

# BRUM GROUP

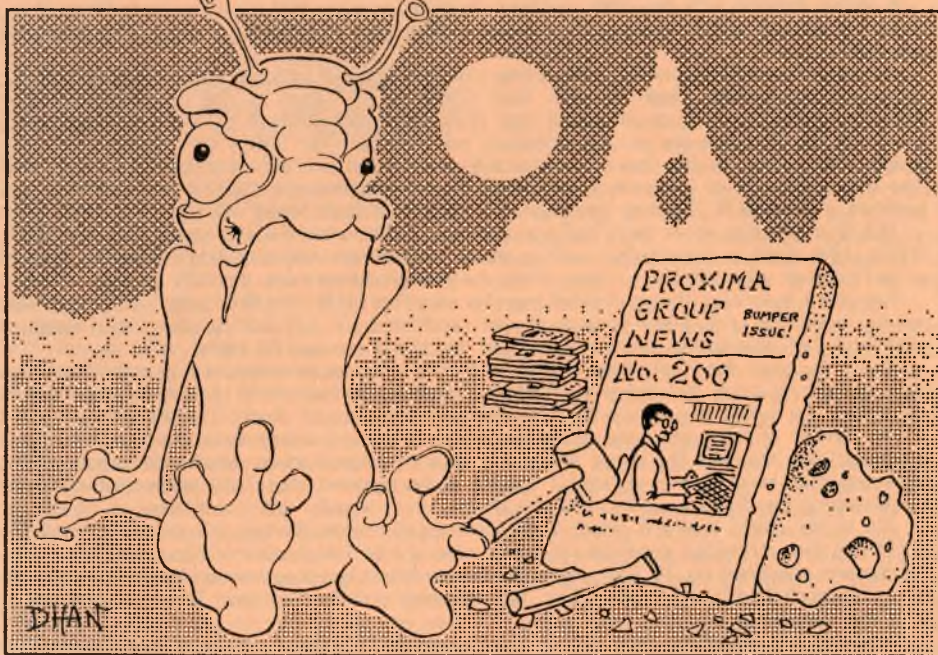
# NEWS

May  
1988

Bumper  
Issue!  
No.200

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



Dave Hardy/Anthony Taylor

*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 20 May at 8.00pm

# This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00  
Visitors £1.50

This month's Guest Speaker is the US author

SHERI S. TEPPER

Before we knew for certain that Sheri was coming to talk to the Brum Group, but did know that she was doing a Signing Session for Andromeda, Chris Morgan wrote an excellent piece about her. I can do no better than reproduce it here:

New female fantasy writers seem to be surfacing in the US at the rate of at least one a week. In my job as a publisher's reader I'm forced to peruse a lot of their novels, which tend to be unoriginal and quite a bit worse than the Tolkien or McCaffrey works from which they are derived. That's why it's so refreshing to come across one who has something new to say and possesses the skill to put it across entertainingly - like Sheri Tepper.

If you're familiar with her work you'll be delighted to know that she's coming to Brum. If you haven't tried one of her books, please keep reading this: I guarantee that you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Ms Tepper's earliest books are all strong, fast-moving quest fantasies (full of magic) featuring teen-aged protagonists. Peter in *The True Game* is 15, Mavin in *The Chronicles of Mavin* *Manyshaped* is 'some 12 or 14 years' and Jinian in *Jinian Footseer* is 14 to 16. These novels (of which the first two are actually trilogies) not only get right inside their young characters, making them come to life, but are written with a verve and vividness that marks a young author. You know, the sort of exuberance with which Poul Anderson wrote *The Broken Sword* in his late twenties or Samuel R. Delaney produced *The Jewels of Apor* aged 19.

But Sheri Tepper wrote these books in the early 1980s, when she was already into her fifties. That's right, she's a grandmother with a career behind her. And she didn't have the time to write fiction at all until 1981, since when she has produced more than 20 books.

Two more surprising things are that even her very first book, *The Reverants* (written in 1981 but not published until 1984 because it was considered too big and complex), is an excellent read, and that despite her prolific output her standards are getting higher.

What's so good about all these novels is that Ms Tepper is a natural storyteller. She keeps her plots racing along and makes the readers care about her characters. She's not a great literary stylist but she writes smoothly with some humour and a lot of charm. (Unlike some very well known fantasy authors, she never allows her stories to become unduly sentimental or twee, thank goodness!) She also has the knack of coming up with original ideas, which add surprise to her plots and help to achieve a wonderful texture of background: she really takes a lot of trouble in developing her fantasy worlds, and the details are normally very convincing.

It's to her credit that she hasn't been content just to write fantasy. *Blood Heritage* and *The Bones* are two connected supernatural horror novels. Her latest work to appear in Britain, *The Awakeners*, published on 19 May, is really science fiction, set on a wonderfully different planet. It's a big book (published in the US in two volumes) and her best yet. There is a review of it in this Newsletter.

And one last surprising item is that there's already a British fan club for Sheri Tepper, The True Game Society, with a regular fanzine, *Rancelman* (defined on p.118 of *The True Game* as 'one used to seeking the lost'). All of the books mentioned are Corgi paperbacks except for *The Awakeners* which is a Bantam hardcover. Lots more are in the pipeline. I hope that some of these astonishing facts have interested you enough to come along to our meeting, and/or to Andromeda at 12.00pm on Saturday 21 May. [NB.: Terry Pratchett will be there at 1.30pm, too, to sign *his* hardcover, *Sourcery*. -Ed.]

(With thanks to Julia Smith at Corgi for information and books. *Rancelman* is \$4 for six issues, via Graham Ing, The True Game Society, 11 Hawk Close, Stubbington, Hants PO14 3SW.)

Dave 'Bamber' Cox and scorer Simon organised an interestingly different event last month. Having avoided a punch-up over who should make up the four teams, two teams at a time entered battle, often encouraged (and helped?) by the audience. The final play-off was between 'Tony's Troublesome Troubadours' (comprised of leader Tony Morton, Chris Morgan, Michael Brown and Andy Wright) and 'The Guesshawks' - Pauline Morgan, Andrew White, Carol Morton and Dave Packwood. Two husbands versus wives, you'll notice (at least it made sure that one of them got the money!)

An exciting climax came when at close of play both teams were found to have scored 105 points. A sudden-death play-off was called for, and TTT won by 115 points to 105. Fortunately, as the teams contained four members and not three, the prize of £50.04 still divided equally. Congratulations to all involved - organisers and players.

By the way, did you know that the original TV version (OK, we admit it - they didn't really pinch it off us) ran for 25 years and almost reached 1,000 programmes?

## GUEST SPOT

As part of our celebrations for the 200th issue we asked two SF fans who have, like me, recently taken up a new position as Editor, to write a piece for the *Brum Group News*. John Jarrold is now SF Editor at Futura, and writes:

### MY LIFE IN PUBLISHING

See, I prefer science fiction to fantasy; I must come clean here. Which is odd, because I read *The Lord of the Rings*, ERB's Martian books and Michael Moorcock's fantasies long before I came to Asimov, Zelazny and the rest. Fantasy seems to have had a stranglehold on the genre in recent years - every bookshop I go into has 80% fantasy titles on the SF shelves - but I can see that changing. I'm quite happy about that. If the mix was 50:50, I'd be perfectly happy.

The last three months have been fascinating for me. After 15 years of attending conventions, putting out fanzines and arguing about SF, I can finally put my money (or Futura's money) where my mouth is. So where *is* my money?

Well, it's on some young American writers: Loren MacGregor, Robert Reed, W.T.Quick. All of whom I'm delighted to have bought books by in the last couple of months, and all of whom I hope will make it big. And my money may well be on a couple of young British writers I've been lucky enough to pull out of the unsolicited manuscripts. Nothing definite there yet, so I'll go no further. To trot the old line out, one is always looking for new British writers, SF is becoming too much of an American genre at the moment. There are a couple making it, but nowhere near as many as were around in the mid-70s, for example.

The slush pile (a name I dislike, these are all people's babies) grows much like Topsy, and frantic reading has to be done if I'm to keep it

in check. But let's be fair, I don't mind that at all; publishing is a way of life, not just a job, and anyone who isn't willing to give up evenings and weekends to reading manuscripts should be working somewhere else. If my social life has suffered in recent months, my liver can only have improved! And you wouldn't believe the number of people who've come up to me and told me how relaxed I look, so I may be busy but I'm sure as hell happier than I've ever been before.

Eastercon was a strange experience. As I said, I've been attending cons, on and off, since 1973. Being a 'pro' for the first time was odd, and very challenging. It was no longer simply a time for Desperate Fun, I actually did some business there, and some seeds planted in Liverpool may still come to fruition. But one of my main resolutions was not to ignore friends in the heady rush of pro-dom. I *think* I managed pretty well; no-one kicked me in the backside because I wasn't talking to them, anyway. And I ended up on two panels in the main con hall and two in the fan room, so I guess you could say that was pretty even-handed.

In the last three months I've got an enormous buzz from being involved in publishing books. Apart from actually buying books for Futura, I've proof-read, copy-edited, written cover copy, made the tea... well, you name it. And what I find most exciting is the sheer *enthusiasm* I feel for the job. Look, I'm not saying I wake up every morning with a bloody great grin on my face, but I can't think of a single thing I'd rather be doing. I wouldn't swap the pleasure of buying a book I love for anything; not even Sigourney Weaver. So from here on in, it's just a matter of keeping on keeping on. Most of my best friends are involved in SF and fandom, but now it's what I do for a living too. I'm going to try to go on buying good books, making friends, (and the odd enemy too, I expect), and above all, enjoying myself. Me, I love SF, and obviously you do too, or you wouldn't be in the Brum Group. God bless us, every one....

## GUEST SPOT 2

It is flattering to be asked to write an article for a zine, more so to be invited to contribute a guest editorial to the 200th issue of the Brum Group Newsletter. When I stopped to think about it, I realised that the Brum Group has been at the back of my entire fannish existence. My first major convention was a Novacon, my first trip to Birmingham in fact, and my first introduction to the Royal Angus, still my favourite con venue. And I was involved with Apa-B in an early incarnation, which is how I came to join the Brum Group in the first place. More recently, in a fit of conscience because I can't go to meetings, I began to review books and contribute a very occasional article for the Newsletter instead.

Two hundred issues is an impressive track record, given the way so many clubzines fold almost immediately through lack of interest, or because the work involved is far more than first envisaged. I don't know how many editors you've had over the years, but I know one thing. Without doubt they've put in a hell of a lot of work on your behalf. I wouldn't dream of embarrassing them, but to paraphrase a well-known SF radio show "It isn't easy being an editor". You'll have to imagine the tone of despair in that *cri de coeur*, but take it from me, producing a newsletter is not all wine and roses.

Every editor in the world has run into the same problem - how to fill the mag that they are expected to edit. It is a sad fact but true, that whilst most editors are more than competent at extracting blood from stones and running up natty little silk purses from sows' ears, it is damn near impossible to persuade people to write, without plying them with liquor, threatening their cat with a nasty fate, or else sending round Bernie Evans to sort them out. I've tried bribery, corruption, alcohol, smiling sweetly, assertiveness training, sending in the attack cats. I wonder if Bernie has an evening spare.

And then, there's the opposite problem, the person who won't stop contributing. [Now there's a novelty! -Ed.] I hope the BSFG Newsletter doesn't suffer quite what I've been through lately, but how do you persuade someone that they can't draw like Chris Foss, and would they please stop sending you pencil drawings you can't use? [No, it's NOT me!] And what about the person who wrote to complain because I would insist on *editing* his work. How dare I trim his mellifluous prose, *and* have the temerity to insert the correct punctuation. That's another thing you need in this job, the patience of a saint, oh and the hide of a rhinoceros [corrects spelling - after

Maureen Porter has recently become Editor of the BSFA's 'house journal', *MATRIX*. She is also a member of the BSFG - at long distance. She lives in Folkestone.

checking with dictionary]. You rarely receive praise for editing a zine, it's a kind of unwritten rule. Do it right, and there's silence. Get it wrong (and how do you define wrong if no-one tells you what's right?) and the knives are out quicker than you can blink. It can take a long time to work out the rules of the game, and it can be incredibly frustrating. Does this silence really mean that they like what you've done? And why do people complain about what you've not done, according to their ideas, rather than making suggestions about what might be interesting? And why do they never offer to help? No, editing is not a job for the insecure.

You may well wonder why anyone ever edits a zine. So do I. In my case I was going down the wrong corridor at the wrong time, saying the wrong thing to the wrong person. I gather Dave volunteered. Stout man, but totally mad. I don't know what drives an editor but they will move heaven and earth to translate the vision in their head into reality on paper. Perhaps it's a weird variety of altruism. I do it because I want to give something back to fandom, to the BSFA, and because I like organising things. Some people do it because it's fun. At least, that's what they keep telling me, though why they smile in that strangely manic way I'll never know.

Now if you want to make an editor happy, it's quite simple. Take him (or her) aside, buy them a large drink, promise to write an article, make a few constructive comments on the last zine, and ask if you can help. You may live to regret it, but your editor will leave the pub with a lighter heart, and the knowledge that someone noticed.

Congratulations to all the editors on the first 200 issues of the BSFG Newsletter, and here's to the next two hundred.





**Mick Evans: Reviews Ed.**

Mick Evans, our Reviews Editor, was born in Dudley on 20 January 1950 (make a note in your diaries for 1990), and has always lived in the Birmingham area. He first became interested in science fiction in the early 1970s. Having dabbled with various authors, he read Philip K. Dick's *New Wait For Last Year* and thought "This guy's crazy!". However, having nothing else to do he immediately re-read it, and has been hooked on PKD ever since (there's no law against it).

Mick admits to enjoying also Silverberg, Shaw, Ellison, and others too numerous to mention, so I won't.

He met Bernie (our Chairman, remember?) at a party early in 1981, got talking about SF, and they've been talking ever since (he says). Later in 1981 he came along with Bernie to a Brum Group meeting "to see what she got up to". He enjoyed it so much that he came again - occasionally - but eventually he became a regular attendee.

Mick very cleverly avoided active involvement in the Group until last year, when became not only our Publicity Officer (stepping into Bernie's shoes, which must have been painful) but also Novacon 17's Registrations Secretary. He adds: "Believe me, Rog Peyton's tactics have nothing on my wife's - he can only arm-twist!"

Other interests are music - jazz, blues, folk, rock, etc. - and football: "I am a keen Albion fan - sorry, I mean masochist!". He also has a part-time job as a doorman - to four cats (see last month's Profile).

### **New Members: April**

Elinor Predota, who lives in Harborne, was introduced by Helena Bowles. She's a vegetarian, enjoys going to cons when she can afford it, and filking. Doesn't have any special favourite authors.

Michael David Brown is from Edgbaston, and heard of us through *What's On*. He likes Zelazny, Heinlein, Gerrold and Haldeman, and is *writing a book*, which he hopes to finish this year. Also, appropriately for our 200th issue, Michael is our 500th Member. Well done!

## *CONTRIP*

**FOLLYCON: Easter 1988 - an impression, by Pauline Morgan.**

The Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool was as near perfect for a convention as you are likely to get. The committee was not.

Designed after the fashion of the *S.S. Titanic*, the Adelphi has a large central lounge with spacious rooms leading from three sides - to con halls. Book Room and cheap food. Two corners gave access to bars and the Film Room, a third to the Art Show. All that most fans would want in one area.

A good committee member is unobtrusive until needed. All too often, if you want one, there's never one around. The *Follycon* committee members had a tendency to make silly rules, then shout about it. The only one who had an air of knowing what she was doing was Gytha North (she also makes fabulous jewellery).

One mistake was the committee's choice of Guest of Honour. Gordon R. Dickson may well be a loveable veteran but he is also a totally boring public speaker - unless you desperately want to know the plot of his latest work-in-progress (at least three times). Fortunately not all the programme items suffered from this. Gwyneth Jones is an extremely articulate speaker and held a small, select audience spellbound during a session on 'How to Write Ghost Stories' but, as her appearance on a panel and her Special Guest speech proved, she is also versatile. I am sure she would receive a warm welcome if invited to speak to the Brum Group.

A critics' forum early in the weekend led to a lively dialogue between Jack Cohen and Ian Watson - both of whom were in the audience - showing that given the right topic, an interesting discussion can develop. On the whole, the best panels were those with a strong chairman. It's a pity this didn't happen more often.

The hotel was also ideally placed for restaurants. If you didn't want to avail yourself of the phallic-looking sausages served in the convention's food bar, Liverpool's Chinatown was within walking distance, as were a variety of Greek, Indian, Spanish and Mexican eating places.

Above all, like most conventions, it was what the attendees made of it. I enjoyed it, despite a few drawbacks. I would go back to the Adelphi. In the meantime, if you can't get to Jersey next year, I'll see you half-way down the Hagley Road, over Easter in 1990.

[I endorse most of the above. The lighting in the Art Show was pretty atrocious (so what's new?), and the visits to the Planetarium were a good idea. Best Eastercon for some time. Ed.] 5



*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...*

## Pure Science Fiction

In the *New Scientist* of 17 March appears the following improbable plot:

A brilliant scientist, in his 20s, lives on a teeming planet which numbers its people - who are mostly horribly poor and feuding with each other - in billions rather than millions. He invents a means of linking these billions, which requires a technology barely dreamt of. Yet ... within two or three decades, not only do the beings of this planet solve all of their (technical) problems and find the billions of dollars necessary to realise this invention, but our scientist hero retreats to a remote idyll, there to live by the pen, linked to a grateful world by his own invention.

The writer of the above is Clive Sinclair, and he is writing not about the novel he is reviewing (*2061: Odyssey Three*) but its author: Arthur C. Clarke. I thought it was worth repeating here.

It was at the end of the war that Arthur wrote his now-famous paper, published in 1945 in *Wireless World*, which set out the principles of the communications satellite. How different the world would be today without those miracles of technology orbiting 22,300 miles above the equator!

## UFOs become respectable

I recently took a review copy of a book entitled *Phenomenon*, edited by John Spencer and Hilary Evans (Futura, 413 pages, £3.95 paperback). I must admit that, being a non-fiction, non-SF book, my original intention was to 'skip and dip' and write a short review. But I found it interesting enough to read to the end. It could in fact have been up to a third shorter were it not for the fact that it is in the form of 'articles' by various members of BUFORA, many of whom relate the same cases, albeit from different angles.

Not surprisingly, SF fans don't like to be tarred with the same brush as ufologists - though it is difficult to persuade the media to understand this. During *Follycon* one of the dailies - I think it was the *Telegraph* - printed a piece stating that we were there (often in costume, of course) to have discussions on UFOs and allied subjects....

Nevertheless, as we saw last year when Peter Warrington came to the Brum Group, attitudes

towards UFOs are changing. The book, *Phenomenon*, is certainly not just a book for 'Believers'. It contains sections written by obvious sceptics; well-known cases are analysed and various possible explanations offered, varying from natural phenomena like the piezoelectric effects produced by the Earth's crust to purely mental effects. It looks at the 'history' of UFO reports, at reports of crashed saucers, occupants, contactees, abductions, traces of landings, photographic and other evidence (including fakes and hoaxes), government cover-ups, spooklights and earthlights, various hypotheses, and those fascinating cults like the Aetherius Society. All-in-all, quite a balanced summing up of the present situation.

Whatever 'they' are, there is no doubt that the phenomenon itself is well worth study - as the audience at a programme event at *Follycon* voted. The fact that respectable publications like *New Scientist* give space to discussing new books on the subject also proves this. One such book is *UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game* by Philip Klass (to be published later this year by Prometheus). Klass is prominent in CSICOP - the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal - a generally sceptical organisation. (If you are interested in knowing more, there is now a British Branch, which distributes *The Skeptical Inquirer*, at 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex IG10 4PZ.)

He concludes that well publicised cases like Whitley Strieber's and Budd Hopkins' can be traced back to that of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961. The diminutive, bug-eyed alien and the needle in the abdomen are images which recur in most of these alleged abduction cases, and Klass says they are now 'embedded in the collective psyche of American society'.

As the reviewer, Dennis Stacy, points out though, if the original Hill video had the impact claimed by Klass, it is surprising that we have not been swamped by reports of cuddly little aliens invading our children's bedrooms, with Spielberg's *ET* outstripping *Game with the Wind* as the most popular movie ever.

One thing is certain: writing up your 'true' exploits at the hands of aliens can be more rewarding than writing SF on the same subject. Strieber's *Communion* leapt to No. 1 again when published as a paperback in the US. Perhaps we'll have an alien speaker yet!

# 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!  
(Anybody?)

Firstly, a couple of comments on last month's Jophan Report (just to show that we do sometimes get some feedback, Martin!). William Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive* was not, it seems, due out here in April; it will be published in July, when there is a possibility of a signing session at Andromeda. Rog also points out that the 2000 copies of *The Peace War* donated by Dreamhaven Books in the States were surplus remaindered stock! (But he adds that it has 'given him an idea'....)

## THE JOPHAN REPORT #017

First some items of news from this year's Eastercon. The 1990 National Science Fiction Convention will be *Eastcon 90*, held at the Cobden Hotel, Birmingham. The bid secured nearly two-thirds of the votes cast at this year's event, *Follycon*, held in Liverpool. Author Iain Banks will be Guest of Honour, Anne Page Fan Guest and SMS Guest Artist.

Keith Roberts' novel *Grainne*, Jim Burns' cover for the *Conspiracy '87* Programme Book and Geoff Ryman's short story 'Love Sickness' were among the winners in this year's British Science Fiction Awards. The BBC's *Star Cops* was named as best media SF. The Arthur C. Clarke award went to George Turner, whilst the Ken McIntyre Award was won by SMS.

Next we have the bad news (for me at least). Lillian Edwards and Christina Lake have won the 1988 TAFF race, running a joint campaign against Martin Tudor and Dave Wood. They will attend *Notacon II* in New Orleans this summer. A record 169 UK and European votes were cast, with a further 92 American votes and 11 Australian. Following hectic 11th-hour voting, both Tudor and Wood fell below the crucial 20% level in America and were therefore automatically disqualified. A record £284 was raised by voting fees in the election. My special thanks go to fervent campaigners Dave Holmes, Rog Peyton and Pete Weston - nice try lads!

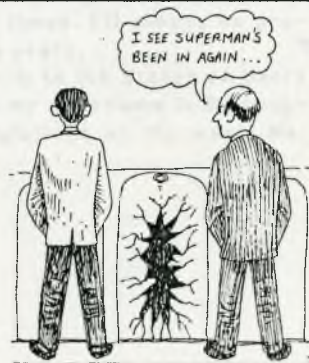
It is rumoured that Charlotte Proctor and Bob Lichtman are both considering standing in the 1989 race. Charlotte publishes the Hugo-nominated *Anvil* (the official fanzine of the Birmingham Science Fiction Club - Birmingham Alabama) which is available for \$6.00 a year or a nice letter and a few international reply coupons, from 8325 7th Avenue South, Birmingham, AL. 35206, USA. [However, I have twice asked Charlotte for a contribution for *this* Newsletter, but no joy so far. Charlotte - ? -Ed.] Robert publishes a fanzine called

*Trapdoor*, available for for \$4.00 or try a polite letter and a few IRCs to P.O.Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA. 95442, USA.

Still on the subject of Fan Funds, the candidates for the 1988-89 GUFF race (UK or Europe to Australia) will be Roelof Goudriaan and Linda Pickersgill. Roelof is the publisher of the European newszine *Shards of Babel* - £5 for a six-issue subscription, from Noordwal 2, NL-2513 EA The Hague, The Netherlands. Linda, as well as working on the committee of *Notacon '88*, has edited/co-edited such fanzines as *Tiger Tea* and *Six Shooter*, copies of which may still be available for around 30p of stamps, from 7a Lawrence Road, South Ealing, London W5 4XJ.

## VIDEO NEWS

*Surf Nazis Must Die*, hyped as the 'Clockwork Orange of the 80s', looks like being the major video release of this year - from the perspective of hard sell, anyway. Cineplex is mounting a massive radio and point of sale campaign, backed by badges, posters and nightclub promotions, competitions and ads on 22 independent radio stations throughout the country. Of more interest among the spring releases are *The Karloff Collection* - four Mexican/American horror movies made by Karloff shortly before he died and never shown in Britain, and a futuristic adventure from Virgin Video entitled *Steel Dawn*. *Rumpelstiltskin*, starring Amy Irving, and *Hansel and Gretel* with David Warner and Cloris Leachman, are two of Cannon's full length fairy tales coming through Warner Home Video, along with *Gar*, based on John Norman's *Tarnsman of Gar*, starring Oliver Reed, Paul L. Smith, Jack Palance and Urbano Barberini as Tarl Cabot.



Tim Groome

A Message from our President:



## HARRY HARRISON

What? The Brum Group Newsletter has reached its 200th issue? Can this be true? It is. And it brings fond tears of memories to my eyes.

Remember when the newsletter published the first translation into Esperanto of the *Necronomicon* by the mad Arab Abdul al Hazrad? Remember why he was mad? He was never paid for the translation. That's all right, errors happen. Like the issue where the printer mixed up the newsletter copy with *Illustrated Porn for Perverts*. A collectors' item that issue. Remember the complaints because the book reviews were left out?

I could go on all night like this. (Which swine said I already had?) Gosh, you all remember the issue featuring the wit and wisdom of Sam Moskowitz? Every page blank. Or the double-size issue interviewing Harrison and Aldiss in the local brewery. Every page beer-soaked. It is rumoured that Dave Hardy, then in nappies, ate that issue and was six months in an alcoholic coma. You couldn't tell that by looking at him now. Unless you looked very close.

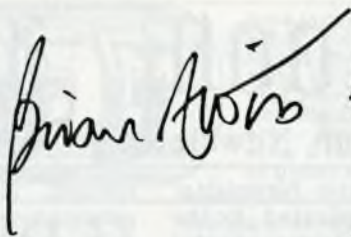
It is a little known fact that my first GoH gig was at a Brumcon. Wasp-waisted red-haired Rog Peyton was Chairman of the con. My fee for coming was £100.00. I didn't mind paying it. Bernie Evans looked so cute in her pram. The banquet was wonderful. It was the first time I ever ate a seven course meat pie dinner. Life was gay in those days!

Good luck to all on the merry 200th. Brian and I look forward to sending letters of congratulation on the 2000th.

Harry



## A Message from our President:



### **BRIAN ALDISS**

My memories of Brum Group meetings go back a long way, thanks to age. There can be very few other members alive now who recall, as I do, the actual christening of Stan Eling. He was beautifully dressed for the occasion, wrapped in a long white shawl. The ceremony was meant to take place in a church but, since the clergy found out we were all sf readers, it had to take place instead in the foyer of the Royal Angus Hotel, with a fire bucket as font. Little Stan was a model of behaviour - the real one being at home in bed with whooping cough.

The great occasion was the launch of the official group, when Rog Peyton invited L. Ron Hubbard to address us, and Hubbard came. It was a great scoop for Rog, who was still in short trousers, which he was sharing with another fan. They looked very strange in there together. Particularly since the other fan was Pauline Morgan (then masquerading under a maiden name).

As luck would have it, the Hubbard visit was rather a disaster, since we all fell before his charm and signed on as Scientologists - into the Sci Org, as the jargon had it. Most of us were sent aboard the S.S. "Scotman", where we were imprisoned in a hold until we had written all the twenty million words of the *Mission Earth* dekalogy. Yes, Brum fandom has a lot to answer for.

Of course, I have many other memories of happy times with the group, most of which I prefer not to commit to paper. No doubt Harry will have something to say about that. And perhaps this is the place to deny rumours that Harry is really my uncle; that is not the case. The early group had its troubles; at one time, a hunchback called Charles ran off with the petty cash - fortunately, it was too petty to matter. I also recall a period when I had undiagnosed hepatitis; drink was not at all good for me, and I had to carry myself off from the Midlands. Health and strength eventually returned, and I've carried myself back a number of times. I'll always be grateful for the fun and enjoyment we've had over the years.

This note has to be written in haste, before I fly to the States as Harry flies back. But I want to send best regards to all my old chums in Birmingham. Splendid times have been had, and congratulations on the magic No: 200. Here's to 2001!

All the best

Brian

# The 200th Issue -

The Brum Group Newsletter

by Dave Hardy

The first issues of the Newsletter were single sheets, duplicated. As the Group grew in strength, several sheets were stapled together and the odd illustration even appeared.

But the first real breakthrough came just about ten years ago, in 1978, when - with the advent of more versatile Xerox-type machines in the High Street - it became possible to have A4 sheets reduced down to A5 in size, and thus have folded A4 pages. The usual size, except for special issues, was eight pages.

None the less, the method of preparing the Newsletter remained basically the same. The text matter had to be typed out and, if several pieces were to appear on the same page, cut out and pasted into position, along with any artwork. Sometimes contributions by other members, such as reviews, would be re-typed by the Editor(s) for uniformity; sometimes (especially when under pressure of a close deadline) they wouldn't. Headings had to be set in Letraset, and sometimes reduced in size by photocopying.

In the last few years we have seen an increase in contributions which were 'justified' - ie. the text had a straight edge at both left and right. This was of course because of the use of home computers, such as the ubiquitous Amstrad, and word processing software. It would be quite possible to set the whole Newsletter using such a program (Rog does so with his Andromeda catalogue), allowing sections and paragraphs to be moved around on the screen before printing.

My own computer is an Atari 1040ST, and I set up the Newsletter using a program called *Fleet Street*

noticed, allows the use of justified *columns*, a choice of type styles in a wide variety of point sizes, 'box rules' to make boxes of any size or just a black line of any thickness, and also the insertion of graphics (although most of the artwork is still pasted in, in the old-fashioned way). I do use a device called SAM (Silicon Animation Machine) to digitize images from video tapes, for the Caption Contest.

It certainly helps to produce a neat and readable (I hope) publication, though of course everything still has to be typed in! Mick (see **Profile**) prepares the Reviews using a word processor, which, thanks to Bernie, also addresses the envelopes. We have 100 copies printed every month, of which around 20 go to the publishers who send us their books to review.

We are very pleased, for this special issue, to have contributions by our Co-Presidents. Of course, you can tell they live in an 'alternate universe', since most of their reminiscences are pure science fiction (ie. downright lies!). Except the bit about L. Ron Hubbard's visit, of course, every word of which is true. And Harry's second paragraph. But Bernie and I were much too young to be at the first Brumcon, even in our prams or nappies....

Incidentally, it is interesting that both Harry and Brian say, quite independently, that they look forward to our 2000th (or 2001st) issue. But I shan't be editing it: it should appear in 2137.





Here (supplied by our Archivist, Stan Eling) are all the people who have edited the Brum Group Newsletter since its first issue. You may notice that many of them are actually still with the Group (and some aren't)! I asked those who are still around to write a few words about their period of penal servitude.....

## The Editors: 1971-88

1971 (June to December) and 1972 (January to April): PETER WESTON.

"I used to do it on a Sunday Morning. It really didn't take long. Two fooscap sides of stencil, onto the Gestetner, knock out 80 copies, into the envelopes and finished by luncheon. Of course the Newsletter was a bit basic then, in 1971-72, just a write-up of the last meeting, plug for the next, and various bits of news. But I quite enjoyed doing it and of course the Deadline was something sacred; from the start it was understood that the Newsletter was a reminder, it had to be out on time or something dreadful would happen, no-one would turn up, and that would be the end of the BSFG."

1972 (May to December), 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977 (!): VERNON BROWN. (Assistant, 1972, 1973, Gillon Field).

"Wax stencil, A5 (but not reduced), stapled, multi-paged with topical cover, conreps, puzzles, articles, meeting reports, book reviews - even the occasional letter. But it grew too difficult to continue and after a year or so I reverted to a one- or two-sided A4 newsheet.

I think that many of the first Group members were long-time readers who suddenly found others to whom to talk, and the BSFG was more or less the only place to do this. But as SF became more popular other groups appeared, conventions became an almost monthly occurrence and the enthusiasm for things SF-ish became much diluted. With so much else going on, plus the ease of producing ones own fanzine for those interested in writing, Newsletter contributors are an extinct breed!"

[Vernon added, verbally, that he and Pat used to collate the Newsletter, sitting on Euston station on a Friday night. And Maucen Porter says 'I'm mad!' -Ed.]

1978: ROG PEYTON. (Assistant - Steve Green)

"So, sez Dave, do me a short piece, no more than 10 words or so [? -Ed.] on your year as Newsletter Editor. I was Newsletter Editor? ME? I couldn't remember being Editor of our illustrious rag. When was it, I asks? 1978 apparently. I don't remember 1978. I tried. Blank. I rang up Chris Morgan, to ask him about his file copies.

What did I do with our Newsletter? Apparently we had lots of interesting people, so I'm told. I don't remember. I was responsible for making it A5 instead of the traditional A4 sheet. I don't remember.

All this could lead one to believe that editing the Brum Group Newsletter leads to failing memory. Don't believe it. It's great fun producing something which no-one reads every month. Or so I'm told. I don't remember."

1979 (January to June): STEVE GREEN. (July to December): IAN WARNER (Assistant, Eddie Stachelski).

1980 and 1981: CHRIS MORGAN.

1982: PAULINE MORGAN. (written by Chris)

"Perhaps every editor who takes over any sort of periodical has great ambitions - an ideal to be aimed at, an Everest not only to be climbed but also transformed en route. My idea was to get lots of free books.

Or, to put it another way, there had only been occasional book reviews (most often written by one of us) in previous issues. I was determined to institute a regular review column, covering as many as possible of the SF and fantasy books published in Britain. Why? For three reasons: as a guide for Brum Group members; as a source of free books for any members willing and able to write competent reviews; and because it seemed like an intrinsically worthwhile project.

The statistics are interesting. During the three years we reviewed almost 600 books from just over 20 different UK publishers, using about 20 reviewers. Trying to get hold of the books each month was a Labour of Hercules. Even after making contact with the individual publishers and specifying which titles we wanted I used to find that books weren't sent, or got lost in the post (our postman used to leave parcels outside the door in a very exposed position). On one occasion we received a review copy of David Niven's autobiography *The Moon's a Balloon*, on the basis that anything with 'moon' in the title *had* to be SF. I found that each month some publisher would fail to get their new titles to us, and I would have to phone up their publicity department and ask nicely, or even threaten.

By the way, in 1980 book prices were only half of what they are today - 95p for most paperbacks and £5 to £6 for hardcovers.

We tried - admittedly without total success - to make each issue literate and witty, with news, reviews, illustrations, articles and, above all else (because it's the *raison d'être* of the newsletter) details of the forthcoming meeting on the front page. (So what happened to that last little tradition, eh, Dave?)"

[Well, if you get that far, you'll find it on the first page, immediately inside one of *my* innovations - an identifiable, illustrated cover, Chris! -Ed.]

1983 (January to March): PAULINE MORGAN (Assistant, Eunice Pearson). (April to December) and 1984 (January to February): EUNICE PEARSON.

1984 (March to December): GRAHAM POOLE.

"Editing a newsletter is a very demanding chore. The slog of trying to get contributions in each month [?! -Ed.], typing them up, getting the newsletter printed and mailed out on time is a time-consuming task. It is worse than producing your own fanzine when the Real Soon Now syndrome means that you can take months over each issue without feeling pressurised. The Newsletter Editor needs enthusiasm, discipline and time in order to be a success.

Despite all of the above I enjoyed my brief stint as Editor. It took me back to my old days of > 11



fanzine editing when I was young and enthusiastic and, for a time, it seemed to rejuvenate me. Eventually, though, the enthusiasm wears off, other priorities enter your life and it's time to hand over to a new editor who can bring his own style and personality to the Newsletter."

1985: MARTIN TUDOR.

"I have tried my hand at quite a few things since arriving in SF fandom in 1980. I've produced apazines, genzines, newszines, written regular columns, worked on a variety of conventions - Novacons, a Eurocon, a Worldcon and now a Mexicon. But without doubt the single most frustrating, monotonous, unsatisfying thing I have attempted in these eight years has been to produce the BSFG Newsletter.

Everything you do in fandom has one common aspect - feedback. Whether positive or negative, people will always tell you (either verbally or in riting) what they thought. But not if you're editing this Newsletter.... So I'd like to say that I have nothing but admiration for those people who kept on plugging away month after month. They are better men than I am, Gunga Din!"

1986: CAROL MORTON.

1987: TONY MORTON.

"Deadlines are set to give the editor the time to re-type articles or reviews prior to printing. Unfortunately all good intentions fall foul of that dreaded beast the Gremlin.

We felt our typewriter was MADE by a Gremlin. It seemed to work or not as the mood took it, misspelling words and throwing in Spoonerisms as it felt necessary. Often words changed *after* being typed!

To add to the drama, our son Iain took a hand (literally) to 'help'. One broken typewriter.

Aargh!

It came to pass a handwritten 'thank you' column appeared that month. Funny, even the pen seemed to have Gremlins...."

1988: DAVE HARDY.

Compiling this 200th Issue has been - well, not quite what I expected. I've gone through various phases. At the start I just wanted to create a Newsletter which was a happy, upbeat celebration. And I hope I've succeeded. But some of the comments of past Editors unsettled me. Rog says that nobody reads your efforts every month. I wondered: "Do they?" Martin complains that there is no feedback. I know that has been true.

On the other hand, I have received quite a few favourable comments since I started editing the Newsletter - but they have been very general: "The Newsletter's looking good", "Marvellous what you can do with a computer, isn't it?" - that sort of thing. (There's no doubt that a computer and a desktop publishing program does help with layout etc., but it can't conjure up the contents, or ensure good grammar, spelling, punctuation....) But those are the sort of comments that could be made from just looking at the Newsletter; no-one has actually commented on the *contents*.

The *Brum Group News*, as I re-titled it, is the sort of Newsletter I would like to read, and I wanted people to enjoy reading it. Above all, I enjoy producing it. But there is no point in doing so just for myself! The comments of some of our ex-editors made me wonder whether perhaps the Committee should reappraise what Chris called its *raison d'être*. He seems to suggest that the Newsletter exists primarily to inform members of who or what is on the programme for that month, and to review books.

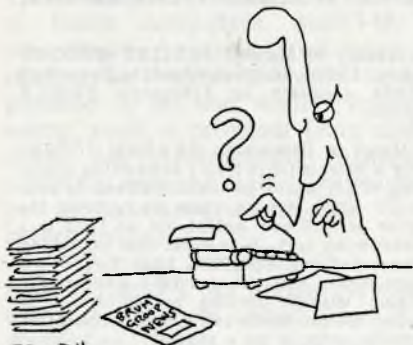
Am I, then, wasting many hours each month by writing or compiling Profiles, Film and Video News, Science Reports, Caption Contests, and so forth?, I asked myself. Myself couldn't answer, because no-one has told me. The fact that I have to twist your arms at meetings to get captions, that I have not received a single voluntary contribution in the form of 'News or Reviews' (of films etc.), that we have had NO response to the twice posed question "Do you want a Summer or Christmas Event?", and that for most of last year the 'Members' Forum' remained empty, certainly suggests that Rog and Martin are right. But are they?

I was on the point of asking you whether you would be just as happy with a Newsletter which contained only 'This Month's Programme' and a bunch of Book Reviews, when Maurcen Porter's piece arrived - the last in, but very welcome. For it put everything in perspective, and made me realise that I am not alone, and that every editor has the same problems. Mad I may be (but stout?), but as long as a reasonable number of you read most of the Newsletter each month, I'm willing to go on producing it.

Still, it would be nice, just for once, to get some real feedback. So how about taking Maurcen's advice - ? (You don't even have to buy me that drink - I'm driving. Just the constructive comments will do.) After all, if I don't get any comments, I shall be justified in assuming that you *haven't* read this; so if next month's issue consists of only four pages, it will be down to YOU. (I'll bet we'd get some feedback then....)

**YOU THINK I'M JOKING? TRY ME!**

Tell me at the next meeting, or ring, or write. All comments and suggestions gratefully received. Please?





# the Caption Contest

Well, our friends from *Star Trek* certainly produced a good response last month (logically enough) - they may appear again some time. Meanwhile, here's a different type of picture to exercise your minds on. Don't forget - let me have your captions on a piece of paper by or at the next meeting; the winner gets in free at the next meeting.

And the lucky winner last month was Pauline Morgan with: "It may be fascinating, Mr Spock, but the Chairman stripping is not everybody's idea of a good home-grown event!"

## THE

# ANDROMEDA

### TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks in April in the world's oldest-established SF Bookshop were:

1. *The Stainless Steel Rat Gets Shafted* - Harry Harrison, Bantam.
2. *Dark Side of the Sun* - Terry Pratchett, Corgi.
3. *Consider Phlebas* - Iain Banks, Futura.
4. *Legacy of Heorot* - Niven, Pournelle & Barnes, Sphere.
5. *Strata* - Terry Pratchett, Corgi.
6. *Dr Who: Mysterious Planet*, Target.
7. *Burning Chrome* William Gibson, Grafton.
8. *Silicon Mage* - B. Hambly, Unwin.
9. *Demon's Law* - M. Scott, Sphere.
10. *Mercedes Nights* - M.D.Weaver, N.E.L.

### Top Five Hardcovers:

1. *King of the Murgos* - David Eddings, Bantam.
2. *The Drabble Project* - Meades & Wake, Beccon Publications.
3. *Serpent Mage* - Greg Bear, Century Hutchinson.
4. *Infinity Concerto* - Greg Bear, " "
5. *Hammer of the Sun*, Mike Scott Rohan, Macdonald.

[If anyone really wants the *March* Top Ten, which we missed last month due to circumstances beyond our control, ask me at the next meeting - I should have it with me. Ed]

## YET ANOTHER COMPETITION

(set by Stan Eling - thanks, Stan) A pint for the winner, as usual. Answers to Dave by the next meeting, or by post by Monday 23 May.

### HISTORICAL CHARACTERS' FAVOURITE SF:

Below you will find listed a number of people from history: what you have to do is to imagine which SF story/novel each would have chosen as their favourite, had they been around today to read it.

As an example, Chopin might have picked *Player Piano* by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr....

The winning entry will be printed in next month's Newsletter. Here are the characters.

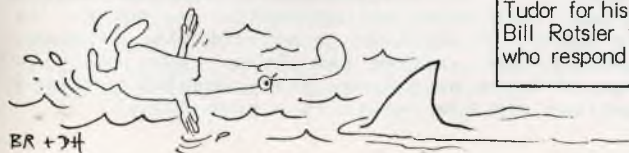
Christopher Columbus,  
Charles Darwin,  
Richard Coeur de Lion,  
James Watt,  
Isaac Newton,  
Thomas Alva Edison,  
Isambard Kingdom Brunel



Go on - have a go!

Contents of this issue (c) 1988 The Birmingham Science Fiction Group, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Committee or the Group.

Thanks this month go to all the former Editors who sent contributions; special thanks to Chris and Pauline Morgan for their several articles; to our Presidents and Guest Writers; to Martin Tudor for his Jophan Report; to Tim Groome and Bill Rotsler for cartoons - and to all members who respond to my request on page 12....





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

---

## BOOK OF THE MONTH

This month we pay special attention to the latest work by our guest, SHERI S. TEPPER. Published on May 19th, just the day before Sheri visits us, this book is being hailed by critics everywhere.

THE AWAKENERS by Sheri S. Tepper; Bantam; 476 pages; £12.95; Hardback.  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

While reading this big new novel I thought of it as fantasy, but *Locus* has listed it as one of the best science fiction novels of 1987. However one categorises it, this is an ambitious book: complicated, subtle, multi-plotted and full of excitingly original ideas.

Imagine an Earthlike planet whose two major landmasses are separated by a "World River" some 2400 miles wide. Humans (colonists who've forgotten that they are colonists) inhabit the northern continent, coexisting with strange talking birds and worshipping bird gods. Religious constraints affect the humans' reproduction, freedom of movement and even disposal of the dead. In the river is a strange infection, blight, which can turn humans or even fish into wood—but it doesn't kill them. To say that the novel has everything would be an exaggeration, though it does contain excitement, religion, politics, torture, world exploration, obsession, genocide and more than one love story. The characters are believably vivid (there are dozens of them!) and the writing is more measured and descriptive than usual from Sheri Tepper (with only occasional purple passages). The overall effect is like a big Jack Vance novel, though I was also reminded of Ian Watson's *The Book of the River*.

It's the best work so far from a storyteller on her way to the top, an exceptionally good read.

THE FORGE IN THE FOREST by Mike Scott Rohan; Orbit; 406 pp; £3.50 p/b.  
Reviewed by Geoff Williams;

This is the second volume in Rohan's *Winter in the World* trilogy. Like the first, it features Elof the smith and his friends Kermorvan, Roc and Ils. at the end of the first novel, the people of the city of Kerbryhaine had defeated their enemies the Ekweh. This one starts with a meeting of the city's rulers at which it is agreed they have only won a battle, not a war. Furthermore, the damage caused to the city, their losses in battle and the determination of Ekweh vengeance mean that the city is unlikely to survive a second attack. So Elof and his friends are sent to explore the east of the land, to see if a place of refuge can be found.

As with *The Anvil of Ice*, this story is primarily a quest. In Elof's case it is a double quest. In addition to helping his friends, he also seeks Kara, with whom he has fallen in love. Add to this Rohan's extensive knowledge of Norse mythology, his powerful writing and realistic characterisations and the result is a good novel.

THE MISPLACED LEGION by Harry Turtledove; Legend; 323 pp; £2.95 p/b.  
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This book is the first in *The Videssos Cycle* (a trilogy at the last count). The story is the familiar one of people from our world thrust into another world where magic works, but with the twist that it is one of Julius Caesar's legions that gets transported. Their commander, Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, quickly arranges for them to sign on as mercenaries for the beleaguered Empire of Videssos.

One quibble I had was that the various countries map over to 10th century Europe rather than being purely invented. Videssos is the Byzantine Empire, Halcgans are Vikings, and the inhabitants of the Duchy of Mandalen are the Normans. In spite of this I liked the book, because the societies and characters were convincing.

KHALINDAINE by Richard Burns; Unwin; 268 pages; £3.50 paperback.  
Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

As a standard formulaic fantasy, this novel is sadly lacking. It has only the one rather skimpy map, no detailed list of characters, and there isn't even a sequel promised!! Good God, this may even mark the end of paperback publishing as we know it!! Even more remarkably, it has some exceptionally beautiful descriptive writing, which unfortunately slows down an almost non-existent leaden plot, which is so depressingly familiar that one is almost grateful for the lamentably unbelievable twist of having no fewer than three possible contenders for the throne of Khalindaine. My only comfort is that I'm still not entirely sure they got the correct one onto the throne, as opposed to the one most suited for the job. However the search for the true heir provides all the necessary ingredients of a fantasy novel, and with greater elegance than usual. *Khalindaine* undoubtedly has its drawbacks, but it does suggest that, if he could find only find a story to tell, Burns might well enjoy success in the fantasy field.

DAUGHTER OF THE BEAR KING by Eleanor Arnason; Headline; 239 pages; £2.95 paperback.  
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is an "odd" fantasy. For a start the great struggle is not between Good and Evil, but between Integrity and Shoddiness. It has the obligatory map and appendices, but there is no "recommendation" by Anne McCaffrey, so it can't be all bad. Esperance is a daughter of the Bear King who was sent into our world for safety, and is called back to defeat Evil, I mean Shoddiness. The story chops and changes around rather too much, but at least it is not as predictable as I feared it would be. The appendices are two myths mentioned in the main story which have an authentic feel, and a treatise on the evolution of dragons from magic---using dinosaurs! Reasonably good.

THE SHATTERED HORSE by S.P. Somtow; Headline; 464 pages; £3.50 p/back.  
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Somtow looks into the Trojan wars and decides he has another viewpoint, where Ashtanax was not killed at the sack of Troy, but lived on to become King after the Greeks left. This is based on the Greek myths, where Robert Graves mentioned such a possibility, but it remains unsubstantiated by evidence.

Circumstance and quest quickly follow each other as Ashtanax attempts to fulfill his 'destiny'. Purely a self indulgence by the author, *The Shattered Horse* is a "sex and violence" fantasy, and it failed to hold my attention.

Egotism? Maybe he needs the money? Stretching himself over music, books, and he is I believe book critic for the Washington Post, Somtow over-stretches, he should stick to one profession, preferably music, judging from this insane tome. Avoid.

THE ENCHANTMENTS OF FLESH AND SPIRIT by Storm Constantine; Futura;  
318 pages; £3.95 paperback. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is an excellent debut from an unusual and articulate new writer and the first in a fantasy/SF trilogy. She belongs to Britain's punk culture and some of this is reflected in the novel.

From the northern cities of Megalithica has come a new race, the hermaphrodite Wraeththu, destined to supplant man. Adolescent boys become Wraeththu by a transfusion of blood from a member of the race. This novel concerns the progress of Pellaz, a farm boy who is induced to follow Cal, Wraeththu who stays the night at his parent's farm. Told in the first person it follows Pellaz's inception into the new race and later travels across the continent.

The pace is leisurely, an exploration rather than an adventure story, as Pellaz discovers not only the new world he has joined but also the disintegrating one he was a small part of. The style of writing is fresh and imaginative. There are flaws in the book---the world has perhaps changed a little too rapidly and the mechanism of Wraeththu reproduction is suspect---but it is well worth reading.

THE REWITCHMENTS OF LOVE AND HATE by Storm Constantine; Macdonald;  
411 pages; £12.95; Hardback. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Again Ms Constantine weaves a tale of the Wraeththu, this time from the point of view of Swift, and tells of his childhood in the house Forever. Swift does not understand his warlike father Terzian, a leader of the Varrs. He is much closer to his host ("mother"), Cobweb, who is a dreamy mystic, and as he grows older the brutality of his father makes him turn to Cobweb for guidance, but Cal has reappeared, and jealousy makes Cobweb retreat further into mysticism, and he offers Swift no help. Swift leaves his home with Cal and travels south to the Gelaming, meets the manipulative Thrice, and learns just what his destiny is.

This second volume of the *Wraeththu* trilogy is possibly even better than the first. It goes more deeply into the characters and motivation of the Wraeththu, and hence is a more satisfying novel. Ms Constantine is a born storyteller, and I certainly recommend this novel. Don't wait for the paperback, buy this now!

WYRLDMAKER by Terry Bisson; Headline; 176 pages; £2.50 Paperback.  
Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

Ignore the cover. This is not a fantasy barbarian sword and sorcery story. As to what is I'm not entirely sure. Bisson has created a universe which doesn't seem to function quite like ours, with wyrls within wyrls, not to mention beyond. Through these new worlds travels Kamen, searching for the woman he loved and lost, and in whose name he committed many atrocities. Having ritually declared himself dead, he goes to search for her, and their son, armed with only the magic sword she gave him. As with many quest stories, the journey sometimes seems to be little more than a device to describe strange new worlds, but *Wyrlmaker* is more. It is well written, well paced, very poetic in places, and however distasteful the violence it is not gratuitous. The denouement is extraordinary, as Kamen discovers that his lost love is not quite as he remembered her, nor was her interest quite as innocent. An interesting novel with some unexpected twists, and not quite what it seems either.

#### ALSO RECEIVED

LYTHANDE by Marion Zimmer Bradley; Sphere; 238 pages; £2.99 paperback.  
AFTER ALICE DIED by Margaret Bingley; Grafton; 234 pages; £2.95 p/b.  
A CHOICE OF NIGHTMARES by Marjorie Danney; Sphere; 266 pp; £2.99 p/b.  
THE MISENCHANTED SWORD-Laurence Watt-Evans; Grafton; 232pp; £2.95 p/b.