

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

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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



Illustration by David P. Johnson

The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at the LADBROKE (now PENGUIN) 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 19 August at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

This month's Guest Speaker is:

Iain Banks

Iain was born in Fife in 1954. He studied English Literature with Philosophy and Psychology at Stirling University, and has since worked (naturally, with those qualifications) as a hospital porter, an estate worker, a pier porter on the Clydesdale docks, a roadworker, a dustman and a gardener. After moving around in Europe and Scandinavia, Morocco and the USA he spent a brief spell in Scotland, then moved to London, when his first novel, *The Wasp Factory* was published, then to Kent, and has now settled back in Edinburgh. His ambition is to travel.

Iain refuses to be 'typecast'. Does he write horror, fantasy, or science fiction? How do you define *The Bridge*, his third novel? As a sort of surrealistic dream fantasy? All one can say for certain is that all of the five books so far published make damn good, original reading. As for Iain himself, he's unmarried, enjoys beer and good food, mixing with people, going to cons, arguing, and is a natural comedian - in addition to which he's well thought of by the literary establishment (especially Fay Weldon). His new book, *The Player of Games*, is set in the same universe as *Consider Phlebas*, though not with the same characters. Now *that's* SF...

Last Month

Maureen Porter & Paul Kincaid

I'm told that there was not a very good turn-out for the July meeting - perhaps because members were, like myself, in foreign parts, enjoying the foreign rain for a change. Even so, the meeting was very successful. Chris Murphy relates that Paul and Maureen described how they came to be in the British Science Fiction Association. Paul originally applied in 1972, but after an initial response heard nothing more - the BSFA was on a downslide at the time. So he tried again in 1979, and became a member. Maureen became a member after nearly joining the British Fantasy Society; she changed her mind because she felt the BFS was too biased towards horror fiction. At first she found the news in *Matrix* baffling - "written in code", but she values the introduction it gave her to the world of fanzines. (She now edits *Matrix*, a job once done by our own Rog Peyton. I'm not sure if that was when it was baffling...)

Paul explained that the BSFA has changed "considerably and constantly" during its 30-year history. At present it is basically a publishing body. In addition to *Matrix* and *Vector* it produces *Paperback Inferno* (reviews) and *Focus* (for writers). Maureen described how as editors they are bombarded with a bizarre variety of contributions, including one individual's complete (and almost completely unprintable) works! They also receive suggestions about what the BSFA *should* be doing - eg. publishing members' novels, making films/videos, or acting as a professional body for writers. In point of fact the Association is trying to provide more services for writers, such as workshops.

Maureen admitted that the BSFA probably has as many aims as members, but it does act as a 'rallying point' for SF readers, not all of whom are active as fans.

FEEDBACK

A Follow-up Page to Last Month's 'You Write'

The following is quoted *verbatim* and *sic*, but not without comment:

Letters to the editor.

I suppose it is rare that a newsletter should run unsolicited reviews. It seems to run them only a little less than I write them but this time we seem to have a little editorial comment attached. While I don't entirely resent this, I can't say as I approve of the opinion expressed either. I would not have sought to limit the range of SF to an electronic buzz and the supposedly relevant product of semi-hard rock bands.

Pseudo-classical stuff of the kind peddled by The Enid (is Bob Godfrey the same one as did that cartoon 'Roobarb' for the Beeb?) [No!] may be quite OK to listen to (even in the odd lift) but is it at all relevant? I can see similar grounds for the inclusion of certain Vienna Waltzes (remember *2001*). Do things qualify if they just rip off bits of skiffy novels? Can you get on the list just by chanting "I am a robot" a few times? You might think so - I don't. [Nor me.] Why does electronic have a better qualification than any other? The recognisable pieces (apart from odd fillers) in most films and TV shows seem to have a different idea - there was a 60's-type surfer theme to *Red Dwarf*; *2001* seems to be hooked on classics, *Dark Star* had that country & western thing, *Back to the Future* has pop songs, *Silent Running* had a folk singer with an accoustic guitar [Joan Baez], our editor, himself, has mentioned working on a film project that included 'Under the Boardwalk' in it's [sic] original format.

While the newsletter might be all the better for a lot more contributions I don't think it's fair to dump a load of irrelevant items on it. In the years I have been a member of this group the newsletter has only printed three record reviews (all by me) - two were submitted because they had a strong lyrical SF plot

and the third because Ursula LeGuin took half the credit for it. I would not like the range to be expanded all that much although I wouldn't mind seeing someone else have a go. [Neither would I.]

W A M

Now then, William, let's not get our knickers in a knot. I gave you almost a page to yourself, so there's no cause to 'resent' or otherwise the fact that I chose to fill up a few lines with the question 'How do we define SF music?'. I pointed out that it usually seems to be electronic, which is undeniably true, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I approve of the fact.

You have quoted a number of films which used more original ideas (though not original music - but remember *Forbidden Planet* - ?), and as a matter of fact I agree with most of what you say. Still, to get our facts straight, what I actually told you was that the music for *Silverworld* was written by Kenny Young, composer of 'Under the Boardwalk'. That song wasn't intended to be used in the movie, which uses basically electronic (keyboard) music...

An editor's job is to fill the Newsletter with items which he/she hopes will be of interest to a majority of readers. If some consider them irrelevant - tough. You try it!

And now, just to show that I do get some favourable feedback too, Susie Cheyne writes:

I love your management, production and editorial policy of the Brum Group Magazine and write in hopes of encouraging you to continue the excellent work. I feel certain there are things wrong with it but at the moment its merits stand out more than any criticism I can bring to mind.

Thanks, Susie! (And William, too.) All members are welcome to join in. -Ed.



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...

HOTOL HITS THE DUST

In the first of these Reports, back in February, I described how Alan Bond's revolutionary space plane, HOTOL, was in danger of being kept on the drawing board by our government. Well, as you may have heard, HOTOL is definitely a dead duck as far as Britain is concerned. The government has axed its £4 million annual R&D contribution, adding that the future of Britain in space lies in collaboration with the international private sector.

No doubt Mr Kenneth Clarke will pat himself on the back when, in some four years' time, a multinational vehicle called LittLEO, developed by our General Technology Systems and with first and third stage motors provided by the Royal Ordnance factory, blasts into space from the coast of Norway. Up to ten LittLEO missions can be flown each year, carrying weather and mineral-surveying instruments at a fraction of present costs, using tried and tested technology.

Great. But Britain could have launched rockets like LittLEO *20 years ago*, if governments then and subsequently had not been so shortsighted. Remember Blue Streak? Back in the late 1960s we led the rest of Europe in space technology: rocket motors, communications satellites, we had it all. Which is why industry can now build LittLEO. But as Dr Geoffrey Pardoe of General Technology Systems says, the British government's attitude is equivalent to someone thousands of years ago saying "Ships? Why do we want ships? We are quite happy staying on dry land."

In France, space is seen as a vote catcher, and there is celebration when Ariane is launched successfully. Space, after all, is where it is all going to

happen (as SF has been telling us for years). It will form a major part of the economy by the end of the century, and it is plain stupidity to expect industry to carry the burden alone - especially when the governments of other countries like the USA, West Germany and Japan are supporting HOTOL-like projects.

Certainly such projects are expensive - £6 billion has been estimated for HOTOL to fly. But one only has to look at the past record of space to see that the spin-offs for science and industry - and even for the man in the street - are enormous. Perhaps all SF fans should force their local MP to read SF, and open their eyes!





Andrew White: Publicity

[Yes, I know I said I'd 'do' the Committee in strictly alphabetical order, but someone who shall remain nameless has not yet supplied biographical details...]

Andrew says that when he was about 11 his teacher told him to read more. Since he hated the Enid Blyton and Hardy Boys [no comment] books which were all they had at school, he rooted around at home and found a battered secondhand copy of Heinlein's *Door into Summer*. That was it. His bedroom is now full of secondhand copies of *Door into Summer* - sorry, SF paperbacks; his parents threaten to throw him out if he doesn't get rid of them. He promises to do so - sometime...

He first heard of the Brum Group in 1986 at a library when he was taking back some overdue SF books (Andrew says he keeps the entire West Midlands Public Library service running with his fines). He came to the October meeting, and having heard Snoo Wilson talking (yawn) [Snooze Wilson?] nearly didn't come again. But he did, as we know.

His first con was *Fifteencon*, where, he says, he experienced the Nufan's thrill of meeting an author. "Gosh, wow, I actually spoke to Brian Aldiss!" His second was *Novacon 17*, where he experienced the average fannish delights of room parties and drinking.

Outside of fandom Andrew has been studying English, History and Politics for 'A' level. He says they have taught him three things: "Literature is full of writers saying what is wrong with the world but giving no solutions; History tells us that the world's always been awful; Politics is full of people trying to keep it that way. Thank heaven for SF - an island of insanity in a sea of . . . insanity. I've come to the conclusion that the world is a giant tea bag. We are either being strained or getting stewed."

His aims for the future: "A job requiring heavy drinking, frequent talking and the company of strange people with stranger ideas about the world. I didn't know whether to become an active fan or Prime Minister." I - er - *think* he made the right choice, don't you?

FUTURE PROGRAMME:

September: John Jarrold (plus - perhaps - a surprise event). October: Debate with Birmingham University SF Society. November: Gwyneth Jones. December: What do YOU want - ?

THE
ANDROMEDA

TOP TEN

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

1. *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* - Douglas Adams, Star.
2. *Deluge Driver* - Alan Dean Foster, NEL.
3. *Nemesis* - Louise Cooper, Unwin.
4. *Necroscope II* - Brian Lumley, Grafton.
5. *The Darkest Road* - Guy Gavriel Kay, Unwin.
6. *Witches of Karres* - James Schmitz, VGSF.
- 7= *Lords of the Middle Dark* - Jack Chalker, NEL.
- 7= *Time Trap* - David Dvorkin (*Star Trek*), Titan.
9. *Agent of Byzantium* - Harry Turtledove, NEL.
- 10= *Legion of Videssos* - Harry Turtledove, Arrow.
- 10= *Great Sky River* - Gregory Benford, VGSF.
- 10= *Malady of Magicks* - Craig Shaw Gardner, Headline.

The Top Five Hardcover:

1. *Cradle* - Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee, Gollancz.
2. *The Haunted* - James Herbert, NEL (NB. only the £45 edition now in Andromeda!)
- 3= *Mona Lisa Overdrive* - William Gibson, Gollancz.
- 3= *Nick and The Glimmung* - Philip K. Dick, Gollancz.
5. *Disaster!* - L. Ron Hubbard, New Era.

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 Tim Groome for artwork, to Chris and William for their contributions - and to all book reviewers, of course.

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 LEICESTER GROUP JOINS BSFG

The Leicester SF Group has now officially affiliated with the Brum Group. The LSFG is a small, friendly society which meets on the first Friday of each month, at the Rainbow and Dove pub, 155 Charles Street near Leicester city centre at 8.00pm. For more information contact George Clark at 71 Wolverton Road, Leicester LE3 2AJ: phone 0533 823405.

NEWS FROM ICELAND

I never thought I'd see the first man to 'walk' in space walking round in his underpants and a striped T-shirt, but there he was: Alexei Leonov in the flesh, crammed into a small hut with a dozen other Russians and a similar number of American artists, one Canadian and one British (guess who). It was at Landmannalaugar, where there is a hot natural pool to bathe in, which we did, at midnight - it was still light.

Leonov is an excellent space artist whose style, although he paints in oils, often rather thickly (impasto), is not too far from that of Western space artists. Davidoff Vyacheslav also has a very tight graphic style, and Retrov Alexander (Sacha to his friends) paints amazing pictures in a variety of styles, from surrealistic to hyper-realistic.

The rest of the artists aren't really space artists by our definition. They are not interested in rendering the planets or space hardware accurately; their minds are on the more metaphysical aspects of the grandeur of the Cosmos, the great adventure of Man going into space, and so forth. Some of the US artists are planning collaborations. It will be interesting to see the results... As for me, I'm going to do a joint piece with Kara Szathmary. No, he's not Russian - he's the Canadian! We decided that it was appropriate, as we were the only 'odd ones out'.

By the way, if you're thinking of going to Iceland, make it soon. It's starting to get commercialised as more tourists move in. A great pity, since in 1981 it was still almost completely natural. (If Pam Wells reads this, have a good time - it's still great!)

CONSPIRACY '87 LATEST

(From last month's Jophan Report #019, held over due to late post.) Science Fiction Conventions Ltd., the company formed by the committee of the 1987

Worldcon - *Conspiracy '87*, has managed, temporarily, to block moves to force it into liquidation. But the directors must find nearly £6,500 to clear its remaining debts and mail more than 1,600 hardcover programme books to convention members.

Two of the convention's major creditors, the Brighton Corporation (which runs the Conference Centre) and the Metropole Group (owners of the main con hotel), refused to wait for payment. On 5 May, Science Fiction Conventions Ltd. received a demand for £16,892.92 from the Metropole Group, threatening a winding-up order unless the account was settled within 21 days. The Brighton Corporation made similar moves.

The directors of SFCLtd had resigned themselves to bankruptcy, until Brum Group member Tim Stannard, who is the convention's legal representative, on realising that the company was only £6,439 short of paying all of its bills (3,000 if the cost of mailing the leftover programme books could be met elsewhere) urged that they demand a stay of financial execution.

The courts were finally persuaded to delay issuing the winding-up writs; however, the committee must raise the money by December. Linda Pickersgill is co-ordinating the 'bail-out campaign' and Mike Christie is launching an appeal to raise the money to mail out the programme books. Because of the ill-feeling in fandom towards the Metropole Group, the committee is at pains to point out that the majority of the money is needed to repay fans, such as the £700 owed to Rob Jackson. The official press release, which will appear in Mike Christie's fanzine *A Free Lunch*, also highlights the long-term problems the debts may fuel: "If Britain is ever to think of hosting another worldcon or SF convention of any size, we must see that our (company) name is clear for the future."

Donations to the main fund should be forwarded to Linda Pickersgill at: 7a Lawrence Road, South Ealing, London W5 4XJ (cheques to *Conspiracy '87*). The address for donations to the postage appeal (cheques to *Conspiracy Programme Book Fund*) is: Mike Christie, Ty-Lyn, Llangorse, Powys, Wales LD3 7UD.

Leaving that subject, the deadlines for the next US to UK TAFF race have just been announced. They are: Nomination deadline - 1 October 1988; Voting deadline - 15 January 1989. The winner(s) will be attending the Eastercon, *Contrivance*, in Jersey in 1989.

7AD
 (WHY? BECAUSE NOW I DON'T HAVE TO STUFF
 A FLYER INTO EVERY ENVELOPE!)

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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 PLAYER OF GAMES by Iain M Banks; Macmillan; 309 pages; £11.95 H/B.
Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

Consider *Phlebas* was an unruly first offering, which sprawled as uncontrollably as the worlds it portrayed. Undoubtedly a good read, it suffered from being over-long, whilst lacking a sufficiently large cast of believable characters to sustain the breadth of his vision. I'm glad to report that *The Player of Games* confirms the promise shown in that first SF novel. It's tightly written, and the characters are much more sharply observed, even the drones, a rare enough feat. The novel revolves around Jernau Gurgeh, a brilliant but bored games player, who is offered the ultimate challenge by the Culture organisation, to play a game which is closely modelled on the very rules of existence itself. Gurgeh's mounting dissatisfaction with his life, and his increasing boredom, are brilliantly portrayed, whilst the taut pacing increases the tension of the final game beyond belief. It would be unfair to reveal the final twist of the plot, but things are not always quite what they seem. I would certainly recommend this to anyone who likes their action coupled with intelligent plotting and excellent writing.

CONSIDER PHLEBAS by Iain M Banks; Orbit; 471 pages; £4.95 paperback;
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

O.K, so this is the first Banks' book I've read and it's so good I instantly went out and bought all the others (to Dave Holmes' delight). I understand this is his first SF novel, and while a lot of the ideas are familiar, the overall texture and how it's put together provide a unique book. The story revolves around one particular event in the war between the Idiran (self/religious orientated) and the Culture (computer/machine based) empires. The incident is the "loss", and the attempts to recover, a "Mind" - an extremely advanced and powerful computer type entity used to control spaceships by agents of both sides and is the story of one such agent, Horza, a humanoid from the Idiran sector. After a series of adventures Horza arrives on the planet where the Mind has gone to ground - not easy as it's out of bounds because of treaties. Whether or not he finds the Mind, and how he goes about this, provide an entertaining climax to a brilliant novel. Buy this now!

THE SONGBIRDS OF PAIN by Gary Kilworth; Unwin; 177 pages; £2.95 P/B.
Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This collection of short stories by this years Novacon G.O.H is certainly impressive. Over a dozen of them, and the settings range from Arabian deserts to Eastern England. The author must be widely travelled indeed, if, as he indicates in the notes, the settings are drawn from personal experience. They are all "inner space" rather than hard S.F and are easily accessible. My favourites were *Blind Windows* (a lost people), *The Dissemblers* (a marriage of souls), *Almost Heaven* (immortality) and *Gods Cold Lips* (a man's experiences in the body of a tiger). Some powerful stuff here, and very highly recommended.

GHOST KING by David Gemmell; Legend; 266 pages; £11.95 hardback;
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

In this fantasy novel, David Gemmell has moved away from the format of his earlier novels. The principal character in Ghost King is Thuro, whose father, the High King of post-Roman Britain, is treacherously killed. Hiding in the mountains, Thuro has only the winter to change from a weak scholarly boy into a warrior, and discover his father's sword, before he can save Britain from her enemies. If this sounds a little familiar, it is, but don't dismiss it just because of this; it is also very different. The enchanters, and there are several, are immortals whose power comes from small golden stones called Sipstrassi. These stones form a tenuous link between this novel and Gemmell's last one, *Wolf in Shadow*, which was set at the other end of history in a post-catastrophe world. The characters are less rounded than earlier novels as Gemmell does not feel as comfortable with the younger protagonist. The novel does introduce some interesting ideas, which could be developed further.

FIRECHILD by Jack Williamson; Methuen; 377 pages; £3.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Devastated by some mutant virus, the labs of Engene come to represent the evil that is genetic manipulation. So government agencies and religious maniacs are desperate to lay their hands on the tiny pink worm that survived. Because, when it changes, the worm could mean the end of mankind, or the beginning. Written with loving care, Firechild is grabbing and fast moving, yet thoughtful. The main characters are different, credible, and the good guys are likeable. I wanted to read it at a sitting. As life is, I enjoyed it over several days, and no short review could do justice to the complex originality of this excellent book.

THE INFLUENCE by Ramsey Campbell; Century; 234 pages; £11.95 hardback;
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Campbell's latest supernatural horror novel is his best yet. It's set in the author's home territory around Merseyside, which is lovingly described, as in several previous novels. Here a peculiar family inhabits a tall Victorian house in Liverpool. On the top floor is Queenie, bed ridden and dying; it's her house. The rest of the rooms are occupied by her niece, Alison, with husband Derek and eight year old daughter Rowan. Rowan comes under the influence of her great aunt, Queenie, even after Queenie's death. This is faster moving and more cleverly presented than some of Campbell's novels; it's a very good read with a masterful use of atmosphere and a few superb moments of horror.

SHARDS OF HONOUR by Lois McMaster Bujold; Headline; 313 pp; £2.99 P/B.
Reviewed by Andy Wright.

For some reason the publishers have tried to sell this book as a blood and thunder space opera. The plot concerns Captain Cordelia Naismith, who manages to get caught up in the political machinations of two rival interstellar powers. Against this background she meets and eventually falls in love with a general on the opposite side. Both find themselves torn between loyalty to their own governments and to each other, and through this conflict the author seems to be saying something about the relationship between loyalty, honour and self respect. Unfortunately this does not seem to come off, which detracts a little from what I found to be an enjoyable book. The novel is more of a romance than the war epic promised by the blurb on the back and is well written with an interesting enough plot to make it a good read for a wide range of tastes.

TIME OUT OF MIND by John.R.Maxim; Legend; 502 pages; £4.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

In present day New York, TV executive Jonathon Forbin is haunted by someone else's memories of murders. These memories link him to 1888, and to a feud which has already wiped out three generations of his family. He may be the next unless he can make the connection with the ancestor in his head. The story is slow and difficult to follow at first, but the pace soon picks up and the complexities are worked out with meticulous accuracy and a wealth of authentic detail. I couldn't wait to find out what would happen and the above average length of the book was no obstacle to my enjoyment. Highly recommended, especially for anybody who likes something a little bit out of the ordinary.

THE NIMROD HUNT by Charles Sheffield; Headline; 401 pages; £3.50 P/B.
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Man, in his wisdom, develops Morgan Constructs (a type of security device of symbiotic form combining organic and inorganic components) to protect explored space. These promptly escape, causing crises, as they are considered dangerous by the other members of the Stellar Group. Teams are set up to track down the Constructs and destroy them. This is the starting point of a very well written story. As with others of his books he includes an interesting S.F device, here it is the "Mattin Link", which instantaneously links places for the transfer of messages/materials etc. How the teams are formed and trained, the interaction and motives of the human supervisors and the "real thing" provide an entertaining story with a twist in its tail. Read this, if only for the S.F content. Highly recommended.

A HORSEWOMAN IN GODSLAND by Claudia J Edwards; Headline; 299 pages; £2.99 paperback; Reviewed by Andy Taylor.

Despite a promising start, Edwards' second novel for Headline leaves you with the feeling that you've read it somewhere before. Admittedly, there are a few good ideas, principally that of a true theocracy where the populace are kept at bay by the priesthood's manipulation of supernaturals and the like. Adelinda is the fiery, independent horsewomen of the title, who travels to Godsland on business to deliver horses to Bishop An-Shai. The latter, of course, is totally bewildered by the thought of a woman who can think for herself, and so sets out to master her, by frightening her into submission through use of the "Overmind". Luckily for Adelinda (and the author) Orvet, one of her party, is a man of hidden talents and solves the entire plot almost before it starts. He may seem like a mild mannered stable hand but ----. The end was a bit rushed, but on the whole it was enjoyable.

DEMONS LAW: TALES OF THE BARD VOL TWO by Michael Scott; Sphere; 249 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

These days it is rare for the separate volumes of a fantasy series to stand on their own. On the whole this one does. There are two seemingly separate but parallel plot strands. In one, Paedur, the Bard and Champion of the Old Faith, has ventured into the Silent Wood, the domain of Mannam the Death Lord. His aim is to persuade Mannam to return to life two of his friends. In the real world, Prince Kutur, aided by the Weapon Master Owen, begins the campaign to win the throne from his half brother, the Emperor of the Seven Nations. It is Paedur's wanderings in the spirit world that give this novel sparkle, for, though Kutur's story is the stuff that legends are made of, it is not original. The combination of the two provides a well written interesting mix. Worth reading.