participate in the development of HOTOL...

Kenneth Clarke has stated publicly that "space technology has no impact on everyday life". How far from reality can

you get? Everyone (except Clarke?) knows about the part that satellites play in modern telecommunications, weather forecasting, land resource imaging, etc., etc. Once the potential of space for industry - the availability of minerals from the Moon and asteroids, 'free' heat, cold, vacuum, zero gravity and so forth - is realised, the countries which control space transportation systems will be able to call the tune. And where will Britain be - ?

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Space research is always at the leading edge of developments which later prove their value in other fields. Would we all have the calculators and computers we take so much for granted, were it not for the Apollo programme? Carbon-carbon would be used for HOTOL - but is also an ideal material for human implants like artificial hip joints. Many of the industrialists who scoffed at space travel in the 1960s are no longer in business, having been overtaken by those who saw the opportunities of high tech which space research offered.

What happened to companies that happen to countries, and if Britain continues its merely token contribution we shall find ourselves on the wrong side of a canyon between nations which do and don't have investments in space, which will overshadow the present gap between ourselves and the 'Third World'. Unless our government comes to its senses, Alan Bond says he intends to continue his project elsewhere - and who can blame him?

This report seems to have turned into an editorial on Britain's future in space; but if you agree or disagree with anything I have said, why not write to the Letters Page?



All books reviewed in these pages by members have been provided by the publishers, who will receive a copy of this Newsletter. Members may keep books reviewed by them (or may donate them as Raffle Prizes, or Auction Items, if feeling generous...)

Please keep reviews to under 150 words, unless instructed otherwise. If you'd like to review a book, please see the Reviews Editor.

A BLACKBIRD IN AMBER by Freda Warrington; NEL; 437 pages; £3.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Unlike most modern fantasy authors, Freda Warrington does not write trilogies. Her books come in pairs. The first pair (*A Blackbird in Silver* and *A Blackbird in Darkness*), involved a quest by three disparate characters to slay the serpent M'gulfin, whose power threatened to destroy the world. *A Blackbird in Amber*, though set in the same fantasy world, takes place 25 years later. After the death of the serpent, the power released meant that, for the first time, sorcery could be used.

Mellorn, a trained sorceress and daughter of Ashurek (one of the trio of serpent killers), comes to this earth with the intention of founding a School of Sorcery. She expects it to be easy, but instead of finding latent sorcerers flocking to her for tuition she meets the Emperor Xaedrek. Through metaphysical means, he has developed powers resembling magic but evil in nature. Both attracted and repelled by him, Mellorn flees: her new quest - to raise an army to depose him.

This is but one strand in a relatively complex plot. Freda Warrington is a good descriptive writer and her prose flows easily; images are varied and ideas imaginative. However, in this volume there is not the strong sense of direction of the first pair of novels. Her main characters are gradually moving towards each other but their ultimate destination remains unclear. Despite the wealth of detail the eventful journeys are too long, and the travellers could have arrived at this half-way stage sooner. It does, though, contain much to recommend it to regular fantasy readers.

GREEN EYES by Lucius Shepard; Grafton; 332 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This book is difficult to put into a neat category. For instance, it is labelled 'Science Fiction', but has a 'Horror' cover of a skull with glowing green eyes. The publisher's confusion is perfectly understandable, as the story cleverly mixes elements of horror and science fiction, and even fantasy as well.

The 'hero', Donnell Harrison, is either (i) a crazed homicidal zombie, or (ii) a poet revived by a miracle of modern medicine, or (iii) a sorcerer from another world come to destroy evil, or (iv) all of the above, depending on your point of view. The plot twists and turns, all through the book, and will keep you guessing right to the end (and a bit beyond). Highly recommended.

LOVECRAFT'S BOOK by Richard Lupoff; Grafton; 287 pages; £2.95 paperback. Reviewed by Graham Morton.

Not, as you may think from the title, a book written by, or even about H.P. Lovecraft, nor about his life and work. It is, in fact, a novel concerning what might have happened if the Nazis had asked Lovecraft to write 'an American version of *Mein Kampf*' before the Second World War (though why the Nazis would ask an extremely obscure horror writer to produce their masterpiece is not made clear).

Possibly the worst book I have read in 1987, and no doubt released to cash in on Lovecraft's current popularity. AVOID.

SHADOWS II edited by Charles L. Grant; Headline; 223 pages; £2.50 paperback. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This was originally the first *Shadows* anthology, not the second, but Headline are reprinting them in a peculiar order. It's thirteen horror stories, mostly well written and not too nasty (no chain saw murders!). Stephen King's 'Nona' stands out as the best piece, and there are good contributions from Michael Bishop, Ramsey Campbell and Thomas F. Monteleone. Worth reading.

CYCLES OF FIRE by William K. Hartmann and Ron Miller; Workman Publishing; 189 pages; \$27.50 hardcover, \$14.95 paperback. Reviewed by David A. Hardy.

Subtitled 'Stars, Planets and the Wonders of Deep Space', this is actually by the same team as *The Grand Tour* and *Out of the Cradle* - Hartmann, Miller, and Pamela Lee (this time with a few contributions from Ron's brother Tom - very nice too). With this book, they have covered just about every topic in outer space that can be covered, and I hate them all! I mean, what is left for the rest of us space artists?

Seriously, this is a magnificent volume, and a must for all lovers of astronomical art. Supergiant or white dwarf stars, pulsars, quasars, nebulae, galaxies - they are all here in dramatic full colour. (OK, so red stars aren't *really* that red, and you wouldn't *really* see stars so close to a bright sun; but these have become conventions in space art, haven't they?) I don't know whether it is being published in the UK: probably Andromeda can get it - but GRT IT.

FREEDOM BEACH by James Patrick Kelly & John Kessel; Unwin; 259 pages; £2.95 paperback. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is an unusual psychological fantasy that becomes positively surrealistic in places as it describes a strange beach resort run by talking statues but controlled by 'the dreamers' who are never seen.

The problem is that although individual episodes are brilliant (especially dream sequences that are pastiches of well known films - the Marx Brothers' *Horse Feathers* and a version of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*) the whole thing is too uneven. It hardly adds up to a novel at all. Worth trying if you don't demand coherence in your reading.

EQUAL RITES by Terry Pratchett; Corgi; 205 pages; £2.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Graham Morton.

The third of Terry Pratchett's novels set on the Discworld, this does not deal with Rincewind and Twoflower but instead concerns Esk, a young girl set to be the first female wizard.

However, wizardry is solely a male preserve on the Discworld, so armed with her magic staff and aided by Granny Weatherwax, Esk heads to Unseen University to challenge the system.

A very enjoyable book and recommended.

THE LAYS OF BELERIAND by J.R.R.Tolkien; Unwin; 393 pages; £3.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Or 'Tolkien's Collected Laundry Lists, Vol. 3'. This book consists entirely of several versions of two long epic poems. These are 'The Lay of the Children of Hurin' and 'The Lay of Leithian', and both are unfinished.

The most interesting parts of the book are the notes at the end about Unwin's reaction to the poems in 1937. They had asked if Tolkien had written anything else like *The Hobbit*, and were rather bemused to get two pseudo Anglo-Saxon poems and *The Silmarillion*. Their carefully tactful reply was mistaken by Tolkien for enthusiasm, so Tolkien started to write something new, which eventually became *The Lord of the Rings*!

For all that the poems are quite readable and easy to follow; in some ways the stories from *The Silmarillion* work better in poem form.

THE GLASS HAMMER by K.W.Jeter; Grafton, 238 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Mick Evans.

A group of 'Sprinters' drive across the Western US desert at night in high-powered cars, dodging deadly pulse phase particle beams fired from satellites. Their mission is to deliver computer chips to the European black market. This provides entertainment for millions on TV. The sprinter Schuyler is told through his computer co-pilot that his fellow drivers will all die, and only he will survive. The story is interspersed with numerous flashbacks telling how this situation evolved.

This rather bleak look at the future contains some interesting ideas, such as a religion determined to prevent the coming of the next Messiah, and some humorous backchat from machines (à la P.K.D.). For me though, despite being skilfully written, the book never really comes alive, and a rather sombre mood prevails. Worth investigating.

ALSO RECEIVED:

SOUL STORM by Chet Williamson; Headline; 311 pages; £2.95 paperback.
THE TIMEKEEPER CONSPIRACY by Simon Hanke; Headline; 215 pages; £2.50 paperback.

THE PIMPERNEL PLOT by Simon Hanke; Headline; 211 pages; £2.50 p/b.
MAGIC KINGDOM by Terry Brooks; Orbit; 350 pages; £2.95 paperback.
TROLLNIGHT by Peter Tremayne; Sphere; 247 pages; £2.75 paperback.
NIGHTFALL by John Farris; NEL; 311 pages; £2.95 paperback.

Printed by Paper & Print, Shirley.

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