

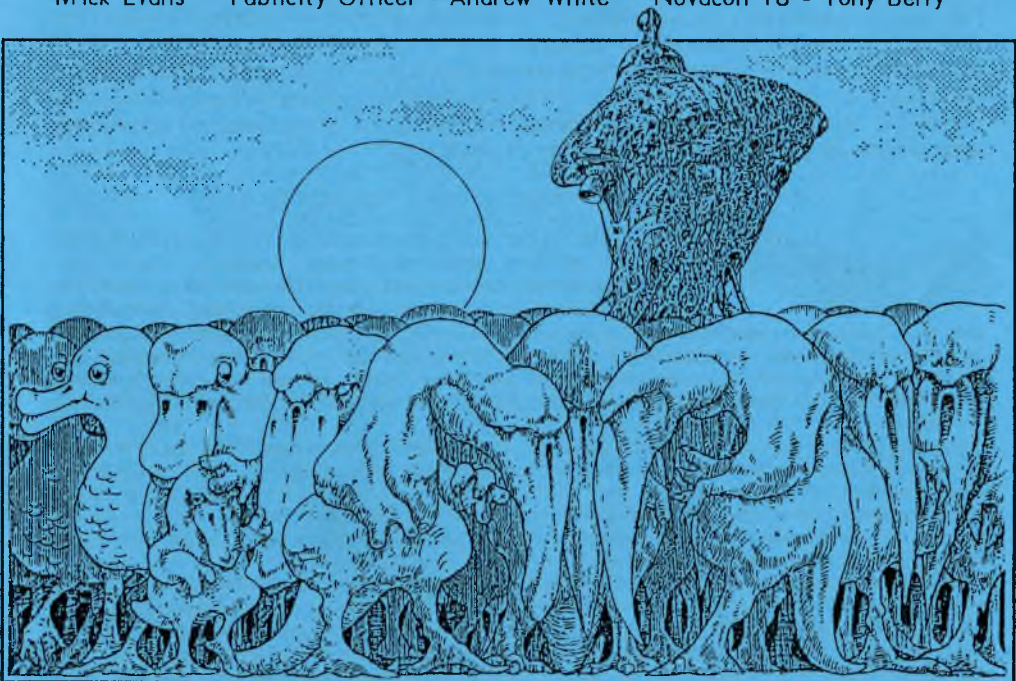
# BRUM GROUP NEWS

June  
1988

Issue  
No.201

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 17 June at 8.00pm

# This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00  
Visitors £1.50

This month's Guest Speaker is

Professor Jeffrey Knight  
on ROBOTS - PRESENT AND FUTURE

What is the current state of robotics? Will the 'predictions' of SF ever become reality? Will the computer brains of robots ever achieve true artificial intelligence? Come to this month's meeting and find the answers to these and all those other questions you've always wanted to ask....

Jeffrey Knight has been working in the field of Industrial Robotics for ten years. He has held positions at Strathclyde, Loughborough and Nottingham Universities, and as the Bogard Professor of Robotics at the Louisiana University in the USA; he appeared recently on a TV programme about AI. So if anyone can be called an expert on the subject, he can. His current work is concerned with developing ultrasonic sensor systems for autonomous robots - and if you want to know what *that* means be sure to come along on Friday!

## Last Month

### SHERI S. TEPPER

Sheri Tepper told a good audience that she had been born on a farm south of Denver, Colorado. During the Depression, hobos would ask to do work for a meal. She described the mood as 'a mossy grey-green': it made her

feel that there was something very wrong with the world. Her grandfathers used to read to her in their rocking chairs - stories like the Brothers Grimm and 'Three Little Pigs'. All horrible and delicious! But they were more enlivening than grey-green reality, and all had a happy ending. These inculcated a love of happy, enlivening 'rightness' that we reach for, but that reality doesn't give us.

Her school sent her home with a note that she wouldn't learn to read. That meant no more stories were read to her; within six weeks she could read as well as anyone.... In the local library she found fantasy books, *Amazing*, etc., but, she says, no science fiction. She married young, got unmarried, and at 26 was left with a couple of kids and a longing to write - but she couldn't because of her family. One can't get paid for *thinking* about writing, so now and then she would break loose. She amassed a marvellous collection of rejection slips.

In 1963 Frederik Pohl, then Editor of *Galaxy*, accepted two poems; then nothing. She remarried, and thought 'When I retire I'm going to write!'. On her 50th birthday she went through her files of unpublished stories, and came across a chapter of a novel she had written when she was 21 - 'A quest novel to end all quest novels'. She sent it to that vast slush pile in the sky, and despite enclosing a SAE etc., months passed with no response. Eventually she 'phoned: 'What have you done with my baby?!' The publisher admitted that they had lost it - but the editor who found it, read it. Gullt works! It was too sad, too long, too complex - did Sheri have anything more accessible? She sent the first chapter of a new book that she was working on. The publisher liked it - could she write two more books like it? She did; that was five years ago. Nothing happened, but she kept writing.

*The Awakeners* is now out here in hardback (see review, last month): it is the one she always wanted to write. Her message to BSGF members: 'DON'T say "I don't have time to write". You do - or you will have. Make time, or break time into little pieces.' Sheri has never been to a convention, and it was the first time she had met a group of fans. Her verdict? 'You look just like me!'. Her audience agreed that she would be welcome at conventions, and would not find them as frightening as she seems to imagine.



# You Write...

(Formerly Members' Forum)

This page is - still - open to all members who have something to say. Announcements, complaints, congratulations - whatever. I'll even consider 1-page fiction...

This month our transatlantic member, Wendell Wagner, Jr. (see New Members, April) has a few words to say about authors whose work is rarely, if ever, seen on opposite sides of the Atlantic - and one in particular who, while not American, is even more exotic:

"I was a little miffed by Tony Morton's brusque dismissal of S.P. Somtow in his review of *The Shattered Horse* in Issue 200. *The Shattered Horse* may well be as bad as Tony says - I haven't read it yet - but Somtow is a writer well worth reading in general.

I'm not sure where Tony got his biographical information from, but it's inaccurate. Somtow Papinian Sucharitkul (Sucharitkul is the family name, Somtow and Papinian are the given names) is 35 or 36 years old and part of the Thai royal family. His father was a Thai diplomat, so he grew up in various places around the world and spoke English as early as he did Thai. He was educated at Eton and Cambridge. Since then he has lived in the US, in Virginia near Washington, D.C., and now in California.

He was a composer for a while, but he's apparently now pretty well given that up. He describes his music as 'neo-Asian post-serialist'. Other people describe it as 'sounding like two cats stapled together'. Apparently there was quite a cult for it though, particularly in Japan.

He is not 'the' book critic for the *Washington Post*, not even 'the' science fiction critic. The *Washington Post Book World* has dozens of regular SF book reviewers, most of them regular SF writers. The *Washington Post Book World*, incidentally, has the best newspaper science fiction and fantasy book criticism in the US and maybe in the world.

Mostly, though, Sucharitkul has been writing SF and fantasy: at least 11 books by my count. Two were published - by some dipshit publisher's request - under the name of S.P. Somtow. If he's not a great writer yet, at least he's a very good one.

The reason Tony, and probably most of the rest of you, haven't heard of him is that his stuff isn't in print in the UK. Have you ever heard of Diana L. Paxson, Paul Edwin Zimmer, Paula Volsky, Alexis Gilliland, Roger McBride Allen, Shariann Lewitt, Darrell Schweitzer, or John Betancourt? If not it's because their books are only published in the USA. OK, maybe that's understandable for those people.

5 Though they are all nice people, I suppose I

could class them as minor writers. But why isn't Somtow Sucharitkul in print in the UK, or Rudy Rucker, or Melissa Scott? (Yes, there are anomalies in the other direction, too. Why isn't Terry Pratchett in print in the US?)

Excuse me for making this seem like a personal attack on Tony Morton, who, I assume, was only copying down what some lamebrain blurb writer wrote. Somtow Sucharitkul is a good writer. Try something else by him."

[If you can! Terry Pratchett's *The Colour of Magic* was published in the US about a year ago, but according to Dave Holmes it had a rotten cover, which is probably why it didn't sell - so no other titles by him have appeared... I asked Tony if he would like to respond, and he wrote as follows:]

"Yup, I did get the biographical information from the blurb within the book.

I will admit to not having heard of or read S.P. Somtow prior to this - although a friend 'gave him up' after reading a couple (not a good UK response so far, is it?) However, another friend reviewed *The Shattered Horse* in *Critical Wave* and liked it. So, as with all reviews, in the end it's up to you - a reviewer can only 'guide'; and my personal opinion was "I didn't like it". OK?

Now, Wendell seems to flag-waving for the 'good ole US of A - if it's American it must be good (?). I hope not, because I could start a (very) long list of US authors that, frankly, are not so hot. OK. I'm sure the reverse is also true, but over here we *seem* to accept criticism better - or possibly make up our own minds; as I've already said, reviews are only 'guides' to books.

Finally, I probably will read other books by Somtow; just because I disliked this one doesn't necessitate my not reading any others - does it?

[I'm keeping out of this - but other members may like to join in - ? However, I'm grateful to Wendell for some interesting information - and for raising a controversial topic. Also for some genuine feedback... -Ed]



# 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. (This does mean YOU!)

## THE NEBULA AWARDS 1987

For the uninitiated, the Nebula Awards have been given by the Science Fiction Writers of America since 1966. The idea of such an annual award came from Lloyd Biggle, then Secretary of the SFWA, in 1965. The date of the awards is the year of publication of the stories, unlike the Hugos. The glittering nebula trophy was designed by Judith Ann Lawrence, the wife of James Blish, based on a drawing by Kate Wilhelm. The 1987 Awards are:

Short Story: 'Forever Yours' - Kate Wilhelm.  
Novelette: 'Rachel in Love' - Pat Murphy.  
Novella: 'The Blind Geometer' - Kim Stanley Robinson.

Novel: *The Falling Woman* - Pat Murphy.  
The Philip K. Dick Award went to 'Strange Toys' by Pat Geary.

[Most of them sound more like romances than SF, don't they - ?]

## THE JOPHAN REPORT #D18

[Not surprisingly, much of this month's Report is taken up by the deaths of Heinlein and Simak, but since the obits for these two famous writers appear elsewhere there is no point in duplicating them. I already had the Nebula Awards, too! But thanks anyway, Martin.]

Fritz Leiber, Frank Belknap Long and Clifford D. Simak have been named as the first recipients of the Horror Writers of America's 'Life Achievement' Awards. The awards were announced by HWA president Charles L. Grant and will be collected by Fritz Leiber and Frank Belknap Long at the HWA's first annual banquet, to be held in New York City over the weekend of 24 June.

Birmingham's own Rog Peyton will shortly be launching the first, long-awaited books from his publishing company Drunken Dragon Press. Sometime towards the end of July a collection of David Langford's criticism will appear, followed in September by a collection of Jonathan Carroll short stories. Also under consideration is *The Enchanted Duplicator* by Bob Shaw and Walt Willis and the revised edition of Rob Hansen's history of British SF fandom.

[Frank Hatherley and Brian Aldiss, as 'Avernus', intend to launch Brian's *Science Fiction Blues* as a paperback - with a cover by yours truly - at the October World Fantasy Convention in London, where an hour's worth of the Show will be performed on the Saturday night. The book will then, of course, be on sale

at Novacon. -Ed.]

## MEDIA NEWS IN BRIEF - Martin Tudor

Filming was scheduled to begin in May on *Cocoon II*. Most of the original cast are back in their roles as the aged citizens who left with the aliens. Brian Dennehy won't be involved this time around; as the emphasis is on the humans this time there is no need for his character. Newcomers include Elaine Stritch and Courtney Cox. Director will be Daniel Petrie.

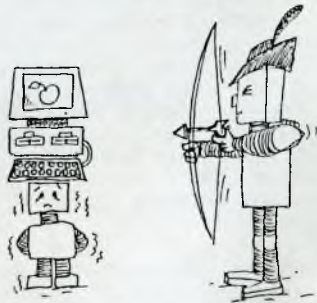
*Robocop II: This Cyborg for Hire* is the title currently given to the sequel to guess what. [The original movie will be available on video in September. Also available at last on video in the Autumn will be that blockbuster, *ET*. If you want to buy it, it will cost £75... -Ed]

Four each of the *Ray Bradbury Theatre* productions currently being shown on US payable will be shown in Britain and France. The British shows include *The Coffin* with Denholm Elliott and Dan O'Herlihy; *Punishment Without Crime* with Donald Pleasence; *The Small Assassin* with Susan Woolridge and Cyril Cusack, and *There was an Old Woman*.

Filming is under way on *Indiana Jones III* which will feature Sean Connery as Indy's strait-laced archaeologist father.

*Starman's* future is still under consideration. It now looks more likely that ABC will aim for a series rather than the TV movie, but no official decision has been released.

In the works are movie versions of the 1960s TV classic *The Invaders*; the radio show *The Green Hornet*; and *Motorama*, a futuristic look at human life by producer Michael (*Time Rider*) [Monkees?] Nesmith, which will concentrate on desert locations to give it that 'surrealistic ambience'. >



Tim Groome





## Small Ads

Free to Members; £2 to Non-Members.

Ring 021-777 1802 or write to the Editor.

[Please support this service - and use it.]

NEW AND SECONDHAND PAPERBACKS FOR SALE.  
Write to: Maureen Porter, 114 Guildhall Street,  
Folkestone, Kent CT20 1ES for current catalogue.

(SAE appreciated!)

WANTED:

*An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another  
World, 1871*, by David Langford. No unreasonable  
price paid.

Dave Hardy, address and 'phone number on front  
cover.

THIS SPACE COULD BE YOURS - FREE!!!

### MEDIA NEWS - continued

*Freddy's Nightmares*, the US syndicated TV series, will feature Robert Englund in the Freddy Krueger makeup - at least for the pilot episode. Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger are the unlikely *Twins* in the comedy film of that name being directed by Ivan (*Ghostbusters*) Reitman - not to be confused with *Twins*, the forthcoming David Cronenberg film starring Jeremy Irons as twin gynecologists and co-starring Genevieve Bujold.

Warner Brothers are planning to produce Ronnie Lynch's *Rocket*. Thanks to the worldwide popularity of Lee Falk's comic strip creation, King Features has authorised a new movie version of *The Phantom*, the jungle hero known as 'The Ghost Who Walks'. The production will include some of the creative personnel from *Crocodile Dundee*.

Geena (*The Fly*) Davis and her real life husband Jeff Goldblum return to the screen together this summer in the SF musical comedy *Earth Girls Are Easy*, directed by Julien (*Absolute Beginners*) Temple. According to Davis she plays "this manicurist from the Valley, and aliens all covered in fur - Jeff and two other fellows - land in my swimming pool. They have to stay for the weekend, so I try to help them out and I bring them into the salon where I work. Julie Brown is the hairstylist and she shaves them or waxes them or something. It turns out they're cute guys, so we end up going out with them..." [What *would* Jack Cohen say - ?] Davis may also reappear in *The Fly II*, but although the script is written and preproduction

reportedly under way, she is only negotiating at the moment.

*Micronauts*, no relation to the Marvel comic of the same name, has been commissioned by CBS. It will feature some incredibly small cops who come to Earth from another galaxy to do good. [Why are they always from another galaxy? Isn't 100,000,000,000 stars in our own *enough* - ? -Ed.] Chris Proser and Rachel Singer are writers/producers on the show.

Caroline Munro will star as the female lead in the tentatively titled *Doctor Who: The Movie*. The film will be produced and directed by Peter Litten and George Dugdale, the original creators of *Max Headroom*, through their London based SFX company Coast to Coast Productions. The screenplay will be by Mark Ezra. The \$14 million movie casts Munro as Cora, a Gallifreyan TARDIS engineer, who reluctantly accompanies the Doctor on his adventures.

Munro will also be starring in another Litten/Dugdale production, this time in the title role as *Roxscene*. *Roxscene* is an android manufactured by profiteering tycoons to operate a pirate TV station in outer space. Liberated from their control via a technical mishap, she unleashes her outrageous personality on an unsuspecting world. The character will be photographed in full-length form wearing a variety of colourful costumes and wigs, with at least six distinctly different personas, including an ingenuous Valley girl, a coquetish Southern tomboy, and a gritty punk rocker. "Roxscene is a rebel without a cause, and her cause is rock 'n' roll," says Munro. [?]



# the Caption Contest

One of the best responses yet last month. Sorry, Brian, you didn't win, but it was close! Would you have claimed your prize if you had, though? The caption which made the Committee laugh most, though, was by Stephen Rogers: "Darling - how long did you say you have been working at Sellafield?"

This month's is also a classic illustration (by Stephen Fablan) rather than a digitised pic. It may well be the last, as I have a different competition planned for next month to test your powers of observation. Usual rules and prize.

## THE

# ANDROMEDA

## TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks in May in the country's biggest and best SF Bookshop were:

1. *Star Trek: Time for Yesterday* - Titan.
2. *Star Trek: The Final Frontier* - Titan.
3. *Dr. Who: Time and the Rani* - P.&J.Baker, Star.
4. *Dark Side of the Sun* - Terry Pratchett, Corgi.
5. *The Awakeners* - Sheri S. Tepper, Bantam.
6. *Strata* - Terry Pratchett, Corgi.
7. *Dawn* - Octavia Butler, Gollancz.
8. *Palace of Love* - Jack Vance, Grafton.
8. *Tuf Voyaging* - George R.R. Martin, Gollancz.
10. *Greyhawk: Demon Hand* - Rose Estes, TSR.

The Top Five hardcovers:

1. *Life During Wartime* - Lucius Shepard, Grafton.
2. *Sourcery* - Terry Pratchett, Gollancz.
3. *The Awakeners* - Sheri S. Tepper, Bantam.
4. *King of Murgos* - David Eddings, Bantam.
5. *Oktober* - Steve Gallagher, NEL.

As I announced at last month's meeting, the deadline for this competition has been extended to the June meeting. DO try it - you'll find it can be fun. The prize is a pint (or free entry).

## 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.

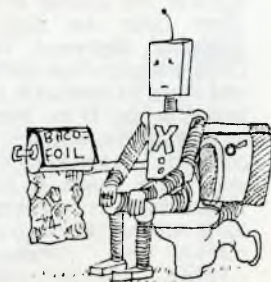
As an example, Chopin might have picked *Player Piano* by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr....

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

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Thanks this month go to Tim Groome for the cover illo, to William,\* Wendell, Janet, Laurence and Pete for their contributions - and to all book reviewers, of course. \* (HELP OVER TO NEXT MONTH!)



Tim Groome



## Obituaries

Within just two weeks, science fiction lost two of the masters from the 'Golden Age': Clifford D. Simak on 25 April and Robert Heinlein (aged 80), on 8 May. Simak died of respiratory failure, Heinlein of a heart attack. Laurence Miller and Peter Weston pay their respects:

SF has lost another of its old masters with the death of Clifford D. Simak at the age of 83. A journalist and editor by profession, the majority of his work was written in his spare time until his retirement in 1976.

A multiple award winner, acknowledged as one of the finest science fiction writers, his entrance to the world of writing was somewhat less than auspicious. In 1931, his first published work, "The World of The Red Sun" appeared in the December 1931 issue of *Wander Stories*, followed by four more during the following year. He wrote nothing more until 1938 apart from a single story in 1935, "The Creator" which drew a storm of criticism for its sacrilegious implications of a universe that was not created by God.

We have to thank John W. Campbell's editorial policies at *Astounding* for his return to SF with two stories in 1938 and the serialisation of his first novel, *Cosmic Engineers* in 1939. Over the next five years, his work showed a steady improvement and it could be said, arrived, in 1944 with "City" and its sequel "Huddling Place" which led to another six stories finally published as the compilation book *City*. The award of an International Fantasy Award for *City* provided the crown for what is probably Clifford D. Simak's best known work. The 1950s proved a prolific period with the production of dozens of short stories including "The Big Front Yard", which won the 1959 Hugo for best novelette, and three novels: *Time & Again*, *Ring Around The Sun* and *Empire*. Many of the shorts were subsequently released in various collections through the latter half of the 1950s and the 1960s. The enduring quality of these works is clearly shown by the number still in print today. The next decade brought a shift from short stories towards novels with classics such as *Time Is The Simplest Thing*, *They Walked Like Men* and *Why Call Them Back From Heaven*, but the highlight was *Way Station* which was awarded the 1964 Hugo. This production of novels continued through the seventies at the rate of almost one novel a year, a tremendous achievement when you consider that he wrote part time until retiring in his early seventies. His later work received criticism for its uneven quality but novels such as *A Choice of Gods* and *Shakespeare's Planet* retain all of the quality of his earlier work. Whilst we must all regret his passing, few people manage to leave an enduring legacy for the future and the best of his work stands in its own right as a fitting memorial which will always be with us. For

those of you who haven't had the pleasure of reading his work, don't continue in your ignorance...go out and buy something now!

L.M.

### Belated Thoughts on Robert A. Heinlein

I stood behind him in a lift, once, at the 1977 World SF Convention in Miami.

The lift went down six floors in the Hotel Fontainebleu while I stared at the back of a grey, close-cropped head and wondered exactly what, if anything, I had to say to Robert A. Heinlein.

There was a time when I would have had little hesitation. Back in 1969 I was the archetypal Heinlein fan, published a tribute to his "First 30 Years", and knew the first lines of all his novels\*. To me he was simply The Best; the most imaginative, readable, influential science fiction writer in the world. I admired him tremendously, and a conversation would have been my idea of heaven.

But things changed. He started to write those dreadful books, from *I Will Fear No Evil* on, so bad that I officially Gave Up after *Number of the Beast*\*\*.

I heard quite a lot *about* my hero, too. The way he treated his admirer and would-be biographer, Alexei Panshin. His Guest of Honour speech at MidAmerican, when he walked off stage as soon as his stopwatch signalled 'time up' (some Guest; some Honour!) All that business about 'blood drives', and no approaches without a donation.

And I suppose I grew up a little. *Starship Troopers* no longer seemed a very good pattern for society; a Swedish friend pointed out a giveaway line in *The Puppet Masters* ('I felt warm and relaxed, as if I had just killed a man or had a woman'); *Stranger* blueprinted Charles Manson.

Whatever happened to that young visionary who wrote *Beyond This Horizon?* Where did he go, the exuberant author of *Door Into Summer?* Heinlein the social theorist (*Citizen of the Galaxy*), the political analyst ('Solution Unsatisfactory'), the innovator ('Waldo'), all gone, almost entirely, and much missed.

Some of these thoughts went through my mind in that lift, that morning in Florida. I had nothing to say to the Robert Heinlein who was standing in front of me.

I kept quiet. That's sad. He was a great man in our community, once upon a time. P.W.

\* Still do: try me at a meeting.

\*\* But Rog keeps selling them to me on the basis that 'this one is much better - just like his old stuff'.



**Dave Hardy: Newsletter**



**NASA PLANS AHEAD**

For the second year running NASA is asking for more money in its budget request. It is trying to reverse a 20-year slide in making the necessary investment in its technology base - very necessary, since tomorrow's missions are governed by the technology developed today. Back in the days of Apollo, this investment represented 6% of NASA's total annual budget: it shrank as low as 2%.

As an example of how bad the situation currently is, Roger Boisjoly, an engineer at Morton Thiokol (who make the solid fuel boosters for the Shuttle) has commented that the computers aboard the Shuttle are "an absolute joke". He says they are mid-60s technology, and that spare parts for them are no longer even manufactured - they have to run up a special batch when any are required. Very expensive!

This year's 'new initiative' is called Pathfinder, in which NASA is asking for a \$100 million down-payment on a five-year, \$700 million-plus preparation for manned expeditions to the Moon and Mars (better done jointly with another country - say the Soviet Union, surely?) It also wants \$391 million for the National Aerospace Plane - a rival for HOTOL. This represents 3.4% of NASA's budget; last year the technology request amounted to 2.5%. So things *are* improving - just.



**New Members: May**

One new member joined us in May (a first for me, as I was on the door at the time): Andrew Munn, who lives in Selly Oak and heard of the Group through the Andromeda Bookshop.

Andrew gives his favourite authors as Harry Harrison and Isaac Asimov, and has been reading SF for as long as he can remember. Mind you, he's only 21. Apart from that, he is into clay pigeon shooting. Cool! (Sorry)

Perhaps I should get someone else to write my Profile; but since I am writing everyone else's from information provided by the victim - and no-one knows more about me than I do (I hope), here goes:

I was born in 1936, and from a very early age was fascinated by pictures of lunar craters, Saturn's rings, etc., in encyclopaedias. I discovered 'pulp' SF and H.G.Wells when I was 14, at which age my school friends used to make fun of me for being quite certain that men would land on the Moon (crazy ideal!).

I went to my first SF con in 1959, though I haven't been attending *continuously* since then. I have lived in Brum for most of my life, though I spent six years in Norfolk, returning in 1973 with a divorce pending; that's when I joined the Group. I became Publicity Officer in 1975, and have since been Chairman four times - three consecutively, which is a record (so far...), Secretary and now Newsletter Editor. I have a daughter, Karen, who is 24 and has been to meetings a couple of times (as has my wife, Ruth) and a step-daughter, Mary, who hasn't. I was on the Committee of *Novacon 12*, and you can usually see my work in the Art Show at Novacons and Eastercons.

Having been equally interested in Art and Science at school, I worked in a laboratory, met Patrick Moore in 1954, and illustrated my first book at the age of 18. Until 1970 all my published work was science fact - astronomy and so forth. Then I began to do covers for *Vision of Tomorrow*, followed by *F&SF* - for which I have now done over 40: more than any US artist! Since 1981 I've also done covers for *Analog*, most of which have appeared in the top three in the annual Readers' Poll - once at numbers 1 and 2 - and even *Interzone*.

I've written six books of my own, and worked on movies, TV and advertising. It is many years since I did any British covers (UK publishers please note), which could perhaps explain why, despite being nominated for a Hugo in 1979 and being voted 'Best European SF Graphic Artist' at Eurocon in 1984, I have never even been nominated (to my knowledge) in the *British SF Awards*. Funny old world, ain't it?



# Guest Review

**Janet Ryland is not a member of the BSFC (she's a neighbour of our Chairman) though she has been to meetings. However, in view of the fact that we had a female writer last month and *hope* to have C.J.Cherryh soon, here is her review of:**

IN THE CHINKS OF THE WORLD MACHINE: FEMINISM AND SCIENCE FICTION; Sarah Lefanu; The Women's Press; 231 pages; £5.95 paperback.

*In the Chinks of the World Machine* is in many respects a post-modernist feminist statement. Rather like the work of painter Therese Oulton, Sarah Lefanu's examination of the rise of a specifically feminist science fiction is an attempt at renegotiating, as opposed to deconstructing, what has often appeared as an inherently patriarchal literary genre.

As Lefanu points out in the Introduction to the book, the value of feminism positively using SF lies in the materiality of the genre and the unique relationship it posits between author, text and reader. The multifarious existence of science fiction, and its ability to absorb other genres such as horror, mythology and fantasy, offers much to commend it as a vehicle of feminist ideology. But as Lefanu quite rightly indicates, the growth of feminist SF over the last decade is not merely a case of appropriating an established cultural genre in order to make a political statement; rather it is grounded in an authentic interest in and appreciation of the genre itself by women.

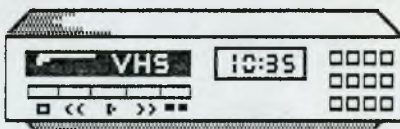
Essentially what Lefanu and contemporary feminist SF writers identify is not just the democracy of science fiction in its interrelationship between reader (fan) and author, but that this interrelationship has been the very foundation on which feminist SF has attempted to renegotiate the exclusion of women from yet another cultural discourse.

Lefanu distinguishes between what might be termed 'women's' SF and feminist SF. There have been women science fiction authors, Anne McCaffrey being a classic example. But invariably such female authors have made little reference to the significance of their own sex, or acknowledged the problem of being a woman in a patriarchal society. The guise of humanism has been much used, particularly in SF, to mask the cultural inequality of women. What *In the Chinks of the World Machine* is concerned with is feminist SF as opposed to SF that just happens to be written by women.

Whilst it is impossible, and naive, to attempt to define feminist SF in the space of three hundred or so words, what such a term infers is the use of the genre (and all that its materiality offers) to examine and interrogate the social, cultural and political position of women. This, as anyone who has read any of

the pioneering Women's Press series of feminist SF would agree, is not to the detriment of the genre. As pointed out, and as reinforced by Marge Piercy and *Woman at the Edge of Time*, the very democratic nature of SF has allowed this development to take place. Piercy (who prior to *Woman...* was by no means a science fiction author) produced what has emerged as modern SF, and feminist, classic.

*In the Chinks of the World Machine* is one of the first critical retrospective examinations of the rise and nature of feminist SF. In the book Lefanu examines the treatment of women within science fiction narrative, often misogynist, and the early interventions in the genre by women before the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. But the strength of the book lies in her discussion of contemporary feminist SF and her placing of such work firmly in the context of an increasingly authoritarian and unsympathetic socio-cultural context.



## VIDEO NEWS IN BRIEF

*Flight of the Navigator* and *Inner Space* should be in your local video library by the time you get this. *Flight of the Navigator*, although it stars a little boy (as usual), is well worth seeing. The story works well, the script has nice touches of humour, and the special effects are excellent and imaginative. If you missed them on TV, you may be interested to know that all five of the *Planet of the Apes* movies are now available on video at only £9.99 each.

At the same price is *Quatermass and the Pit* - the original BBC serial, not the Hammer remake - while for space enthusiasts there is *Voyage to the Outer Planets and Beyond* - a journey through space with images from Voyager and other probes, and a commentary by Isaac Asimov. If you're feeling a bit richer, the second and third *Star Wars* films, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* can be bought for \$14.99 each.

Finally, on the music front, ten of the best from David Byrne and Talking Heads can be found on *Story Telling Giants*, also at £9.99. Anyone like to do a review of any of these -?



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

THE INFINITY CONCERTO (341p) and THE SERPENT MAGE (343p) both by Greg Bear; Century; £5.95 each; P/back. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This pair of novels makes an intriguing fantasy. *The Infinity Concerto* begins in the present when the sixteen year old would be poet, Michael Perrin, follows the directions given him by an elderly musician, Arno Waltiri, and finds himself in the Realm of the Sidhe. Totally bewildered, he is trained in magic by three crones, though the reasons are not explained to him. Events overtake him and he begins a journey in search of David Clarkham, the mage who seems to be behind all his problems, and those of the other humans living in the Realm.

By the start of *The Serpent Mage* Michael has returned home and found out that he has been made manager of Waltiri's estate. The Realm is disintegrating, and the Sidhe are migrating to Earth. In a conflict between mages, Michael must find a way to mesh together the magic of the Sidhe and the science of mankind and prevent the destruction of his world.

Greg Bear has taken a number of old ideas and reshaped them with such ingenuity that they have become startlingly original. *The Infinity Concerto* is a more straightforward adventure than *The Serpent Mage*, though to dismiss it as such would not do justice to the blend of magic in both style and story. *The Serpent Mage* has more complexity and shows the twists of imagination that were taken to extremes in *Blood Music*.

THE DERYNI ARCHIVES by Katherine Kurtz; Legend; 325 pp; £3.95 p/back. Reviewed by Andy Taylor.

This is a collection of short stories ranging over 250 years, and all set in her "Deryni Universe". It will delight those of us who are Kurtz fans, as the stories elaborate on characters and events in the novels as well as hinting at what is to come in the histories of Gwynedd. The book should prove no less enjoyable to the uninitiated, and contains several interesting appendices. I was disappointed that the book was reprinted from the Del Rey edition without any proofreading. Kurtz writes these stories with a particular reference to detail, (as befits a trained historian), and weaves a splendidly vivid tapestry of characters and events. Long live the Deryni! Recommended.

THE HUB by Chris Beebe; Orbit; 248 pages; £2.95 paperback. Reviewed by Andy Wright.

People keep asking writers where they get their ideas from. That question doesn't arise with this book, it's so similar to William Gibson's *Neuromancer* it could almost have been a first draft of that novel before heavy reworking. If you've read *Neuromancer* then make the following changes:- Add a lot of strange cults based on Scientology and the Black Panthers; Add a powerful world government; Make the theft of data a right instead of a crime; Base the deranged family on the space station with a bunch of sociologists heavily into Zen. The book isn't that bad, but it isn't very good either. If you haven't read *Neuromancer* then read that instead. If you have read it you will find this book disappointing in comparison.



ARCHON by Richard Gordon; Futura; £3.50; 384 pages.

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Mention the word Gnosticism and the response will be one of prolonged sighing or glazed looks, depending on the degree of acquaintance the person has with the subject, but as *Archon* has not a little to do with it, it is as well to mention that gnosticism was a heresy practised by the Cathars of thirteenth century France (amongst others) and the protagonists in this book are catapulted from the present day to the Cathar period. The build up to the time transition is achieved fairly skilfully, with the daughter of a conventional family having nightmares about a burning man (a Cathar heretic), and her father's disintegration due to renewed dealings with black magic.

An easy, fluid style helps to sustain interest together with a competent delineation of character, but I'm dubious about the treatment of the theme, I think Mr Gordon should have concentrated more on the historical elements and eschewed the fantasy parts. However, it's part one of a trilogy, so time will tell.

VISIBLE LIGHT by C J Cherryh; Methuen; 348 pages; £2.95 paperback. |

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This collection contains three fantasy and three SF short stories and novellas. The SF stories are:- *Cassandra*, a Hugo winner about a woman who is considered mad because she sees death and destruction everywhere; *Threads of Time*, set in the same universe as the *Morgaine* books; and *Companions*, about a man marooned on a world apparently uninhabited, with only a semi-sentient and very possessive computer for company. The fantasies are:- *The Thief of Korianth*, which is Sword & Sorcery, with the traditional barbarian warrior, who happens to be a woman; *The Last Tower*, about a gentle mage who summons something quite unexpected to protect his tower (this was written on a postcard in 24 hours at a convention!); and *The Brothers*, a high-fantasy about revenge, in a similar vein to *The Dreamstone*. The Author's commentary on each story takes the unusual form of a conversation between two passengers on a spaceship. An impressive collection.

VISIBLE LIGHT by C J Cherryh; Methuen; 348 pages; £2.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This collection of stories brings together a number of Cherryh's shorter pieces of work. All of them are excellent and demonstrate the versatility of her talent. *Cassandra* (which won a Hugo Award) is a poignant near-future story, whereas *The Threads of Time*, though equally disturbing, is set in an alien universe. *Companions*, the longest story, is science fiction in a classical vein. Warren, the only survivor of an exploration team struck down by an alien disease, is stranded on a seemingly deserted planet, with only the ship's computer for company. The remaining stories are all fantasy, but very different from each other. If you are unfamiliar with Cherryh's work, this is an excellent sampler.

THE ALIENS AMONG US by James White; Futura; 217 pages; £2.95; P/Back.

Reviewed by Helena Bowles.

A good blend of seven stories, including one from the *Sector General* series, (to appreciate which you really need to be familiar with the series). All the others are of the standard one would expect from White. The gems, in my opinion, are *Red Alert*, *Tableau* and the longest, *Occupation Warrior*. All deal with White's favourite themes, war and the achievement of peace. My only complaint is that *Red Alert* and *The Scavengers* have exactly the same premise, and the same twist in the ending. Oh yes, ignore the blurb, not only are the synopses misleading but they have even been mis-matched with the titles.

THE KIF STRIKE BACK by C.J Cherryh; Methuen; 299 pages; £2.95 p/back.  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This, the second volume of a trilogy, began in *Chanur's Venture* and is Cherryh at her best. With the exception of Tully, humans are virtually unknown in the section of space dominated by the Hani (Pyanfar Chanur's people), the Kif and the Mahendo'sat. The plot is rejoined with Pyanfar keeping a rendezvous with the treacherous Kif, in their territory, in an effort to secure the release of Tully and her niece Hilfy, from their abductors. She needs to employ all the skills of diplomacy, bargaining and bluff she can muster to extricate herself and her crew from an increasingly complex situation. Cherryh manages to juggle excitement, action, politics and the alienness of her creations without dropping anything. Highly recommended but not without reading volume one first.

THE NICK OF TIME by George Alec Effinger; N.E.L; 244 pp; £2.50 p/back.  
Reviewed by William McCabe.

I suppose there must be a lot of tradition in books that take situations, characters and ideas out of others. This is one of those. It isn't subtle or underhand about it, if anything it's quite blatant. Apart from references to *The Wizard of Oz* (mostly the movie) there are bits that relate to 1984, *The Man in the Iron Mask* and others. The obvious comparison is with *The Humber of the Beast* in that it rambles through alleged alternate universes and somehow manages to get tied up in well known novels. This has two advantages over the Heinlein in that it is shorter and has an obvious sense of humour.

The plot is simple. Frank Mihalik is the first person in his universe to time travel. On his first trip he has an awful time getting back, he gets stuck in a time loop, works for an agency trying to set all time straight, and meets with the masters of time. On the whole, enjoyable but nothing special.

ARAMINTA STATION by Jack Vance; N.E.L; 480 pp; £6.95; 1ge-format p/b.  
Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

The novel's protagonist is Glawen Clattuc, a member of one of the six families living at the settlement of Araminta Station on the planet Cadwal, which is a planet-wide nature reserve. At the start of the novel he has just turned 16, and it covers the next 5 years or so of his life. He has enemies both within and without his family, is under pressure to do well academically and also joins the local police force. All these things, particularly the last, have a significant effect on him as he makes the transition from boy to man. The story and its backgrounds are well constructed. However, this is not a self contained novel, it is the first of a series entitled *The Cadwal Chronicles*, and there are elements of the story left unresolved for the sequel(s). Solely for Vance fans, or for those with time to kill.

THE TOMMYKNOCKERS by Stephen King; Hodder & Stoughton; 563 pages; £12.95 Hardback.  
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This book is technically S.F but is better considered as horror. Its worst fault is that King's inspiration lies in 1950's B-movies. Writer Bobbi Anderson finds a flying saucer buried in the woods and becomes obsessed with digging it up. As she does so the local townsfolk start building hi-tech weapons out of whatever is handy (I especially liked the killer Coke machine!) Her boyfriend Jim Gardener has a steel plate in his skull from a skiing accident, which (spot the cliché) makes him immune to the evil alien mind control rays.

On the other hand I enjoyed the book immensely. The characters and the small town of Haven really come alive, even if the S.F elements of the story creak.