

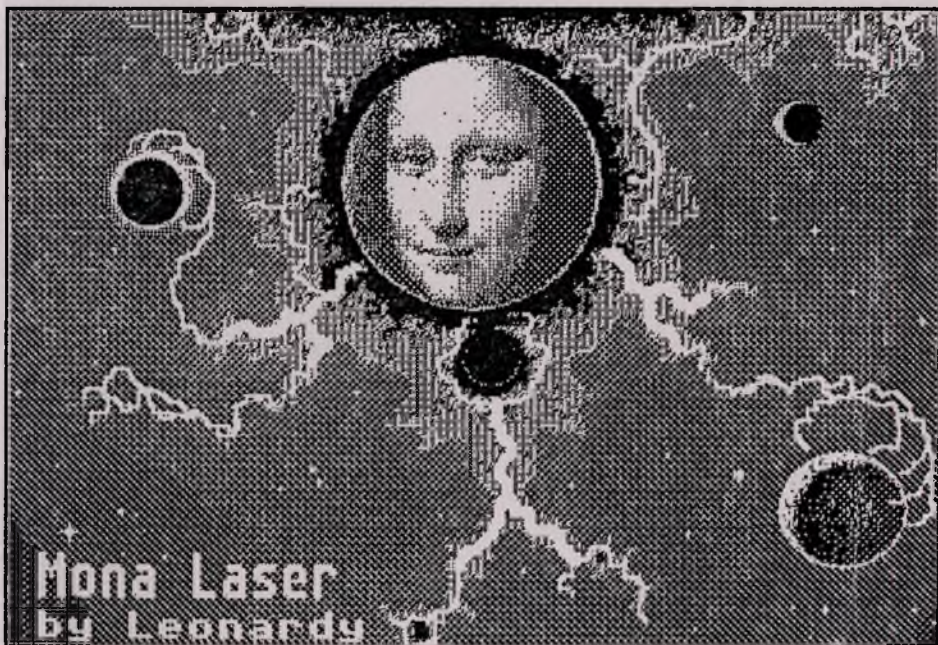
BRUM GROUP NEWS

April
1988

Issue
No.199

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 at 8.00pm. 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 (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 15 April at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

As you know, we promised that this year's programme would contain a mix of speakers and 'in-Group' activities. This month sees the first of these, in the form of:

GALACTIC UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE!

Organised and presented by Dave Cox, along the lines well known to mere terrestrials from a TV programme (pinched from us, of course), this will be an exciting battle between teams, with high-technology buzzers - fast fingers required - starter and follow-up questions, etc. What is more, the winning team will receive a Grand Prize of (read my keyboard) no less than:

£50.04

(the odd pence should prevent anyone from complaining when we divide by three...) Whether you are a player or a spectator, it will be worth coming along!

Last Month

BOB SHAW

Bob arrived rather late, having been delayed on the motorway. He was also hampered by a 'croaky throat' but this did not prevent a packed house from enjoying his visit. Not having had time to prepare a talk, he brought one which he said he found in a drawer, on the back of a story - one of his own, too! The talk was entitled 'Science Fiction, Mon Amour'. People, he said, are always trying to define just what SF is. There's no need for *us* to do that...

Bob used to think that SF could only be appreciated by the young, but that can't be true: these days he sees old friends walking around with grey beards and sticks! So he revised it to: 'SF is for people who don't grow old'. No matter how they look, SF fans remain as resilient as ever. Bob continued by stating that 'Everybody starts off life as a SF fan'. A child accepts everything. But by the age of 10-14, with the advent of puberty and the dawning of sexuality, 99 per cent of them decide SF is childish. A partner must come down to earth and make a living, etc. Today the word 'dreamer' is almost an insult - dreamers can't make money (?) He went on to use Peter Pan as an example. Wendy becomes a woman before he meets her again after their adventures. "You've *grown up!*" he accuses her. But we haven't! Years don't matter - it's the way we think that counts.

That sounds like pure metaphor, said Bob, but he means it. His schoolfriends went straight from adolescence to middle age. His own attitude makes him unpopular with bank managers, but he gets on well at SF cons. End of prepared talk, and I - and I think the rest of the audience - agreed with every word. You have to get your priorities right!

During question time, Bob explained that it was the first time he had set out to write a trilogy (*Orbitsville* may yet become one - but there are years between the sequels). Brian Aldiss told him "Trilogies are hard work", but it took him some time to realise exactly what Brian meant... Bob has now written 26 books (so can say "Oh, dozens!", when asked). Stay young, Bob, and keep writing.

NEWSFILE

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!

THE JOPHAN REPORT #016

I'm afraid I have to open this month's report with two items of sad news. *Locus* has just announced the death of one of the finest short story writers in SF - C.L. Moore. She died on 4 April 1987 at the Cerrano South Convalescent Home in Hollywood, of Alzheimer's Disease complicated by pneumonia. She was 76. Catherine Lucille Moore, born in Indianapolis on 24 January 1911, was one of the first major female writers of SF/fantasy. Her first story, 'Shambleau', which appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1933, featured Northwest Smith who was to become one of the most enduring of Moore's heroes. More famous, however, were her stories of Jirel of Joiry, which began to appear in 1934. 'Quest of the Starstone', in which Northwest and Jirel meet, marked her first collaboration with Henry Kuttner, whom she married in 1940. She started to attend fantasy conventions in the 1970s, was Guest of Honour at the 1981 World SF Convention (*Devention*), and a judge in the first *Writers of the Future* contest.

Lin Carter, aged 57, died of cardiac arrest brought on by chronic emphysema, in the Montclair, New Jersey Veteran's Hospital on 7 February 1988. Having survived a disfiguring operation for cancer in 1985, Carter had been revived after a cardiac arrest earlier in the week. Linwood Vrooman Carter, born 9 June 1930 in St. Petersburg, Florida, was active in New York fandom in the 1950s and early 60s. A serious collector of fantasy and extremely knowledgeable on the subject, he also wrote over 50 novels of fantasy and SF. But his most important work was as an editor, where he was pivotal in the resurgence of fantasy.

Moving on to happier news, Iain M. Banks has turned in his second SF novel to Macmillan. It is entitled *The Player of Games*; his first SF novel, *Consider Phlebas*, appeared in paperback this month at Eastercon. Iain Banks' next mainstream novel will be about a 'middle-aged Japanese lady 'cellist in Central America'...

David Eddings has completed the third in 'The Mallorean' series - *Demon Lord of Karanda* - which will be published by Del rey. Over here Unwin have bought the latest novel from Gwyneth Jones, *Kairos*. Gwyneth is currently working on the second book of a young adult trilogy under the pen name Ann Halam, along with a novel for teenagers for Women's Press Livewire. Over the Channel the French have just awarded Tim Powers their

major SF award, the Prix Apollo, for *The Anubis Gates*.

Still on the wrong side of the Channel, Isaac Asimov denies 'adapting' the new French animated SF film *Light Years* for the screen, although he admits to translating the script into decent English (!). In an interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle* he says that the line 'ISAAC ASIMOV PRESENTS' is 'unfair to the French creators'. *Light Years*, nevertheless, represents his first involvement as a creative participant in a film.

Arthur C. Clarke, writing with Gentry Lee, has completed the treatment for *Rama II*. While last December, in honour of his 70th birthday, Minehead Town Council voted to place a plaque on the house where he was born. *Cradle* by Clarke and Lee is scheduled to appear from Gollancz in July.

William Gibson, recently returned from Japan where he was researching three articles for *Penthouse*, has completed *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. The Gollancz (British) edition will appear in April, long before the Bantam (US) edition, which is scheduled for November. *The Difference Engine*, written in collaboration with Bruce Sterling, has just attracted 'floor bids' of, reportedly, £37,500 from Gollancz and \$85,000 from Bantam.

Sphere will be reprinting the five 'Incomplete Enchanter' stories by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt in one volume in May, to be called (with incredible originality) *The Intrepid Enchanter*. John Brunner, no less, has SOLD an SF NOVEL (stands back in disbelief) entitled *Children of the Thunder* to Del Rey. Terry Pratchett (most ubiquitous GoH of 1988) recently sold six (count 'em, 6) fantasy novels to NAL via Gollancz - who will be publishing *Sourcery* in May.

Gregg Ketter of Dreamhaven Books donated 2000 hardcover copies of *The Peace War* by Vernor Vinge to *Windy Car* where Vinge will be GoH. Any chance of Rog Peyton of Andromeda Books donating 500 copies of Garry Kilworth's *Cloudrock* to *Novacon 18*? Huh Rog, pretty please?!

FUTURE PROGRAMME

In May we have the latest info on ROBOTS from Professor Jeffrey Knight.

In June, we hope to have author C.J. Cherryh - watch this space!

DO YOU WANT A SUMMER (OR CHRISTMAS) EVENT? LET US KNOW BY THE NEXT MEETING, OR ELSE...

PROFILE
COMMITTEE



Bernie Evans: Chairwoman

Small Ads

Free to Members; £2 to Non-Members. Phone 021-777 1802.

FOR SALE: 300 SF Books, including 31 Asimov, 24 Moorcock, 10 Doc Smith, 9 Ashton Smith, 8 Heinlein, 7 Harrison, 6 Sturgeon, 6 Howard, 5 Niven, 4 Hoyle, 5 Leiber. De Luxe *The Hobbit*. Also approx. 450 *2000AD* comics, plus 3 annuals; magazines, and 200 other books.
Phone Rick on 021-449 8762 (24 hours).

Birmingham Public Library appears not to have received (or has mislaid) the following issues of the Brum Group Newsletter: 175, 179, 181, 186 and 190.

Can anyone help with spare/unwanted copies, so that our archives are kept intact for posterity? Please contact Dave Hardy if so.

When I asked Bernie for some personal info for her Profile, she said "Why do I have to be first?" So to be fair I decided to 'do' the Committee in strictly alphabetical order. Which means that first is ... Bernie Evans. (In case you think the Novacon representative on the Committee should be first, that's Bernie too, Tony Berry now living in Nottingham!) So:

Bernie was born in Oldham, Lancs, in 1946, moved to Brum in 1964, and has been here ever since. She became interested in SF while at school, through comics and 1950s 'B' movies. She says that she cut her book-reading teeth (unusual that, reading with your teeth) on mythology: Greek, Roman, Norse, the Arthurian legends. They were all she could get hold of at school. Then she moved on to Badger Books ("yes, honestly!!") and the Golden Age stuff - Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein. She still collects 50s and 60s paperbacks, mainly for the covers. Her current favourite authors are Mike Resnick, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., Bob Shaw, Dann/DuZois anthologies, and Storm Constantine.

Through playing darts at her local she bumped into Dave Holmes (it's easily done), heard about Andromeda, but knew nothing about Fandom. She got into that through Steve Green (who?) and the Solihull Group, and it was Steve who brought her to her first Brum Group meeting. That was in late 1980/early '81: Jack Cohen was the speaker, and Dave Holmes - with whom she had lost touch during her first, ill-fated marriage - was there. Bernie was hooked. Novacon 11 was her first convention.

I think that Rog and I were mainly to blame - thank for 'persuading' Bernie to take up Committee posts. She was Publicity Officer in 1985, then chaired Fifteencon (to celebrate the Group's 15th Anniversary) very successfully in mid-86, and chaired Novacon 17 in '87.

Bernie is of course married to Mick, our Reviews Editor. Her other interests are listed (but not necessarily in this order) as Heavy Metal music, plus rock and 60s stuff, knitting, doting on two grandchildren, and collecting unicorns (models) and cats (real - "four so far, plus a regular visitor from next door and a nice little stray who won't come in.") He's probably scared of being drafted onto the Committee...



"Fred says we're going further than Jersey next Easter"



This month I am incorporating part of Martin Tudor's Jophan Report, as it deals with TV and movies. See NEWSFILE for the rest of the Report.

Members are invited to send in their reviews of films/videos that they have loved/hated (But no-one has yet - come on out there...)

WHAT'S COMING FROM THE US?

Granada TV, along with France's Ellipse Programmes S.A. and USA Network, have become involved in producing new episodes of the critically acclaimed *Ray Bradbury Theater* - an anthology series similar in style and format (but hopefully not content) to *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The series will 'open with a generic Bradbury introduction shot in his Los Angeles office, rather than a new one produced specifically for each of the 12 initial programmes', reports *Starlog* in its March issue. Ray Bradbury is currently writing an off-Broadway play with composer Jimmy Webb.

Paramount Pictures TV have already renewed *Star Trek: The Next Generation* for a second season (which will be shown in the US during the 'fall' of this year). Paramount are also launching a weekly *War of the Worlds* - based on the George Pal movie version rather than the lesser known classic by Mr Wells. [Pity. I'm still waiting for a movie/TV version of the original story - it could be great. Ed.] It is planned that the series will debut as a two-hour special followed by 24 one-hour episodes.

ABC have apparently contacted producer James Hirsch with a view to commissioning a two-hour *Starman* TV movie, to be screened Stateside sometime in 1988. *Sable*, a TV series based on the Mike Grell comic *Jon Sable, Freelance*, appeared on ABC last November only to be cancelled shortly afterwards because of disappointing ratings.

There will be not only an *Alien III*, but also an *Alien IV*. Ridley Scott will direct one or the other, while Sigourney Weaver, who only has a cameo role in *Alien III*, is rumoured to be the star of *Alien IV*. Speaking of sequels, there is one in the pipeline to *The Fly*: Chris Wallace (who did the SFX on *Gremlins*) is slated to direct *The Fly II*, which concerns the child of Geena Davis and Jeff Goldblum. Other films in the pipeline include Dan Ackroyd and Shelley Long in *My Stepmother is an Alien*, Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis (his wife in real life) in *Earth Girls are Easy* [I thought

it might be *Come Fly with Me* - Ed.]; Bob Hoskins teaming up with an animated rabbit in a Spielberg/Disney co-production *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and finally, yet another sequel' *Hellraiser II - Hellbound*, this time directed by Tony Randel rather than the multi-talented Clive Barker.

Finishing on a sad note, Gustav Froelich, who played the young hero Freder Fredersen in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, died on 21st December in West Germany at the age of 85. He appeared in well over a hundred films, directing several; his last appearance on screen was in the 1954 movie *Ball der Nationen*.



Tim Grooms

New Members

From this issue we hope to give a few details about new members - how many depends on what they tell us!

Wendell Philip Wagner, Jr. In March we were delighted to welcome a transatlantic member to our ranks. Wendell now lives in Brookworth, Glos., and heard about us from the Andromeda Bookshop. He lists his favourite authors as Philip K. Dick, Philip Jose Farmer, and Rudy Rucker. (What a lot of Philips there!)



the Caption Contest

A pretty pathetic response last month, considering that Bob Shaw himself did the judging: don't you *want* to get in free?! Perhaps you're too shy to say rude things about people you know, so this month we have a couple of characters who won't answer back (but if you feel a sudden grip on the back of your neck - beware...)
Last month's winner was Key McVeigh, with: 'At last! The true Von Donegan revealed! (right)'. As Bob commented, "At least this shows a familiarity with my work!"

THE

ANDROMEDA

TOP TEN

There is no Andromeda Top Ten this month, owing to re-decoration of the shop (they can't count the books). So, since I have a column to fill, I thought I'd use the space to give a few facts about Andromeda and its staff.

'Roger G. Peyton Books' was started in January 1970. In August 1971 it moved to Old Hill under the name of The Andromeda Book Company, then in November 1973 it took over a shop in Summer Row. In December 1981 the present premises at 84 Suffolk Street, Queensway, were taken over. On each previous occasion it expanded into the shop next door, but while Andromeda still needs to expand, it may have to move completely, or the Mail Order section may be separated.

Mail order plays a large part in the business - the Andromeda catalogue is sent all over the world. Ray Gibberd is the Mail Order Manager, while Shop Manager is Dave Holmes (who is well known at the Brum Group, and has held the post of Treasurer). The shop is owned jointly by Rod Milner and Rog Peyton, who has been Chairman at least as many times as I have! He has also been Newsletter Editor, and chaired Novacons 5, 9, 10 and 12.

Andromeda is (and not a lot of people know this) the oldest SF book shop in the WORLD. It also has the largest stock of SF in Britain - London's Forbidden Planet specialising much more in comics. In addition to new SF paperbacks and hardcovers, Andromeda holds stocks of Art books, magazines, second-hand books - and fantasy, horror, *Star Trek*, *Dr. Who*, and so on. Obviously the Brum Group has been closely linked with Andromeda for many years; it provides us with speakers when it holds Signing Sessions, books for raffles and auctions, etc., etc. If you don't buy all your books from there already, you should!

The Drabble Project

by David B. Wake

At the beginning of the last century a competition was held to write a novel. Mary Shelley won with a novel called *Frankenstein*, and in so doing created a new genre.

A number of similar competitions were held by Birmingham University's Science Fiction Society. We, however, limited the wordage to *exactly* one hundred, as writing novels tend to take more than an evening. The name *Drabble* was used to describe this form of literature, due to a *Monty Python* sketch. Rob Meades and I decided to publish a collection of these drabbles, perhaps ten or so, and include a name author. We'd rattle off a couple of dozen copies from a photocopier, we thought...

But, as in Mary Shelley's novel, the monster got out of hand. It grew, it expanded, it became ambitious, it met Roger Robinson of Becon Publications in a pub in London, and it was eventually published at Follycon in a somewhat expanded form.

The book, which has a green cover, is a limited edition of 1000, numbered (I know! I numbered them!) hardbacks containing one hundred one hundred word stories with a vast number of name authors, both present and future. Copies are available from your Treasurer, David B. Wake, for the traditional sum of one hundred shillings. (That's a mere £5.00, to save you getting out your calculators. Don't leave it too late to get your copy - Ed)

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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...

What will THEY look like?

Following Margaret Thorpe's excellent article, 'Delphinitely Alien', last month, I thought we might look at the forms that aliens might take, based on some suggestions by James D. Burke of JPL (not *Tomorrow's World*), who says that the same ideas have been "elegantly woven into Arthur C. Clarke's new book *2061: Odyssey Three*." I haven't yet read that.

Some scientists - Dr. Jack Cohen not amongst them - have suggested that evolution on any basically rocky planet would naturally lead to a creature having two legs, with a brain, two eyes and two ears about two metres from the ground. However, even on our own planet we can find animals with two, four, six, eight and dozens of legs, while kangaroos effectively use three and spider monkeys five.

Since Margaret's article concerned dolphins, though, let's keep to the physical laws which govern any creature which can move at speed through a fluid. Any being which lives in an ocean and does more than float idly around is likely to look pretty much like a fish, simply because of fluid mechanics - ie. it will be torpedo-shaped and streamlined. On Earth, this applies to whales, dolphins, fish, seals, otters and penguins (once the last three are in the water). The first such creatures lived 500 million years ago, so they have had plenty of time to evolve and refine themselves into today's multifarious and efficient examples - which Man has of course copied.

So if one day we discover aliens on a world covered by oceans - whether of water, liquid ammonia, or whatever - their shape should not be too surprising to our eyes (whatever they make of us). The same physical laws will still apply.

If our hypothetical aliens do not swim fast through their fluid, they may well resemble jellyfish or medusae. But, equally, they might evolve tentacles or other limbs - and we end up with Wells' Martians... Let's keep clear of solid ground - even the ocean floor. Some scientists, like Carl Sagan, have speculated on life - even within our own Solar System, on the gas giant Jupiter, whose atmosphere becomes denser the lower one goes. This would take the form of huge gas-bags or 'blimps', which might propel themselves by taking in gas at one end

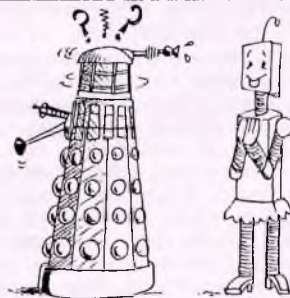
and squirting it out of the other.

For higher speeds and manoeuvrability in 'air' we need to fit wings to our 'torpedo': of course, we finish up with birds. On Earth, evolution has produced quite separately first pterosaurs and insects, then birds. Although their habitats (and thus landing gear etc.) may vary greatly, so far as flight is concerned they obey the same physical laws, and would do so on other worlds. Eventually, just as with ships and submarines on and under the water, Man eventually produced his own flying machines - which are also likely to look quite similar if produced by an alien civilisation, whatever their occupants look like.

But what about propellers, helicopters, jet engines - or the humble wheel? Some bacteria do have corkscrew tails, and octopi and squids use a form of jet propulsion. Oddly, though, it seems that no true animal equivalent of the wheel has ever evolved on Earth. Perhaps Out There - ?

A Prophet in Our Time?

I've just seen a News report that the ninth scientist in recent years, involved with Defence, has committed suicide. Disturbing? Well, in 1951 Isaac Asimov wrote a story entitled 'Breeds There a Man...?' in which just this happens. Dr Ralson asks to be locked up because he wants to follow suit; his theory is that mankind is being bred, just as we now tailor bacteria, by a long-lived superior power. Any time a scientist appears likely to discover this fact, he has a compulsion to die. Are SF authors *really* prophetic?



"Darling! I just love the dress!"

Tim Groom



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

A CIRCUS OF HELLS by Paul Anderson; Sphere; 189 pages; £2.50 p/back.
Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

This reprint of a 1970 novel is one of the *Flandry* series. On Irumclaw, a planet which is at the furthest limit of the Human Empire, Flandry encounters an alien entrepreneur and a beautiful girl. With the girl he goes of a reputed treasure laden moon, in the pay of the alien, just a little free enterprise venture which didn't really take him away from his duty to the Empire, or so he thought. Whilst on the moon he became a pawn in a live chess game, discovered that the girl was treacherous, and fell into the clutches of Earth's arch enemies, the Merseians. He wins out in the end, displaying a degree of intelligence which was remarkably lacking in the first half of the book. This book is Space opera in the old tradition, and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone above the mental age of 13, BUT I ENJOYED IT!!

QRVIS by H M Hoover; Methuen; 186 pages; £7.95 hardcover.
Reviewed by Martin Stallard.

The Robot O.R.V.I.S. is a 400 year old artificial intelligence. It had never questioned its own existence until told to scrap itself. On its way to the dump it meets a young girl who is unhappy about her life in a boarding school on the sparsely inhabited planet Earth. She decides to save the robot by shipping it to her Aunts. They have an accident on the way, and have to fend for themselves in the "uncharted" wilderness, where the robot grows more human than the adults. This is a young adults book, and being young at heart I found it enjoyable. And for those of you a bit older, it is a nice quick read with a happy ending.

THE FALLING WOMAN by Pat Murphy; Headline; 287 pages; £2.95 paperback
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

One thousand years ago the priestess, Yuhuy-kak, failed to appease the cruel Mayan gods by the sacrifice of her daughter, and the city of Dzibilchaltun had to be abandoned. Now all she needs to do is to make archaeologist Elizabeth Butler sacrifice her daughter, Diane, and the Empire of the ancient Mayans will be restored. The characterisation is cleverly done. As Elizabeth gradually sinks more and more into Mayan superstition, she comes to accept human sacrifice as a perfectly reasonable option. I have just heard that this book has been nominated for a Nebula award, even though technically it should be classified as horror/fantasy. It quite deserves to win.

THE HUNGRY MOON by Ramsey Campbell; Arrow; 428 pages; £2.50 paperback;
Reviewed by Mick Evans.

Set on the Moors of Northern England, a small town falls foul of an ancient entity, disturbed by an American evangelist. This is a well written horror novel from a writer who was once a Brum Group speaker. R.C doesn't try to overwhelm the reader with blood and gore on every other page, but rather builds the suspense and lets his characters develop. The book held my interest to the end.

ESCAPE PLUS by Ben Bova: Methuen; 285 pages; £2.95 paperback;
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

I have one complaint about this book: everything about it from the title to the blurb on the back cover, and the excerpt on the first page, indicates it is a novel. It isn't. *Escape Plus* occupies 86 pages, and I suppose could be called a novella, and there are ten other short stories, written between 1960 (Bova's first published S.F story) and 1978. Most of the stories are quite good, and - perhaps suprisingly for Bova - aren't all hard science based; there is even a fantasy (?) about a dragon. But please market your books properly Methuen.

THE KRUGG SYNDROME by Angus McAllister; Grafton; 218 pages; £2.50 p/b.
Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

This novel starts off very promisingly as a send up of all the "Alien Invader" type stories we used to read in the Fifties & Sixties. The Invader, an intelligent tree, takes over the mind of an adolescent boy, and finds itself cut off from its fellows as his human host isn't telepathic. The story then unfortunately loses itself, and turns into the story of an adolescent finding his first job, leaving home, living in a very crummy Glasgow boarding house run by a friend of his mother, and discovering girls and booze. Whilst all this is justifiably in the book, as the reasons for the Invader's continuing failure, it takes over from the main story-line completely for much of the time. As the novel reaches its (predictable) conclusion the story-line is tightened up again, and it would have been a very funny book had it not lost itself as described above.

BUG JACK BARRON by Norman Spinrad; Grafton; 384 pages; £3.50 paperback
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

This book achieved instant notoriety in 1969 when the serialisation in *New Worlds* led to the magazine being banned by W H Smiths, who found the bad language and explicit sex obscene. This aspect now seems fairly unexceptional by modern standards, but its consciously contrived "New Wave" style now appears rather dated, as well as making it difficult to read. Set in near-future America, against a background of financial power and political corruption, it is the story of a T.V. presenter Jack Barron, whose show has made him so popular and powerful he can do just about anything he wants, but the moral dilemma he is faced with is almost too much for him. There is actually a very good SF story hidden under the hip, new-wave, sensational stylised writing, one which made its mark on SF history, but one which should be read and enjoyed in spite of that, not because of it.

FANTASMS AND MAGICIS by Jack Vance; Grafton; 192 pages; £2.50 p/back.
Reiewed by Glyn Jackson.

The main story in this collection, *The Miracle Workers*, is set on the planet Pangborn, a world peopled by small white savages (First Folk), and the descendents of marooned starships. Against this background racial tension is rife, and after 1600 years of being stranded, Magic and Mysticism reign supreme. Nevertheless, man must turn back the clock, and reap the benefits of past sciemces, if he is to survive. The concept involves a neat reversal of the present scepticism regarding magic and science. Another reversal, this time of the present physical properties of Earth, plays host to a haunting tale of Man's future in *The Men Return*. Other stories include *When the Five Moons Rise*, a prophetic tale where nothing is to be believed when the five moons rise together, and *The New Prime*, which involves the process of selection for the most esteemed position in the Galaxy, a very novel process!!

THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER by Ramsey Campbell; Century; 284 pages;
£10.95 Hardback; Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Through a Liverpool imbued with the ghosts of the Sixties stalks Christopher Kelly, archetypal school outcast, underachiever, etc etc., killing, maiming and mutilating. Unluckily Clare Frayn, a teacher, and her brother Rob, fall foul of Kelly, who causes a car crash which renders Clare unconscious. When she wakes Rob is dead and missing an arm. Rob's death and the necrophillic foreplay of the Kelly monster brings the investigative reporter and crime author Edmund Hall to Liverland. Edmund and Clare hunt Kelly, aided and abetted by Chris, an actor. They are precipitated into a circle of intrigue with all the attendant trappings of the supernatural revolving around a dark, dilapidated house in a quiet Scouse suburb. The novel gets off to a tolerably good start with a skillfully observed car crash, almost cinematic in description but from then on the story drifts on listlessly with no originality to give it momentum or vitality. To be fair to Ramsey Campbell it's as well to mention that "The Doll" was written in the seventies and his work has progressed both in style and content since then.

ALWAYS COMING HOME by Ursula Le Guin; Grafton; 523 pages; £5.95 p/back
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

This is more a sociological study than a novel, (several hundred pages more!). Set between documents on the geo-socio-political arrangements, the main narrative concerns a girl whose mother, is of The Valley, but whose father is a warrior of The Condor. When he leaves to take his allotted role in a war that does not concern The Valley, the girl journeys with him.....and is given a place in a hierarchical society she barely comprehends. Is she to be forever Coming Home Woman? I didn't really care. The narrative is in a pseudo-noble language of reminiscences that is, to me at any rate, flat. The New York Times says it is "lyric and luminous". This future-history of California may be so, if you like complex, well-grounded societies. I did like the valley, but I prefer a narrative technique that uses tension to heighten dramatic events. This flattens them under a weight of intelligent detail.

THE REVELATIONS OF DR. MODESTO by Alan Harrington; Paladin; 207 pages;
£3.50 p/b. Reviewed by William McCabe.

Have you seen those ads which claim they can make you into something very special in a short space of time?, the sort of thing that L Ron Hubbard made into a religion? Well, here's the antidote. This is a story about a man who wrote off and took one of those courses, except that it wasn't the normal kind of self-improvement. Whereas all the other courses tell you they can make you into someone who will stand out against the common horde, this one tells him how he can become a nobody, the sort that just disappears in a crowd. The idea is that even the strangest of outsiders can be just one of the crowd - and it works. Like all such systems, it isn't easy to keep up, and soon the pressure begins to tell. The writing is nothing out of the ordinary, but the idea and the plot are, to say the least, different.

