

BRUM GROUP

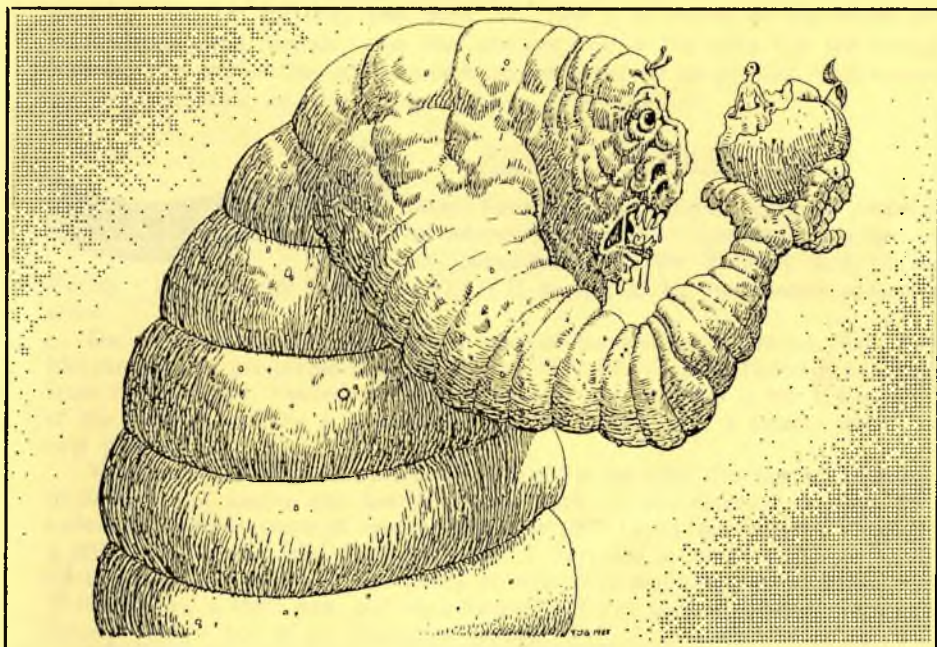
NEWS

March
1988

Issue
No.198

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 BSGF meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at the LADBROKE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham at 8.00pm. Membership costs only £5.50 per year (£8.00 for two people at the same address)

Cheques etc. payable to the BSGF, via the Treasurer at 160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham B30 1NY (telephone 021-451 2287)

Book Reviews to Mick Evans at 7 Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7UY (Telephone 021-707 6606), which is also the Chairman's address.

Other contributions and enquiries to Dave Hardy, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AB (telephone 021-777 1802)

This Month's Meeting is on:
Friday 18 March at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

This month sees the welcome return of

BOB SHAW

Yes, we know Bob was with us as recently as last October. But on that occasion (by special request) he repeated his 'Serious Science Talk' as given at *Conspiracy '87*. This month sees the publication in hardback of *The Wooden Spaceships* - the sequel to his much-acclaimed *The Ragged Astronauts*, which many readers consider the best book he has written, and which deserved to win him the Hugo last year.

So this time Bob is coming to talk about himself, his work, life, the universe and anything else he (or we) can think of. Bob is of course an old friend of the Brum Group, and anyone who has attended one of his talks - at the Group, at Novacon, or any of the other conventions at which he has guested - will know that we are guaranteed an entertaining evening. Don't miss it!

Last Month

FREDA WARRINGTON

New Chairman Bernie Evans opened the proceedings by introducing the 1988 Committee, and then asked for suggestions for the Summer and Christmas Events - IF you want them. DO YOU? If so, please let the Committee have your ideas...

The programme took the slightly unusual form of an interview, with Pauline Morgan puffing pre-prepared questions to Freda Warrington, followed by questions from the audience. Pauline started by pointing out that this is the (Chinese) Year of the Dragon, making it appropriate that we should have a fantasy author as our first guest.

Why do all Freda's books have 'Blackbird' in the title? The first title - *Blackbird in Silver* - just sprang into her head, and stuck. It was finished in 1976, but was followed by three years of rejection slips. In 1979 Freda found herself an agent, but it still took another four years before NEL accepted it. At this stage the first (very thick) book was separated and partly re-written to make two; the first pair, in fact. Will there be a third pair, making a biology(?)? Yes, they are planned, as is another fantasy book - not of the Blackbird school.

Why did she choose fantasy? Tanith Lee said "*It chose you!*" Influences? Many, including Tolkien, C.S.Lewis, Moorecock, Tanith Lee, Gene Wolfe and Thomas Hardy! Freda's fantasy world is Earthlike, but is intersected by three planes or dimensions, which are flat and infinite - perhaps like a Moebius strip which has only one side. These can be reached from Earth by hard-to-find entrance points.

On the real Earth, Freda works as a designer for two days a week, and spends the rest writing - in longhand, to be transcribed by her mother; though she is considering a word processor. She is critical of the artwork on her covers. She was converted to 'real' SF conventions (as opposed to *Star Trek*) by *Fifteencon*, and now never misses a *Novacon*. Which can't be bad for the Brum Group!

NEWSFILE

BRIAN W. ALDISS - ARTIST!

The February issue (No. 4) of the new magazine *WORDS International* ('The Literary Monthly') carries a lengthy interview with Brian by David Wingrove. In addition there are paintings in colour and monochrome - mainly in a free line-and-wash technique - by Brian inside; and he has the cover too. All fans of our co-President should add this to their collection.

Meanwhile, members who saw his *Science Fiction Blues* presentation last year will be pleased to hear that the project continues - in print. Brian and his partner Frank Hatherley, under the company name 'Avernus', intend to bring it out in book form later this year. Watch this space!

ARE YOU INTO D&D?

Penguin Books are putting a lot of effort into the launch of their 'Dragonlance' imprint - though several of the books were originally published some time ago. They are novels, but linked to D&D, so perhaps not of direct interest to the majority of our (SF) Group. However, one of them is reviewed in this issue, and others sent to us will be auctioned for a good (SF) cause.

THE JOPHAN REPORT #015

Comforting news arrived last month that the British SF Association has been back on the register of companies since early January. By now the formalities involved in the re-registration of the BSFA should have been completed at their EGM on 13 February.

The nominations for the 1988 Arthur C. Clarke Award have been announced. They are: *Ancient of Days* by Michael Bishop (Picador); *Agypt* by John Crowley (Gollancz); *Replay* by Ken Grimwood (Grafton); *Fiasco* by Stanislaw Lem (Deutsch); *Grainne* by Keith Roberts (Kerosina); *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* by H.F. Saint (Viking), and *The Sea and the Summer* by George Turner (Faber). The winner of the £1000 will be announced at *Follycon*, this year's British SF convention at Easter. Membership of the convention costs £18 attending (see last month's newSFfile).

The shortlist for the British SF Awards for this year has also recently been announced. Novel: *Consider Phlebas* - Iain Banks; *Agypt* - John Crowley; *Grainne* - Keith Roberts and *The Urth of the New Sun* - Gene Wolfe. Short Story: 'Krash-Bangg Joe and the Pineal-Zen Equation' - Eric Brown (*Interzone* #21); 'Triptych' - Garry Kilworth (*Other Edens*); 'Love Sickness' - Geoff Ryman and 'Sexual Chemistry' - Brian Stableford

News and Gossip from the world of SF, incorporating the noted Jophan Report by Martin Tudor.

If you have any information, don't keep it to yourself - send it in!

(*Interzone* #20). Media: *Disappearing Acts* - Geoff Ryman; *Hellraiser* - Clive Barker; *Performance* - Geoff Ryman; *Science Fiction Blues* - Brian Aldiss & Ken Campbell, and *Star Caps* - BBC. Artwork: cover *Vector* #141 - Ian Brooks; cover *Conspiracy Programme Book* - Jim Burns; cover *Grainne* - Keith Roberts; 'The Good Robot' - *Interzone* #22 - SMS, and the illustrations to 'The Philosophical Stone', *Interzone* #21 - Russ Tudor (no relation to renowned TAFF candidate and writer of this Report, yours truly). The BSFA Awards will be voted on by members of the BSFA and *Follycon* at Easter and awarded at the convention.

J.G. Ballard will be making a guest appearance in Steven Spielberg's film adaptation of his novel *Empire of the Sun*. The beginning of a new career in the movies?

The British rights to Carole Nelson Douglas' *Rynth* trilogy have recently been bought by Corgi. In the US Robert Adams has sold the first three volumes in a new fantasy series, *Stairway to Forever*, to Baen Books for a rumoured \$60,000. Bill Gibson has sold movie rights to *New Rose Hotel* to Edward Pressman. He will be sharing the scripting chores with John Shirley. Also in the States, the *Science Fiction Book Club* has announced the winner of its first annual award, voted on by members from the past year's Club selections. Over 10,000 members took part in the voting. Winners receive 'upright glass book' trophies (runners-up get certificates); this year the 'upright glass book' went to Anne McCaffrey for *Killashandra*, with *Ender's War* (an omnibus edition of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*) came second and *The Summer Tree* by Guy Gavriel Kay, third.

Auction of material from the renowned Forrest J. Ackerman collector, with other added items, on 12 and 13 December 1987, turned into the most successful SF auction ever held (hard luck Rog! Ed.) Total sales came to over \$1,000,000, with the Ackerman share about \$550,000 (before commission of 20%). Although there were bargains, with H.G. Wells 1st editions going for \$50 or less, stunning prices were paid for movie material - the screenplay draft of *The Wizard of Oz* went for \$36,000 and the Frankenstein model from *The Bride of Frankenstein* (in Karloff's original costume) went for \$18,000. The highest bid of the auction, \$42,000 for Frazetta's original *Conan* painting, was REFUSED by the artist. Interestingly, the first five issues of a FANZINE (*Science Fiction*) fetched \$19,000 - merely because they contained the original appearance of Superman...



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...

RECENT RELEASES

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace (Warner Bros; 90min): It's more of the same, really. Superman comes up against his old adversary, Lex Luthor, who, by the simple strategy of obtaining some of Superman's genetic material from a hair and having it hurled into the Sun, produces a sort of evil clone. Superman's efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons (by sending them into the Sun...) take second place to his battle with this monster. Lois Lane seems unsure whether or not she knows who Clark Kent really is, but gets enough romance to keep her happy. And so on.

The special effects are up to standard - but I still don't believe a man can fly.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (CIC; 90 min): Long awaited by *Star Trek* fans (of whom I admit to being one, though I don't consider myself a Trekkie), I watched this with mixed feelings. It's not *Star Trek*, of course, without the old gang (even if a decrepit McCoy does make a brief appearance). Patrick Stewart makes quite a good Captain - though it's strange to hear British accents intoning that famous and ungrammatical opening speech (which now concludes "... where no-one has gone before.") and he should learn to smile a little more often. Commander William Ryker bears a passing resemblance to James T. Kirk.

Women do play marginally stronger roles than in the original series. Spock's telepathic/ 'mind-meld' abilities are taken over by an attractive female Councillor (or is that Counsellor?), while his logical brain is replaced by a pasty-faced android.

The first story, 'Encounter at Farpoint' is written by D.C. Fontana and Gene Roddenberry, and you can tell. It's recognisably a *Star Trek* story - indeed it's almost familiar. A superior alien being forces the crew of the *Enterprise* (once again revamped) to undergo a 'test' in order to answer for mankind's past misdeemeanours - you know. The whole format would not be possible without the background of the original series, and on balance, if I watched this on TV every week, it would probably grow on me. But Captain Kirk would never have surrendered - superior power or not!

HAVE YOU NOTICED...?

Central TV has been having a George Pal season of films - without telling anyone! First they showed *When Worlds Collide*, then the following week *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*. Pal doesn't even get a credit in *TV Times* in some cases, being producer but not director. He died in 1980, and also made *Tom Thumb*, which was on BBC recently too. All we have to look out for now are *Destination Moon*, *Conquest of Space*, and perhaps *7 Faces of Dr Lao*.

Have you been watching *Lost in Space* on Channel 4? (Go on - admit it!) Terrible, isn't it? But did you notice 'Music by Johnny Williams'? Could that be THE John Williams, now famous for his music for *Star Wars*, *CELIK*, *ET*, and just about every other SF film of note? I'd guess so.





the Caption Contest

Rog with his Nostromo cap didn't generate an enormous response last month - but enough, with a little encouragement. Perhaps this month's guest (seen here with ... friend) will do better. Don't forget, all you have to do is write your caption (which could be in 'speech bubbles') on a piece of paper, with your name, and hand it to me at the next meeting. Winner gets free admission to the following meeting. Last month's winner was Dave Cox, with: "Would you buy a secondhand SF book from this man?"

THE ANDROMEDA

TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks in January (in Britain's best SF bookshop, of course) were:

1. *The Forge in the Forest* - Mike Scott Rohan, Futura.
2. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* - David Gerrold, Titan.
3. *A Blackbird in Amber* - Freda Warrington, NEL.
4. *Cobra Strike* - Timothy Zahn, Legend.
- 5= *Star Trek: I.D.I.C. Epidemic* - Jean Lorrain, Titan.
- 5= *The Burrowers Beneath* - Brian Lumley, Grafton.
7. *A Blackbird in Darkness* - Freda Warrington, NEL.
8. *It* - Stephen King, NEL.
9. *A Blackbird in Silver* - Freda Warrington, NEL.
10. *Anvil in the Ice* - Mike Scott Rohan, Futura.

Top Five hardcovers:

1. *The Tommyknockers* - Stephen King, Hodder.
2. *A Man Rides Through* - Stephen Donaldson, Collins.
3. *Valis* - Philip K. Dick, Kerosina.
4. *Hammer of the Sun* - Mike Scott Rohan, Macdonald.
5. *Weaveworld* - Clive Barker, Collins.

JOHN
DELL



David Frost to Isaac Asimov in TV interview (on the subject of God):

"But *is* there a force out there that we don't know about?"

Asimov: "Well there may be - but if there is we don't know about it!"



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Many thanks to Tim Groome for ^{NEARLY} all (non-computer) artwork in this issue.



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...

DINOSAURS RAINED OFF?

It's a couple of years since Dr John Davies came to the Brum Group and told us how the dinosaurs may have been wiped out by the fall of a giant meteorite, 65 million years ago. He wasn't totally in favour of that theory, and since then there is new evidence both for and against. Ronald Prinn of MIT has measured a variation in the ratio of strontium-86 and 87 at the end of the Cretaceous.

Some scientists have been sceptical of the idea that the blocking of sunlight by dust (in a sort of Nuclear Winter) could have caused major extinctions. Prinn points out that the energy of the impact would have heated the atmosphere to such high temperatures that nitrogen and oxygen could combine, forming oxides of nitrogen which would then combine with atmospheric water to produce nitric acid rain.

If the impact was caused by a comet, having low iridium content, this body would be larger than an asteroid and would arrive at a higher speed, causing a more energetic impact. The acid produced would have been strong enough (equivalent to battery acid) to dissolve the limy shells of marine animals and some metallic minerals, and defoliate trees.

Prinn claims that the only explanation for the increase in the ratio of the two strontium isotopes is the weathering of silicate rocks by strong acid rain.

Before leaving the subject of dinosaurs and their extinction: Niles Eldridge has suggested that extinction is in fact a sort of driving force in evolution. When a species becomes extinct, other creatures can move into the ecological niche left behind. This means, to take the most extreme case, that had the dinosaurs not vanished so completely we would not be here; mammals were just lucky to be able to survive. Harry Harrison (*West of Eden*) may not care for this theory! [How about a letter, Harry?]

Are they extinct though? The Loch Ness Monster may or may not be a plesiosaur, but in the Congo basin there is a legend of the 'Mokele-mbembe' - a 'monstrous clawed animal'. Roy Mackal, a biologist at Chicago University, believes that the beast may be a small sauropod dinosaur. When he showed the locals photographs of various animals, they

immediately identified elephants, lions, gorillas - and a brontosaurus - yet shrugged when shown animals not native to the locality, such as a grizzly bear.

His next expedition will be backed by a major American movie company, so look out for - a remake of *The Lost World*?

And while on the subject of mysterious creatures and legends, it is 100 years since the Abominable Snowman first came to the attention of the West. Of all the explanations put forward, the most likely seems to be that it is the rare Tibetan blue bear, which is described as walking upright, being over six feet tall, and having an apelike face. It also has reversed toes. There is also a smaller yeti, and Chris Bonington wants to lead an expedition next year to resolve whether this is an anthropoid ape.

CARE FOR A DIP IN THE COMET?

Meanwhile, Christopher Chyba of Cornell University believes that the bombardment of the young Earth - between 3.8 and 4.5 billion years ago - could have produced our first oceans. Judging from the amount of cratering on the Moon, he calculated how many impacts would have been received by the Earth; if ten per cent of the material were from comets, they could have provided 40 per cent of our present oceans. Earlier theories suggested that only four per cent arrived in this way.

In *Heart of the Comet*, David Brin and Greg Benford postulate strange alien lifeforms living on Halley's Comet. Almost as alien are the organisms which have been discovered living at the bottom of the sea around thermal sulphur vents, without light, and producing starch and other organic carbohydrates from carbon dioxide *without help from the Sun*. They do this by oxidising hydrogen sulphide, in a process called 'chemosynthesis'. From those comets perhaps?

TAIL PIECE

David Dolphin, a Canadian chemist, has made a chemical similar to porphyrins - which make blood red and, when they accumulate under the skin, cause symptoms that may have led to mediaeval legends of werewolves and vampires. Drinking blood would alleviate the symptoms...

Delphinitely Alien

by Margaret Thorpe



The first alien landscape that Man has been able to explore is that of the underwater world inhabited by lifeforms vastly different from himself.

Whales and dolphins are mammals like us, and yet they inhabit worlds which we can only survey with the help of protective life support systems. Their brains are larger than ours, and indeed some specialists do not rule out the possibility that these mammals have a folklore and an oral tradition passed on from generation to generation.

These ideas are not new, and imaginative writers have long speculated about the idea of intelligent sea mammals. Even the legend of the mermaid has its origin with the manatee, another sea mammal.

In the late 1950's and 60's the work done in the US on Sonar and training dolphins came to the attention of the SF world in stories such as Gordon R. Dickson's *Brother Charlie*, where an alien race resembling dolphins appeared. Dickson followed this up in 1962 with *Secret Under the Sea*, where the boy hero and his pet dolphin capture a crew of vandals.

'63 produced two novels and a short story about intelligent dolphins. Norton's *Key Out of Time* has a team of humans and dolphins co-operating as espionage/sabotage agents. There is a common theme in her novels and in this case there is a female agent who can communicate telepathically with a pair of dolphins, while exploring an alien world similar to ours. Arthur C. Clarke's juvenile novel *Dolphin Island* has the animals as servants of Man, providing a means of transport. Thomas Burnett Swann's novelette, *The Dolphin and the Deep* is a fantasy in which a white dolphin is turned into a woman -- a were-dolphin, yet?

Dickson broke from traditional thinking in 1964, with his excellent short story 'Dolphin's Way'. It concerns mankind's attempt to communicate with dolphins as the first step in establishing communication with aliens, and has a marvellous twist at the end.

Robert Merle, a French writer, highlighted the more serious implications of US research in 1967: *The Day of the Dolphin* [also made into a film. Ed]. In this the dolphins are used, as at present in the USA, for ship-to-diver communications. Then someone has the bright idea of using them to plant bombs at enemy installations -- the dolphins are of course expendable. However the dolphins in this book have a moral sense which makes them question for the first time Man's superiority. In complete contrast is the Roy Meyers fantasy trilogy, published between '67 and '69. *Dolphin Boy*, *Daughters of the Dolphins* and *Destiny of the Dolphins* tell of the adventures of an aquatic Tarzan: Sir (of course) John Averill, who due to a radiation accident before his birth,

has gills, and is brought up by dolphins. Anne McCaffrey, 1969, in 'Weather on Welladay', relegates whales to their usual role as hunted animals, where they are 'milked' of iodine by humans, some of whom have no regard for them, except as expendable items.

Dickson continues his *Secret Under the Sea* theme in *The Space Swimmers* (1967), where dolphins appear as free companions of the sea dwellers, pursuing their own lives. This idea was enlarged in 1979, with the publication of the prequel *Home From the Shore*. Zelazny has written an unpronounceable (and untypeable) short story: 'Kjwalll'kje'k'Koothaiill'kje'k', about dolphins wrongly accused of killing humans. Zelazny is one of the few writers who acknowledges Professor Lilly's work on dolphins, and also invents a philosophy and religion for the creatures. *Dolphins in Profundis* (1979) by Richard Cowper, also have a moral sense, and censor the information which they are sent out to gather for the humans.

The latest offerings with this theme are *Starline Rising* and its sequel, *The Uplift War* by David Brin. In these beautifully-crafted novels the cetaceans have been elevated to Man's co-equals and fellow space explorers. *Star Trek* fans will naturally already have included Spock & Co's involvement in helping to save the whales for the future of mankind. In our own time, of course, dolphins had already proved their superiority by leaving Earth before the Vogons built their Interstellar Bypass in *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979).

Zelazny perhaps summarises the attraction of the dolphin: "They are beautiful friendly creatures, so well adapted to their environment that they don't have to mess it up in order to lead the life they seem to enjoy. They are highly intelligent, they're co-operative, and they seem lacking in all areas of maliciousness."

Let's hope that any aliens we do encounter demonstrate some of these qualities.

OTHER NOVELS:

- Operation Malacca*: Joe Poyer, 1968.
Ishmael in Love (s.s.): Robert Silverberg, 1970.
The Girl and the Dolphin (s.s.): John Boyd, 1973.
Cathalot: Alan Dean Foster, 1980.

NON-FICTION:

- Man and Dolphins*: Lilley, 1961.
Dolphins: The Myth and the Mammal: Alpers, 1961.



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. Deadline for reviews: at least 2 weeks before next meeting

SHADE OF TREE by Piers Anthony; Grafton; 352 pages; £295 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This, Piers Anthony's first horror novel, is written in the smooth, flowing style that characterises much of his work. Josh, recently widowed, moves with his children and their pets, to the country. The half-built house is shadowed by a magnificent tree but the property has a reputation for being haunted. Almost from the moment they arrive, strange things begin to happen. It has all the ingredients of a good horror novel but it lacks sufficient tension to make it scary; and is it really necessary, I wonder, to have the goldfish's impressions of the situation. If Anthony was a little less deliberately prolific, he might have made a better job of this. He has written other books which are more worthwhile reading.

TIMEFIGHTERS by Bernard King; Sphere; 254 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Having committed himself to writing a trilogy, Bernard King ran out of ideas. Volume One, *The Destroying Angel*, introduced a pattern of historical snippets at the beginning, spanning almost two thousand years. These, in this volume, provide interesting images. The bulk of the novel is less exciting. Robert Ferrow, one of the principal good-guys from *The Destroying Angel*, goes to a remote Scottish village, ostensibly for a holiday but actually at the prompting of his dead friend, Pythonius Meeres. Here, Ferrow is obliged to save the world from a fate worse than AIDS. There is a lot of bloodshed which seems to be a cover for weakness of the plot. Not recommended.

BLOOD HERITAGE by Sheri S. Tepper; Corgi; 240 pages; £2.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is horror in a classical vein. It has all the traditional elements beloved by English proponents from the early part of this century---mazes, family curses, supernatural demons, etc. etc. These themes have effectively been translated to the U.S.A, and an extra dimension added.

The story of how Badger Ettison seeks his missing wife and child is worth reading as Ms Tepper is an excellent story teller. What in other hands would be tired, old cliches have been given a fresh lease of life.

ARCHON! by Stuart Gordon; Macdonald; 316 pages; £11.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

With *Archon!*, Gordon has produced a powerful opening to a fantasy trilogy. He begins with a vision---a man burning to death. It is the nightmare of Chrissa Joyce, an otherwise normal teenager at odds with her parents. As she comes to realise that the burning man is benevolent, and a real person reaching out from the past, she also begins to understand that her father is in danger. The elements of the plot are closely and cleverly interwoven, moving from the present into 13th century France during the period when the Inquisition was hunting down and burning Cathars. The interplay between characters is extremely realistic, especially in the contemporary passages. In the blending of familiar and supernatural, historical and archane, Gordon has done a difficult job magnificently.

THORNS by Robert Silverberg; Futura; 158 pages; £2.50 paperback;
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A story of pain and comradeship, where two people are manipulated by a third to satisfy his own desires. The two, Burris an astronaut changed by alien science and now barely human, and Lona Kelvin a donor 'mother' deprived of her babies, are introduced, fall in love through need, and find themselves. A wonderful emotive story from Silverberg which is well worth a read.

BETWEEN THE STROKES OF NIGHT by Charles Sheffield; Headline; 346 pages;
£2.95 paperback; Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A well paced and well balanced novel. Beginning with clinical experiments in reducing sleep, and moving on into space to continue them, the story then leaps forward thousands of years to what mankind becomes. Sheffield introduces an ingenious idea: no FTL here, but a reversal slowing down the human metabolism and making time (seemingly) slow down-love it!

Although inventive in its choice of story angle and introduction of characters as the narrative progresses, the interplay of characters is a little predictable (rebel youth against establishment idea). Basically it involves the attempts of the six winners of a planetwide contest to 'find the truth'. That they do so and the way in which they accomplish it I won't reveal. This is excellent Science Fiction. Read it, it's well worth the price.

FIRE DANCER by Anne Maxwell; Orbit; 203 pages; £2.50 paperback;
Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The planet Deva had two sentient races the Senyas and the Bre'n, who lived in almost symbiotic pairings. The Senyas were dancers who controlled the elements, and the Bre'n were their mentors, protectors and eventually lovers. But now Deva has been destroyed and only a few escaped. One such duo is Rheba, a fire dancer, and Kntn, her Bre'n. This novel is the tale of their search for other escapees in the hope of perpetuating their respective races. Ignore the tacky cover and dreadful blurb (where the publishers cannot even spell the name of one of main characters correctly). This is a fascinating novel full of incident and ideas. I can see why Mrs Maxwell has previously been recommended for the Nebula, whilst this is not in the same class I would still recommend it.

TO LIVE FOREVER by Jack Vance; Grafton; 253 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

Although first published in 1956, this novel hasn't dated much. It is set in a society in which immortality has been discovered, but not given to everybody. Indeed it is only for those who have merited it, as resources are limited. Consequently, those who fail to merit immortality are allocated a fixed life-span; at the end of that time they are killed.

One individual who had achieved immortality was Grayven Waylock. He accidentally kills a fellow immortal and flees before he can be arrested. His plan is to live on the fringes for 7 years, until he is declared legally dead, before re-entering society and working his way back into the ranks of the immortals. Unfortunately, one month before this time is up he is recognised by another immortal and the novel deals with his resultant actions.

Vance's depiction of a society in which immortality is available, but only to those who earn it is a fascinatingly logical one. His portrayal of the effect that an increasingly desperate individual can have on such a society is perhaps disproportionate, but nevertheless I found this an interesting novel.

THE LABYRINTH by Robert Holdstock; (writing as Robert Falcon). Arrow; 283 pages; £2.50 paperback; Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

This is the sixth and final volume in Holdstock's *Nighthunter* series. While I enjoyed the earlier volumes in this series, I found this one disappointing. This may have been because Dan Brady, the protagonist of the previous volumes, plays a relatively minor part in the story; indeed he could easily have been written out without affecting the story in any significant way. An additional reason for my disappointment was that the elements of fantasy and horror which had been evoked so well in previous volumes failed to work this time. The overall impression that I got from this book was that the author had decided to finish the series but was either unable to maintain the standards of the previous volumes or else had little enthusiasm for the actual writing. A pity really, as the actual plot is fairly reasonable, and given treatment similar to the earlier volumes it could have worked well.

THE MAGE-BORN CHILD by Jonathon Wylie; Corgi; 350 pages; £2.95 p/back. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the final volume in the *Servants Of Ark* trilogy and deals with Yve, a female Mage, and how she becomes a vital factor in the destruction of Alzedo. The evil grey fog covers Lugg, Yve's home island, and when it disperses Yve's Master Drogo is dead and the island's people have become hostile to Mages. Yve decides it would be politic to leave, and on hearing that Ark was relatively unscathed she journeys there, where the final round against Alzedo takes place. This trilogy got off to a very shaky start but improved rapidly. All in all it's a good trilogy and one I would recommend. A note for American Football fans, you may find that some of the characters in this trilogy bear names that are remarkably similar to the names of the Los Angeles Rams team.

THE CLOCKS OF IRAZ by L. Sprague de Camp; Grafton; 191 pp.; £2.50 p/b. Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

This is the second volume in de Camp's *Reluctant King* trilogy. Ex-king Jorian of Xylar, having settled down as a surveyor on an aqueduct(!), gets embroiled again in the plans of the wizard Karadur, who has found himself a job in the city of Iraz. Unfortunately as his superiors have obtained their jobs on the basis of who they are, and not on what they know, Karadur finds himself restricted in his magical activities. However, as the great clocks of Iraz have not been working for many years, Karadur soon arranges with the King of Iraz to have his superiors pensioned off provided he can repair the clocks. So Karadur sends an emissary to Jorian, whose father built the clocks, promising to help Jorian rescue his wife Estrildis from Xylar, if he repairs the clocks for Karadur.

Readers of the first volume, *The Goblin Tower* will know that Karadur's schemes rarely work out in practice, and this one is no exception. Like *The Goblin Tower*, I found this a good and sometimes funny book. De Camp's characters and settings lift this series well above those of many fantasy novels. Definitely worth reading.

THE MAGIC OF KRYNN ed Margaret Weis & Tracey Hickman; Penguin; 350 pp; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by Chris Murphy.

This anthology is the first of a series about the world of Krynn. The ten tales (one is actually a poem) share a cast of humans, dwarves, elves, Hobbit-like kinder and monsters, but vary in style and quality. There is a well drawn illustration for each story. The book will most probably appeal to younger fantasy fans.