

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

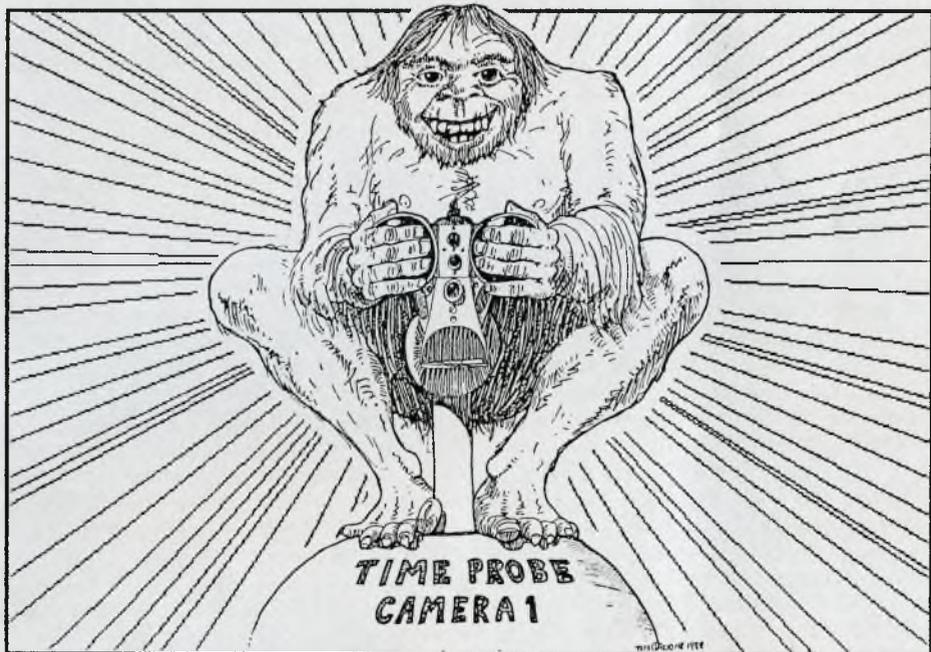
September
1988

Issue
No.204

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



T.M. Groome (+ P.A.M.I.)

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 16 September at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

This month's Guest Speaker is:

John Jarrold

We have authors, we have fans, sometimes we even have scientists to talk to us. And occasionally we like to have a publisher to give their side of the story, and to answer the slanderous remarks made about them by the authors... This month is one of those occasions. John Jarrold has been SF Editor at Futura for about the last six months, but he has the distinction of having been a fan for years.

John used to be a Librarian, but has attended conventions, on and off, for the last 15 years and has edited his own fanzines. He is now in the enviable position of being able to choose which SF books get published. He admits to preferring hard science fiction to fantasy (hooray!), and, I'm told, does an ace Ben Elton impression. Come along (and bring your MSS?) for a good evening.

Last Month

Iain M. Banks

One of the biggest audiences this year saw a 'performance' by Iain Menzies (pron. 'Mingus') Banks. The Chairman said he needed no introduction, so didn't give him one, for which he thanked her. Iain revealed that *The Wasp Factory* was not the first book wot he wrote. He wrote a novel of twice that length - 140,000 words - 18 years ago, when he was 16, entitled *The Hungarian Lift Jet*. It was full of sex and violence, about which he knew nothing. His school chums and English teacher were unimpressed, saying that the sex and violence were unconvincing... It was written on Admiralty paper in pencil. His next epic was typed double-spaced on foolscap with no margins. This was an attempt to write the type of book in which the characters develop a life of their own. It was a satire - full of bad puns - about a future Sino-Chinese war, in which the USA comes in on the side of the Chinese and is given Mongolia. He actually sent it to publishers. His next three works were SF.

His first five published books were written in the order: *The Player of Games*; *Wasp Factory*; *Consider Phlebas*; *Walking on Glass*; *The Bridge*. Iain would like to produce a coffee table book on dam building (I'm all for that - I used to love building dams; the people who live by the local park are still wondering why their gardens flooded in 1951) but so far has had no takers. *Walking on Glass* contains what is technically known as 'a mistake': Iain has a standard, 4-page, single-spaced letter to send to readers who discover it. From the way he described it, I'm surprised they ever do. He once wrote a book called *O* (I thought that was a band), or is it *Oh* or *Eau*? His editor, on reading it, smashed a marble table with his fist. *O* was cannibalised for *The Bridge*. *Espedair Street* he described as a slightly sentimental rock novel. Some rock writers panned it, others said it rang true as a story of a 70s rock band with fantasies of having vast amounts of money and nothing to spend it on but drugs and fast cars. As he says, countless rock stars have been assaulted by hotel bedrooms. I've missed a lot out, but it's not easy translating that thick accent, laughing at the jokes and trying to write it down...

ON THE
BIG
 & SMALL
 SCREEN

This column hasn't appeared for a month or two - mainly because there was nothing out worth reviewing. As far as SF is concerned, that's still true. But then, SF fans have open minds - don't they?

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

Saturday afternoon. The 'phone rings. I give my number. "Correct," say the dulcet tones of David Holmes, Esq. "Tomorrow, 11am," he continues. "Tomorrow? That's Sunday," say I. "God, you've got more brains than I thought," says he. I should have known it was going to be one of those weekends, earlier. All I wanted to do was go to the Cashpoint and the post box, and I found myself cut off by squadrons of police motorcycles with flashing blue lights, escorting the Kellogg's Tour of Britain. It's amazing what they can do on a bowl of cornflakes.

Sunday. Four minutes to eleven. Dave's face grins out of a red Volkswagon which vanishes up a side street taking the face with it but leaving the grin behind. (I don't blame it.) The manager of the Futurist is ushering in the last of the patrons to his special screening (no one under 15 admitted: ha!), insisting that they put on their mask of Betelgeuse before being allowed to enter. I thought Betelgeuse was a red supergiant star, but my hopes are about to be dispelled. The mask is a three-quarter view of a face with wild, white hair, which makes everyone look as if half their face is missing. By the time the film's over, it probably is.

Roll the Credits: *BEETLEJUICE*. Director: Tim Burton. Starring Geena (The Fj) Davis, Alec Baldwin, Jeffrey Jones, Catherine O'Hara, with Michael Keaton as Betelgeuse. Etc.

Well this film is certainly different. That much was obvious in the first few minutes. It was a blockbuster in the States, and may do as well here, though the audience wasn't exactly rocking with

laughter. (Bernie, sitting next to me, was.) For this is a sort of American comedy about death and the hereafter. It's too light to be black comedy, and too zany to be horrific.

Adam and Barbara Maitland are a cute, happily married couple who live in a big house where he has a model of the town in the attic. I loved the *Tarantula*-type spider on the model, and the fly which screams "Help meeeeee!" - in fact it was little throwaways like that that largely made the film for me - but then I'm always suspicious of gross American humour. I'm a *Python* man myself. Anyway, they drive into town, crash into the bridge (that dog's a star), and find themselves back in their house with a *Handbook for the Newly Deceased...*

The house is sold to a real-estate speculator, Charles Deetz, who moves in with his arty, thinks-she's-a-sculptress wife and black-clad gothish daughter, who turns out to be the only one who can see our ghostly heroes. As the house is re-designed and re-decorated and the attic - their last refuge - is broken into, they decide to drive out the new tenants with spooky tactics. Finding themselves too new at the game (though there's a rather hilarious if illogical mime version of Harry Belafonte's *Banana Boat Song*, performed without their volition by the guests at a dinner party) they turn first to nether-world bureaucrats, then to Betelgeuse, 'The Ghost With The Most' - a gross, tasteless cowboy 'bio-exorcist'. Who doesn't exactly help.

The SEX are good, though it's not Spielberg, and Joe Dante might have tightened the humour. Oh, it has a happy ending. Weird, but worth a visit.



(the small screen)

CONTINUED

VIDEO NEWS IN BRIEF

You may find quite a few science fictional looking films in your local Video Library at present. Are they worth watching? The following may help (or, if you're feeling starved of media SF, you may choose to ignore my comments - at your risk.)

The Stepford Children. This is more a sequel to the original *The Stepford Wives* than to *The Return of the latter*, since the oh-so-perfect housewives (and their children) are androids rather than being kept in line by taking pills. But it's more of the same.

Earthstar Voyager. A cliché-ridden space opera, with a ship manned mainly by teenagers who manage to outwit their bent Commander. There's a bionic android who's programmed only for destruction, but who is foiled by an emotion (love, of course). Avoid.

Space Island. An overlong Spaghetti-Space (ie. Italian-made) film with the rather extraordinary intention of translating *Treasure Island* into futuristic terms, complete with the names: Long John Silver, Blind Pugh and all. It 'stars' Anthony Quinn and Ernest Borgnine, who must have been desperate for the money. What irritates me about these films is the money and effort that has been put into special effects, all wasted on a puerile story... Then there is:

Star Trek: The Next Generation. Since the first episode (reviewed in the March issue) at least six three-quarter hour episodes have been released - two per video. The titles are: *The Naked Hour/Code of Honour; Last Outpost/Where No-one Has Gone Before; Lonely Among Us/The Battle.* They are all standard *Star Trek*-type episodes, some strangely familiar, some better and more original than others. If you were into the old TV series you'll probably want to see these - at least once. Oh - guess what: they've introduced a teenager into the cast - Wes, the Doctor's son.

The Boy Who could Fly. Certainly not SF, but if you're young at heart you're bound to enjoy this charming little fantasy about an autistic boy who can't speak, doesn't react to stimuli, but thinks he's an aeroplane. He is befriended by a pretty female neighbour, who prompts some reactions... If it weren't for the trailer on the TV commercial you would probably wonder, until quite near the end of the film, whether he really *can* fly or whether it's 'all in the mind'. But, as usual, they give away all the best bits.

Do YOU know of any other releases?

CONREP by

Stephen Rogers: ALBACON '88

Any convention with Heinz Wolfe (of *Great egg Race* fame) as a GoH has to be a little out of the ordinary, and *Albacon '88* certainly was. It began with an Opening Ceremony which consisted mainly of an auction of two pieces of apple pie and an orange out of C.J.Cherryh's drink, and ended with a 'religious' service of readings from such SF bibles as *Trauma 2020* and *Sunday Sport*. Can this be bettered? 'Fantastic and Incredible Stories brought to you by the *Sunday Sport*' certainly tried! The panel and audience analysed various *Sunday Sport* stories and then wrote one... [See the extract elsewhere in this Newsletter. Al Bacon - get it?]

Some of the costumes in the Fancy Dress were also quite strange, and the event ended with a sponsored strip by one contestant, for Talking Books for the Blind.

Both Guests of Honour were friendly and interesting, though Heinz Wolfe seemed a bit bemused by the amount of drink consumed! For those of us who thought that flavinoids were monsters from *Doctor Who* there was 'I am Joe Fan's Liver', a humorous talk about the effects of alcohol and paracetamol on the liver. I, for one, gave up paracetamol immediately.

There was an excellent video programme, with four rooms operating virtually continuously, showing countless episodes of *Star Trek* (new and old), *Doctor Who*, *Blake's Seven* and more. The only common complaints were that the bar kept running out of bitter and cider, and that programme items were consistently late and liable to change at a moment's notice - confusing even to the participants!

All in all a thoroughly enjoyable (if exhausting) convention with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, that seemed to be very successful.

BANKS'
Special
PARACETAMOL





David B. Wake: Treasurer

David is 25, he is the Chairbeing of the Birmingham University Science Fiction Society and he is a freelance programmer, house husband and writer, despite what has been written about him in other biographies. [NB. David *did* write this himself, saving me the trouble of inventing libellous details. -Ed.]

He first encountered science fiction during a conversation in the Lower School Library:

"Wake!" [That's his name, not a command. I think.] "You must read more. What sort of things do you like?"

After wracking his brains, our hero replied: "Science fiction," as it seemed marginally less boring than anything else. [Enid Blyton and the Hardy Boys?] An intensive course of John Wyndham followed.

Much later the same teacher wrote at the bottom of an assessment: "Stop writing these Space Operas."

His first contact with the Brum Group was an invitation to a meeting at the Ivy Bush - remember then? He declined [so doesn't]. His first convention was a Novacon - though he withdrew from fandom during those cold Coventry years.

He was recently involved in the publication of a magnificent tome of wondrous works [I told you - *he* wrote this] called *The Drabble Project*, containing such famous authors as Isaac Asimov, Dave Hardy, Larry Niven, Bob Shaw and many, many others. One or two are still available, I believe. [Books, not authors.]

David is currently working on a science fiction *Play by Mail* game and looking after the baby. His aims for the future: "I would like to be able to devote more time to writing and have a lie-in."

["The baby", for readers who have just joined us, is Rachel Roma, who joined the human race on 29 January 1988, and doesn't read SF. Yet.]

Andromeda Top Ten: an Apology
Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency is published by Pan, not Star as stated last month.
Sorry, Pan! (I won't say whose fault it was...)

New Members: July

No, that's not a misprint - this one slipped through the net. Thomas Eddleston joined us in July. He lives at Rubery, is 29, and heard of us through the *What's On*.

Thomas enjoys most types of SF, plus fantasy and SF-related music (a future reviewer - ?) and his favourite authors are Moorcock, Shekley and Shaw.

THE

ANDROMEDA

TOP TEN

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

1. *Dr. Who: Wheel in Space* - Star.
2. *Star Trek - The Next Generation: The Peacemakers* - Gene DeWeese, Titan.
3. *Being a Green Mother* - Piers Anthony, Grafton.
4. *Replay* - Ken Grimwood, Grafton.
5. *Star Trek: The Three-Minute Universe* - Barbara Paul, Titan.
6. *The Sign of Chaos* - Roger Zelazny, Sphere.
7. *Dr. Who: The Underwater Menace* - Star.
8. *Hammer Slammers: At Any Price* - David Drake, Legend.
9. *The Stainless Rat Gets Drafted* - Harry Harrison, Bantam.
10. *Ancient Light* - Mary Gentle, Legend.

The Top Five Hardcovers:

1. *The Player of Games* - Iain Banks, Macmillan.
2. *The Haunted* - James Herbert, NEL.
3. *Mona Lisa Overdrive* - William Gibson, Gollancz.
4. *Cradle* - Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee, Gollancz.
5. *East of Laughter* - R.A.Lafferty, Morrigan.

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Thanks this month go to Tim Groome for artwork, to Maureen and Stephen for their contributions - and to all book reviewers, of course. And to the Post Office, if they ever get round to delivering this...

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!)

A.C.C.: A MEDICAL ODYSSEY

On 13 July this year Arthur C. Clarke went into Johns Hopkins Hospital for a diagnosis of the neuro-muscular problem which has reduced his mobility since 1984. *En route* through London he recorded a TV special, to be screened later this year, with Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking, who has Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, is confined to a wheelchair, can speak only by computer - and is a mathematical genius.

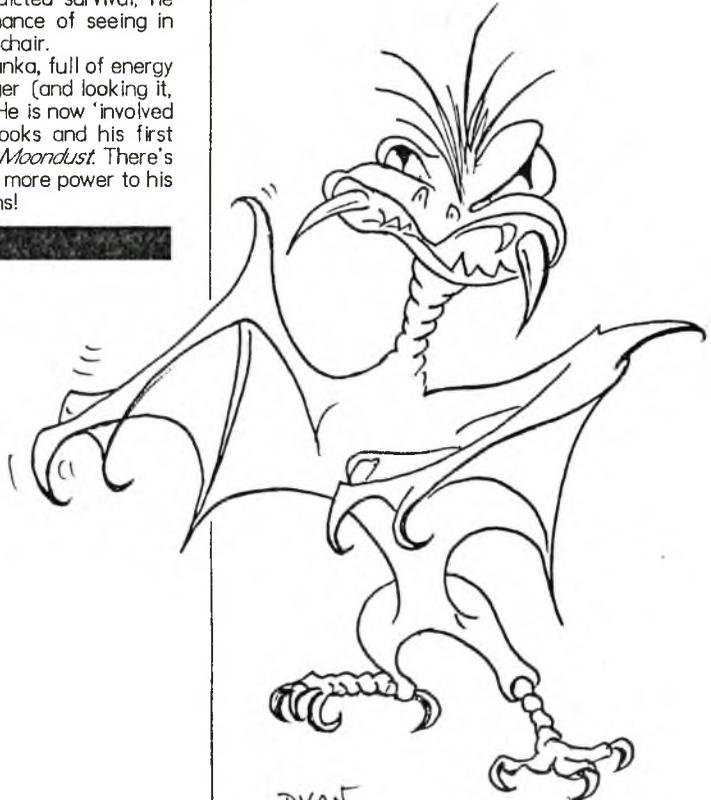
It had been feared that Arthur was suffering from the same condition, but he has now been reassured by the news that he has Post-polio Syndrome, which is much less serious. Instead of having only 2-5 years predicted survival, he says he now has a good chance of seeing in 2001, if only from a wheelchair.

He is now back in Sri Lanka, full of energy and feeling ten years younger (and looking it, his brother Fred tells me). He is now 'involved with' fourteen (yes, 14) books and his first TV fiction series - *A Fall of Moondust*. There's no stopping the man - and more power to his computer finger, say his fans!

WE
REGRET
THAT
OWING
TO
THE
POSTAL
DISPUTE
THERE
IS
NO
JOPHAN
REPORT
THIS
MONTH

- SORRY
FOLKS!!!-

"WHERE'S THIS ALAN
TUFFIN? - I'LL
SHOW HIM TOUGH!"





Record Review

by
Dave Hardy

QUIZ PRIZE

There is still an unclaimed Quiz Prize left over from the the April meeting. If this is yours (and you can prove it), please see a Committee member.

OK, this isn't a science fiction record - I suppose. Up to now we don't what *is* - or whether such an animal exists. But look: there's art and there's SF art. Right? There's also Western art - cowboys and all that stuff, which is very popular in certain quarters. (If you get a chance, take a look at the work of Frank C. McCarthy and tell me if he isn't brilliant.) And there's Country & Western music - nobody argues with that, do they? (True, there are different types, but so what.) So if we can't have science fiction music, we darn well should have...

Anyway, "whether such an animal exists" is appropriate in this case. It is also quite a coincidence that William brought up the name of Kenny Young in his letter last month, as composer of *Under the Boardwalk* and the music for the *Silverworld* movie. Because only a week or so later Kenny rang me to discuss another project; and he has also just brought out an album, with some friends, under the name of

TRANSMISSIONS by Gentlemen Without Weapons (A&M AMA5204)

The point about the animals is that this album is basically about species that are becoming extinct. As the sleeve notes state, a species becomes extinct about every nine hours, or it may be as often as every three hours. By the end of the century it may be every 20 minutes.

The doubt exists because, of the 5-30 million species on our planet, only 1.7 million have been scientifically investigated. By the year 2050 one in four of all plant species alive today is expected to be extinct ... and how many valuable drugs will never have a chance to be discovered? (25% of today's drugs originate in wild plants.) Well, to see the rest of this grim prophesy, get the album. There are notes on the Rain Forests, on Soil, Acid Rain, Pesticides, the Ozone Layer, the Greenhouse Effect, Nuclear Waste, etc.

The future of Life on Earth is certainly a subject for science fiction, so I feel justified in including it here. The other interesting thing about this album is that *not a conventional instrument has been used on it*. (How about that, Maureen?) The musicians have used animal noises recorded on location, oil drums, bouncing softballs - anything that makes a noise, fed into Fairlights. But you'd hardly guess, as the result is rhythmic, melodic - and the lyrics are, ultimately, optimistic.

Here is the cutting referred to in Stephen Rogers' conrep of Albacon. Pretty much par for the course in media reporthage of SF conventions, I suppose...

Boffins baffled by our stories

A CONVENTION of Sunday Sport readers discovered last night just how difficult it was to write a story for their favourite soar-away newspaper.

It took more than 700 of them over an hour to come up with a bizarre tale - and it wasn't true.

The sci-fi fanatics, led by wacky TV professor Heinz Wolfe, spent the whole week-end analysing the strange but true stories that appear every week in Britain's fastest growing newspaper.

"Without doubt Sunday Sport was voted the best paper in the land", said conference organiser Al Bacon, 29.

"But I must admit, we found it impossible to check out some of your scoops like the World War Two Bomber found on the moon and the alien who choked to death on a cheeseburger."

Al insisted their conference at Glasgow's plush Central Hotel was treated deadly seriously.

OH, REALLY?

OH YEAH?

YUK!
TITTER!

HA!

WHO?

IT'S ALL
TRUE...

OF COURSE



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 HOUR OF THE THIN OX by Colin Greenland; Unwin; 186 pages; £2.95 p/back.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Or "Fantasy Goes To Vietnam". This story follows (in alternate chapters) the careers of the rich heiress Jillian Currum in Bryland, and the Imperial Geometer Ky Varan and his apprentice Bi Tok in Escaly. At first there seems no connection between the two groups of characters, but Bryland and Escaly come to blows in the jungle inhabited by the savage satyr-like Belanesi, and they are forced to co-operate to survive. I found it hard to get to grips with this book. The preliminary part of the book went on too long with little happening, and ultimately it failed to engage my interest.

THE JADE DEMONS QUARTET by Robert E. Vardeman; N.E.L.; 831 pages; £4.95 p/b.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a compilation of a series of four books in one volume. Kesira the killer nun and her talking bird set out on a Quest to destroy four Demons (that's one per book). It goes on and on and on. If you liked "Battlefield Earth" then you will enjoy this. If, on the other manipulator, your brain is functional, then it is only useful as a doorstep.

THE DORBOTT OF VACUO OR HOW TO LIVE WITH THE FLEXUS QUO by Patrick Woodruffe; Paper Tiger; 128 pages; £12.95 hb; £7.95 sb;
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Sub-titled "A Tale of Utterly Cosmic Insignificance", Patrick Woodruffe's book lifts the spirits and stimulates the imagination. Set in Valcuo where "all those things may come to pass that elsewhere may be regarded as fiction, as myth or (worst of all) as escapist wish fulfillment" we find the Dorbott and the Great Swamp living at their leisure. Unfortunately, the planet is all "chaos, disorder, flux" and in fact terra infirma to the degree that large chunks of land wander all over the place! The story revolves around the Dorbott and his attempt to have a quiet life, which backfires with alarming results. Full (having 160 colour pictures) of Woodruffe's imaginative artwork plus this hilarious tale makes this a package well worth the money. Ingenious.

HARDWIRED by Walter Jon Williams; Futura; 343 pages; £3.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

If you can't afford *The Mona Lisa Overdrive* in hardback, you could do a lot worse than try *Hardwired*. It has all the popular ingredients of cyberpunk: - heroes who plug into computers, heroines with unlikely weapons implanted in unlikely places, sidekicks on ROM, relatives on addictive drugs, mutated diseases, flashy brand name equipment and more. Cowboy smuggles technical components across a fragmented United States in a heavily armed hovercraft, until he finds that the Orbital corporations which enforce the technical embargo are also backing the smugglers. Sarah is a corporation assassin, until they decide it is cheaper to kill her than pay her. They find themselves on the run, but already making plans to strike back. Great fun, and well written.

SKYFIRE by Bernard King; Sphere; 243 pages; £3.50 paperback;
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This starts with a hotch-potch of bits left over from the previous two volumes in this trilogy, from an author who doesn't seem to care about writing well. Like the "*Destroying Angel*" and "*Timefighters*", the book begins with a series of historical fragments which have no differentiating style either from each other or from the bulk of the narrative. This time the hapless detective Robert Ferrow is caught up with a government project and Pythonius Meers, the mysterious Keeper, has a plan to end the threats of the negative, evil side of the powers he serves. There are actually one or two interesting ideas buried within this volume but the tedium of wading through the rest to find them is not worth the effort.

THE ICE MONKEY by M. John Harrison; Unwin; 144 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This set of seven stories (75-88) proves M.J.H to be a distinctive writer of evocative short stories. They range through a variety of settings but all have a rather 'English' feel to them. They are full of tremendously sharp detail. His interest in rock climbing is used to good effect in 'The Ice Monkey' and 'Running Down' but he is also as descriptive in his city settings, 'The Incalling' and 'Engara'. This a beautifully written collection, Fantasy rather than S.F, with material covering bizarre rites, the discovery of God on the far side of the Moon, madness and psychic horror. Recommended.

HALF A GLASS OF MOONSHINE by Graham Dunstan Martin; Unwin Hyman; 179 pages; £11.95 hardback.
Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

A paranormal thriller taking as its central thesis the problematic theory that ".....consciousness and matter are reciprocally related" or in less ornate terms - does mind control matter? Kirsty Cunliffe, a researcher into the paranormal, thinks that it does, and her tenets are given some credence when her husband Justin "dies" in a plane crash yet is seen transacting business in an Oxford bank a fortnight later. Hallucination or reality?. Mr Dunstan Martin leaves one to draw one's own conclusions: but his prose is rich and descriptive, lucidly evoking scenes of semi-rural life in the groves of academe: he is also rather good on atmosphere - indispensable for a novel that deals with the interplay of logic and intuition, causation and the aleatoric, nightmare and sanity. Witty, atmospheric and very stylish, *Half a Glass of Moonshine* is as intelligent as it is assured.

LYTHANDE by Marion Zimmer Bradley; Sphere; 238 pages; £2.99 Paperback.
Reviewed by Helena Bowles.

Five stories by Bradley and one by Vonda N. McIntyre revolving around the wandering musician-magician Lythande (originally appearing in Asprin's *Thieves World* series). Lythande is a woman cursed to forever conceal her sex from men or else lose her power and her life. The theme is handled with Bradley's usual competence and all are entertaining, lightweight but not fluffy, fantasy stories. A good, if undemanding, read.

CRYSTAL AND STEEL by Lyndan Darby; Unwin; 340 pages; £3.50 Paperback.
Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Oh dear! Another fantasy trilogy in the "outcast prince vows to regain throne from evil usurper and goes on quest" mould. The quest concerns three mystic objects a cloak, a gauntlet and a sword (isn't there always a sword?). These three objects in conjunction will bestow upon the user/wearer "All Power". Eider the Prince and his sidekicks (there's always some of them too!) go in quest of these objects to regain the throne from the usurper Zarratt. Definately boring and unoriginal, don't bother with this one unless you are an insomniac, it will almost certainly cure it.

SLOW FALL TO DAWN by Stephen Leigh; Headline; 165 pages; £2.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Andy Wright.

Neweden is a backwater world which is dominated by extended guilds. The book follows the fortunes of the Hoorka, the guild of assassins, as it attempts to preserve its neutrality despite the intrigues of two large guilds vying for power. The central character is the leader of the Hoorka, who is also trying to defend his position within the guild as he is assailed by doubt. There is a fair amount of diplomatic double-dealing and political intrigue between believable characters in what seems to be a well thought out universe. I was left with the impression that Mr Leigh has a much more detailed and politically complex universe waiting away from Neweden in the ruins of the fallen intersteller empire. Tantalising glimpses are given of this as the story (a little slowly at times) unfolds. The ending leaves a lot of possibilities open for what could be compelling sequel if handled properly. Not Hugo material but worth a read.

THE SILICON MAGE by Barbara Hambly; Unwin; 340 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

This, the concluding half of a fantasy novel, should not be read without enjoying *The Silent Tower*. Having returned to her own world, of computers and pollution and electricity and warm baths, Joanna Sheraton realises that not only has she wrongly betrayed the man she loves to his enemies but that her boy-friend in this world has been taken over by the Dark Mage Suraklin. Guilt feelings lead Joanna to follow Suraklin back across the void to try to correct her mistakes and try to prevent the entropic death of both worlds. It is a fast moving tale, blending aspects of contemporary America with a more traditional fantasy creation. On the whole it works well.

MEDUSA by Chris Achilleos (with text by Nigel Suckling); Paper Tiger; 144 pages; h/b £14.95; p/b £7.95;
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This volume must make Chris Achilleos the most prolific British artist in terms of books devoted to his work. It is the third such book, the previous offerings being *Beauty and the Beast* (1978) and *Sirens* (1986). Apparently these have sold over half a million copies, whether together or separately is not clear. In some ways each has improved on the last. *Beauty* was a collection of illustrations with hardly any text. *Sirens* contained interesting information on various commissions (but does contain more colour reproductions than the new book). *Medusa* is virtually a "how to do it" book, and contains many pages of pencil sketches and step-by-step illustrations in colour, showing how the paintings were constructed. It's a mine of information for any would-be fantasy artist - excellent stuff!

BURNING CHROME by William Gibson; Grafton; 220 pages; £2.95 paperback;
Reviewed by Andrew White.

This book contains all Gibson's short stories up to 1986. All have an eighties feel, up-to-date technology, whole economies dominated by the Japanese, America going into decline and Russia taking the lead in space exploration. Most of the characters are criminals involved in computer crime, living in the squalor of an overpopulated urban background. Potted versions of Count Zero and Neuromancer. Apart from the cyberspace concept (computer generated reality that programmers enter to communicate with each other) there aren't any new ideas here. The stories read like pop videos. Disjointed in a style which tries to be punchy, full of unusual images, but it occasionally becomes meaningless. In one story, "The Gernsback Continuum", Gibson derides the old writers of the thirties for making the future too bright and unrealistic. Gibson must consider himself a realist but I can't take seriously stories about Japanese assassins with molecule thin wires in their thumbs. He'd have to prove more versatile and intelligent than he has done in these stories before I'd give him so many awards.