

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

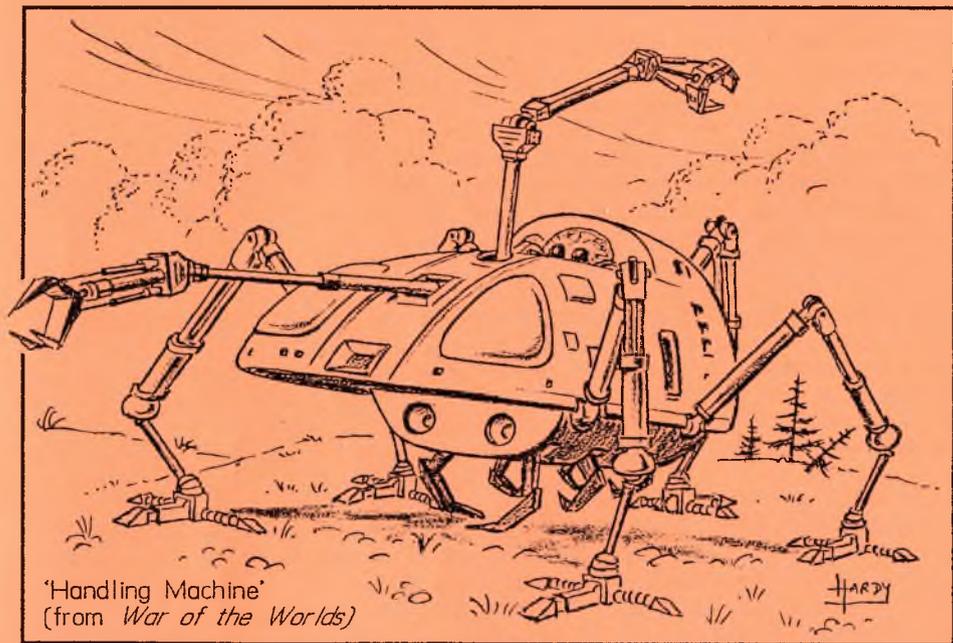
October
1988

Issue
No.205

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 PENGUIN (ex LADBROKE) 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 21 October at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

This month's Programme Item is:

A Debate with Birmingham University SF Society

This has become almost an annual event, and the losing team eagerly awaits its chance to get its own back! (In case you don't know, that's *us*; we won the first round, they won the last.) Rog Peyton and Pete Weston have been 'invited' to speak for the Brum Group; the University team will be led by Mike Ibeji, current Secretary of the University Society.

The Motion for debate is THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT FANTASY IS DILUTING SF, with our side being *for* the motion. See David B. Wake wearing a different hat (it's pink, orange and green with bobbles) as Chairbeing of the University SF (and fantasy) Society - the sixth since the society was formed. There is actually now a publication - *The Six Chairbeings* - more on this next month.

John Jarrold

Last Month

John started by saying that this time last week he was at the Worldcon in New Orleans, which had a BIG BAR a la British cons - but overpriced. He described it as a 'challenging experience', which may be why he spent most of the Friday drunk... John had been reading for publishers since the mid-70s; then in January this year he heard that Toby Roxburgh was leaving Futura, and stepped into his shoes (not literally) as SF editor. What he has enjoyed most is buying good books. He has bought SF and fantasy, but is, like many of us, fed up with the glut of fantasy that we have seen in the last 10 years. He also added that we often didn't need the first book in some of the 'series' that have appeared, let alone the second or third! And he thinks the cyberpunk revolution is over. John buys books that he would go into Andromeda to buy (if he were an ordinary mortal like us).

He revealed that SF editors are not, as we may think, deadly rivals: they phone each other up to say "congratulations - you bastard" when one of them gets a much coveted book. Terry Brooks is his best-selling author. He tends to publish a lot of US authors. Why? "UK authors are drab - there is no colour in their work. They write either 5th-hand Douglas Adams - terribly - or 5th-hand fantasy, or 1950s US science fiction." Johns says he wants 25 year-old authors whom he can take to lunch, then mould their work until they can mould it themselves. He's looking for good *hard* SF (but so are US publishers), but in the last 10-12 years there has been a lack of good new SF writers. He doesn't want to be parochial, though - he'll publish good UK or US SF. But he asks: "Where are the new UK writers to come from?" (Any offers?)

Chris Morgan pointed out that most SF editors just don't have the time to bring on new talent. John's answer to this was that it is the right thing to do. A lot of editors are using SF to move on to something else. Science fiction is *exciting* - it's up to the editor to get out there and *find* new writers. Chris: "Wonderful! I wish more editors had that viewpoint." And so say all of us. Thanks, John.

**ON THE
BIG
& SMALL
SCREEN**

A round-up of the latest releases which may be of interest to members who can afford an evening at the cinema or have a VHS video and belong to a local video library.

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...)

IN YOUR VIDEO SHOP NOW

SPACEBALLS (MGM/UA Video, PG, 90min.)

Actually entitled *Spaceballs - the Video*, this movie is directed by Mel Brooks, who has made comedies such as *The Producers* and *Blazing Saddles*. This one has been publicised as being a spoof of just about every 'sci-fi' movie ever made, but in fact its main target is *Star Wars* (including *The Empire Strikes Back*, etc.) You may have fun trying to spot others, but the main ones I noticed were *Star Trek* and *Planet of the Apes* - the latter being particularly nice (and unexpected).

It's tempting to put this down as "a load of - er - rubbish", but that would be unfair. On one level this is the sort of movie that any one of us might feel he/she could make, given the money and facilities (wouldn't it be fun! Makes me want to revive the often-mooted but rarely put into practice idea of a Brum Group movie or video...) All you have to do is pinch ideas from other films and caricature them. But Brooks does it quite well - in addition to playing the dual role of Yogurt the Magnificent and the evil President Skroob - and it actually made me laugh aloud in several places; not an easy task. (Not that I don't have a sense of humour, you understand - it's just that there doesn't seem to be much around on the screen these days worth laughing out loud at...)

Anyway, it's certainly worth the £2.00 or whatever your local library charges.

By the way, speaking of so-called humour, what do you think of *Red Dwarf*? Original humour or c--p?



Tim Groome

**The Brum Group
Christmas 'Do', 1988**

The Committee, in its wisdom, has decided to hold an 'official' Christmas Event this year again, rather than just have a meal somewhere.

It will consist of a Video Quiz, organised by Colin Bayley, in which everyone can take part and try to win a prize. There will be an informal Buffet Meal, and probably surprise items - who knows?

It will be held at Aston University (more details of exact location shortly), and the cost is only -- £2.50. But don't be put off by the ridiculously low price - we've subsidised it!

Be sure to get your ticket at the next Meeting. It will be fun.

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 JOPHAN REPORT # 20

THE 1988 HUGO AWARD WINNERS are:

Best Novel: *The Uplift War* by David Brin.

Best Novella: *Eye for Eye* by Orson Scott Card.

Best Novelette: *Buffalo Girls, Won't You Come Out Tonight* by Ursula LeGuin.

Best Short Story: *Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers* by Lawrence Watt-Evans.

Best Non-Fiction: *Michael Whelan's Works of Wonder* by some artist or other.

Best Other Forms: *Watchmen*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.

Best Dramatic Presentation: *The Princess Bride*.

Best Professional Artist: Michael Whelan.

Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois.

Best Semi-Prozine: *Locus*, Editor Charles N. Brown.

Best Fanzine: *Texas SF Inquirer*, Editor Pat Mueller.

Best Fan Writer: Mike Glycer.

Best Fan Artist: Brad Foster.

Special Award: The SF Oral History Association.

John W. Campbell Award: Judith Moffett.

The 1988 Hugo Awards were presented at this year's World SF Convention, NOLA CON II, in New Orleans. NOLA CON II had a total of 1178 Hugo Ballots cast and had an attending membership of 5,343. The bid to host the 1991 World SF Convention was won by Chicago, who beat their only opponents, Sydney, by 1,217 votes to 198. (Possibly there were more Americans there than Australians? - Ed.) CHICON V will be held from August 29th to September 2nd 1991 at the Hyatt Regency, Chicago, with Hal Clement, Richard Powers, Martin H. Greenberg and Jon & Joni Stopa as Guests and Marta Randall as 'Toaster'. For the benefit of the Pete Westons of the Group I should perhaps mention that membership until December 31st 1988 will be \$50.00 to CHICON V, Box A3120, Chicago, IL 60690, USA.

Tim Burton, having cast Michael Keaton in the title role of *Batman*, is apparently eager to cast Jack Nicholson as the Joker in his forthcoming *Batman* movie. In a recent issue of *O* magazine, Burton says the public has split into three camps over the project: the fans of the old TV series, *Dark Knight* fans, and those who want another *Superman: The Movie*.

Three *Star Trek* episodes banned by the BBC are now out on tape (again) from Paramount

Home Video: *The Empath, Whom Gods Destroy* and *Plato's Stepchildren*. This means that all the original shows are now available on video, including *Miri*, which was banned after being shown just once on British TV. Kris Kristofferson and Cheryl Ladd will star in *Millenium*, a film of John Varley's short story 'Air Raid'. It is to be directed by Michael Anderson. Frank Miller, creator of *Batman: The Dark Knight*, has been writing the sequel to *Robocop* for Orion. *Watchers*, based on the Dean R. Koontz time travel novel, has relocated shooting from Toronto to British Columbia; the film's Stateside release should be through Universal.

Gollancz have bought Bob Shaw's first juvenile SF novel, *Killer Planet*. Meanwhile, he's working on the third book in the *Ragged Astronauts* trilogy. Gollancz have also bought a solo SF novel from Arthur C. Clarke for a smaller than usual advance - £1.00. Clarke has apparently insisted on such an advance for *Ghost from the Banks* (a novel about the *Titanic*) because he doesn't want to be tied down to writing the book at any specific time. *Ghost...* is part of a two-book deal with Gollancz and Futura which also covers *Rama II*, his second collaboration with Gentry Lee. Now that worries over his health have eased (see NEWSFILE, last month), Clarke is working on his first TV fiction series, *A Fall of Moondust* and with the end of the writers' strike on the way expects to be working on some Hollywood projects again. Futura have bought Larry Niven's next novel, *Destiny's Road*, which he is writing at the moment, for 'a good five figure sum'.

Finally, when Clive Harker held a party to celebrate the publication in paperback of *Weaveworld* recently, some of the guests received a nasty shock on inspecting his sauna. It contained two 'corpses', one decomposing and one flayed. Props from *Hellraiser II*, they were no doubt relieved to be told.

CONVENTION NEWS

Just a reminder that our very own convention, NOVA CON (not to be confused with NOLA CON, above) is coming up fast. The dates are 4 - 6 November: see Bernie if haven't yet registered. Or if you have £50 to spare you could attend the WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION, from 28 - 30 October at the Ramada West Hotel, London. The address is: 130 Park View, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6JU.

Edward Markov - an Appeal to all Readers

This is an appeal to all fans. While you read this and carry out your fannish activities without restriction you can also help a fan who is in dire straits.

Some of you may remember that about two years ago a Jewish fan living in the Soviet Union, Edward Markov, asked for help. British fans responded by writing to him in large numbers, inviting him to conventions and generally causing a fuss. (The Brum Group invited him to Novacon.)

The result of an active public campaign was that Edward's son, Sergei, received permission to emigrate. During the process, Edward himself took the decision to keep a low profile, and for fans' actions on his own behalf to cease.

He now asks for fans everywhere to support him publicly; despite Gorbachev's 'glasnost' and the high profile of the USA's Human Rights concerns, Edward is still trapped without a visa.

Edward himself is 56 years old. He is a science fiction translator and unpublished writer. He has spent the last 9 years trying to leave the Soviet Union for a culture and regime more suited to his ideas and writings.

This is what Edward wants YOU to do:

FANS - write to Edward at: Kostyushko 10/67
LENINGRAD 196240
RSFSR/USSR

(Edward is especially interested to see copies of publications produced by independent and amateur presses in the West.) Please understand that registered and recorded deliveries stand a better chance of getting through to him, but much of what is sent will never arrive. Whether they arrive or not, the number of letters sent is very important to those in authority in the USSR.

CONVENTION ORGANISERS - Please invite Edward and his wife to your cons. He asks that he should be sent a formal invitation (to his address above) and a copy should be sent to the Soviet Writers Union at: Soyuz Pisately SSR
ul. Vorovskogo 52
MOSCOW 121825
RSFSR/USSR

Also please notify Dov Rigal (address below) of any action or invitation on Edward's behalf. In the event of Edward being able to attend a con (ie. granted a visa to leave the USSR) all costs will be met by Dov. PLEASE PASS THIS INFORMATION ON. If you have any questions or if you do get any response from any source please contact Dov Rigal at: 80 Mill Street, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2EF; Tel. (home) 08675 78653, (work) 01 439 7717.

THE ANDROMEDA TOP TEN — AUGUST.

You may have noticed a red '1' by *Replay* in the August Top Ten - an attempt by me to correct an error. Now I accept absolutely no responsibility for this, but it seems that someone at Andromeda, who shall be nameless, made a bit of a cock-up of last month's list. So, out of the kindness of me 'eart, I've agreed to print it as it *should* have been...

1. *Replay* - Ken Grimwood, Grafton.
2. *Dr. Who: Wheel in Space* - Star.
3. *Being a Green Mother* - Piers Anthony, Grafton,
4. *Star Trek: The Three-Minute Universe* - Barbara Paul, Titan.
5. *The Sign of Chaos* - Roger Zelazny, Sphere.
6. *Dr. Who: The Underwater Menace* - Star.
7. *Sprouts of Wrath* - Robert Rankin, Abacus.
8. *Hammer Slammers. At Any Price* - David Drake, Legend.
- 8= *The Stainless Steel Rat Gets Whatever You Care To Rhyme With It* - Harry Harrison, Bantam.
10. *Ancient Light* - Mary Gentle, Legend.

And that's it. (There's no truth in the rumour that Robert Rankin's sequel will be *The Revenge of the Cabbages*.)

In honour of the fact that Vernon Brown is again organising a General Certificate of Science Fiction Education at Novacon this year, and that this year there is a set subject - Wells' *The Time Machine* - I've included a couple of illos based on Wells' stories in this issue... (Though not from that book.)



New Members: September

This month we were joined by Alasdair (I'm told the spelling is Gaelic) William Johnston. He lives in Perry Barr, hasn't divulged his age, and enjoys films as well as books, with his favourite authors being listed as Niven, Asimov, McCaffrey, Heinlein, Harrison, Herbert, and Julian May. And that's about all I can tell you; chat to him at the next meeting.

THE ANDROMEDA TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks in September in the country's biggest and best SF Bookshop were (I hope):

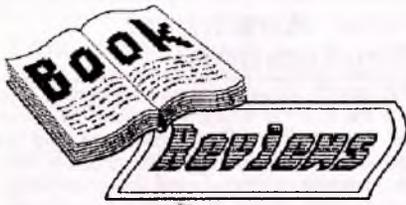
1. *Star Trek - The Next Generation: The Peacemakers* - Gene DeWeese, Titan.
2. *Dr. Who: The Ultimate Foe* - Pip & Jane Baker, Target.
3. *The Dark Tower* - Stephen King, Sphere.
4. *Weaveworld* - Clive Barker, Fontana.
5. *King of the Murgos* - David Eddings, Bantam.
6. *Espedair Street* - Iain Banks, Futura.
7. *Call of the Sword* - Roger Taylor, headline.
8. *Sign of Chaos* - Roger Zelazny, Sphere.
- 9= *Black Wizards* - Douglas Niles, Penguin.
- 9= *Tales of the Cthulhu* - ed. by August Derleth, Grafton.

The Top Five Hardcovers:

1. *Demon Lord of Karanda* - David Eddings, Bantam.
2. *The Player of Games* - Iain Banks, Macmillan.
3. *Prime Evil* - ed. by Douglas Winter, Bantam.
4. *King of the Murgos* - David Eddings, Bantam.
5. *Return of the Shadow* - Tolkien, Unwin.

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Thanks this month go to Tim Groome for artwork - and to all book reviewers, of course. And shame on you for not sending any FEEDBACK this month - just as we'd got it bubbling nicely. Next month, please - ?



All books reviewed in these pages by members have been provided by the publishers, who will receive a copy of this Newsletter.

FOUR PAGES this month - because there was no FEEDBACK. (It was either that or a blank page...)

Please keep reviews to under 150 words, unless instructed otherwise. Deadline for reviews: at least 2 weeks before next meeting

THE KING OF YS by Poul and Karen Anderson; Grafton; 441 pages; £3.95 p/b.

Reviewed by Ann Gay.

Centurion Gratillonius is sent from his station on Hadrian's Wall on a diplomatic mission to Brittany. And on the soon-to-be emperor's bidding he encounters a mystic fate. On this slender footing the Andersons erect a skillful creation. Historically accurate (as far as I could tell) on Roman matters, the fantasy kingdom of Ys is credible, and there are facets to appeal to anyone. Poul's descriptive powers are as visually evocative as ever. The main characters, including the women, are solidly motivated. Only, in places, the drama is dulled in dramatic situations. Worth reading even if the Andersons are saving the best 'til last.

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT GETS DRAFTED by Harry Harrison; Bantam; 256 pages; £2.95 p/b. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Harry gets off to a good start by dedicating this book to "Rog Peyton and all the Brum gang". Unfortunately I am completely immune to flattery (next time he should try bribery). This book is a sequel to *A Stainless Steel Rat is Born*, and continues the adventures of the young Jim DiGriz before he aquired a homicidal wife and terrible twins. It starts with a routine prison escape, but gets into its stride when Jim is drafted into a hilariously incompetent army (just like in *Bill the Galactic Hero*). The army is then defeated by a method which will be familiar to anyone who has read Eric Frank Russell's *And Then There Were None*. A good romp, but not very original.

THE BIRD OF TIME by George Alec Effinger; N.E.L.; 176 pages; £2.50 p/back.

Reviewed by Wendell Wagner Jr.

When I read Effinger's earlier book, *The Nick of Time*, I wondered why he was bothering with trying to squeeze out a novel from the well worn cliches of time travel paradoxes, although I was amused by the reactions of his hero and heroine, Frank and Cheryl, who threw themselves blindly into the most dangerous situations. In this sequel though, I can see that Effinger is trying to show just how ridiculous those paradoxes were, particularly the one about rival groups trying to change history. His hero here, Hartstein, a well meaning dope, is also more interesting. Still this isn't clever or funny enough to be more than a minor novel.

SWORD AND SORCERESS 1 edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley; Headline; 255 pages; £2.95 paperback. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is an anthology of heroic fantasy, with the link that all the stories have a female protagonist. Bradley explains in the introduction that her aim was to avoid the common cliches of women who are merely furniture in the story, women who are victims to be rescued, Amazons who discover that "True Happiness" lies in submitting to a man, and the ultra-feminist "only good man is a dead man" tract. How can I review fifteen different stories in under 150 words? The stories are mostly well worth reading, by popular men and women authors, and feature women on their own, teamed up with other women or even with familiar fantasy props such as men. Well recommended.

THE BROKEN WORLDS by Raymond Harris; Headline; 248 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

I think the goodies won but I couldn't honestly swear to it. To be sure, I couldn't swear that there were actually goodies and baddies, which might in the right hands, be a more stimulating proposition. Unfortunately Raymond Harris misses the opportunity to extract some mileage from an interesting moral dilemma, and instead offers a inter-galactic Cooks Tour. But it's so boring. One superficial, two-dimensional planet after another, peopled with two-dimensional characters. The book doesn't live and breathe, the story of inter-planetary quests and conflict is tedious, the action an obligatory extra rather than an integral part of the story. The most interesting character, Attanio Hwin, a musician accidentally caught up in the action, is little more than a mouthpiece for the author's laboured descriptions. So many opportunities are wasted and the novel never rises beyond the most trivial of space operas.

CHRONICLES OF THE KENCYRATH by P.C Hodgell; N.E.L; 608 pp; £4.50 lge p/b.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the first book by a writer who may well do better. Previously published in America as two volumes:- *Godstalk* and *Dark of the Moon*, its biggest problem is that after 608 pages you find it is still only part one. It also has maps at the front and appendices at the back which is always a bad sign. Jaime has no memory, except that she is Kencyr, a race with several strange abilities but bound to defend the worlds from Perimal Darkling. She learns about life in Tai-Tastigon, a city of thieves and gods, before setting off to find her half-remembered twin brother, who mysteriously is ten years older than she is. While the plot is rather traditional, the details of culture and magic raise this book above the mass of hack fantasy. Quite good.

CLOUDROCK by Garry Kilworth; Unwin Hyman; 160 pages £11.95 hardback.
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It is said that there are no really new ideas for SF writers to discover, and that originality must be found in the combination and treatment of plot cliches. Garry Kilworth shows this to be true in *Cloudrock* by taking the themes of *Romeo and Juliet* and of rebels escaping from a society with which they disagree, and by making an extremely powerful story out of the combination. Cloudrock is a small plateau balanced on a pillar. It is inhabited by deceptively primitive people, who practice marriage within the family and cannibalism. They kill any imperfect babies by tossing them over the edge of the world - except for one crippled child who is allowed to grow up, who is a non person, ignored by all, and who narrates this marvellous novel.

DERVISH DAUGHTER by Sheri S Tepper; Corgi; 221 pages; £2.75 p/b.
JINIAN STAR-EYE by Sheri S Tepper; Corgi; 239 pages; £2.99 p/b

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

Novelist is too small a word to describe Sheri Tepper, she is a Weaver of Words, a Storyteller par excellence. I don't like Fantasy, I only read these because I liked Sheri so much when I met her, but I was spellbound. She tells tales of High Fantasy in such a down-to-earth manner, you feel as if you could meet her characters on the bus on the way to work, and be transported with them to the magical land they inhabit. The two books are the second and third in a trilogy. Jinian is the daughter of a Dervish (a being which cannot stop spinning round and round). In *Dervish Daughter*, with her companion, Peter, a "Shape-changer", and others, she follows the trail of the mysterious yellow crystals which are killing her people. In *Jinian Star-eye* Jinian and Peter go into a mystical maze, in order to save the world. To say more would be to spoil the magic. If you've an ounce of child-like wonder left in you, you MUST read these books.

THE ZENDA VENDETTA by Simon Hawke; Headline; 206 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

The fourth book in the *Time Wars* series, this volume is a rather jolly romp through *The Prisoner of Zenda*, as the Time Commandos hunt for the Timekeepers, temporal terrorists, though the cover is oddly reminiscent of the Lone Ranger. This is not high art, by any stretch of the imagination, but it is fun, competently written and enjoyable to read. I suspect a trifle formulaic, although I've not yet read the other three volumes. The various temporal paradoxes are smoothly handled, and the whole thing seems entirely plausible. I was also quite strongly reminded of H Beam Piper's *Paratime* stories, which is probably the highest compliment I could pay. Definitely worth a read when you want something light and relaxing.

OTHER VOICES by Colin Greenland; Unwin Hyman; 182 pages; £11.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

A sequel to the *The Hour of the Thin Ox*, this book is quiet and stylish, and a little thin on plot. Luscany has been over-run by the Eschalen empire, leaving Princess Nette as a puppet ruler. Serin Guille is the daughter of a taxidermist searching for the secret of immortality. Of different social backgrounds, Serin's and Nette's lives cross only after the death of an Eschalen herald and the subsequent persecution of gypsies sparks a riot. Although there are characters in common to both books, this one stands on its own. The lives of the people are minutely observed and they have presence. It is the kind of book that cannot be rushed as it unfolds at leisurely pace. For readers of literature.

HITLER VICTORIOUS Ed Greg Benford & Martin H Greenberg; Grafton; 397 pp;

£3.95 p/back.

Reviewed by Helena Bowles.

Eleven stories dealing with (fairly obviously) the victory of the Axis powers in World War Two. Predictably the collection is introduced by Norman Spinrad. Most of them pay lip service to the Nazi involvement with Paganism/Christian Mystery Cult, with David Brin's outstanding "Thor meets Captain America" being the most obvious example. The collection also includes stories by C.M Kornbluth, Greg Bear, Keith Roberts and Algis Budrys. A mixed bag which I highly recommend, though given the similarity of the subject matter, not to be read in one sitting.

KING OF THE MURGOS by David Eddings; Bantam Press; 416 pages; £11.95 h/b.

Reviewed by Helena Bowles.

Even if you loved *The Belgariad* as much as I did don't buy the hardback of this book. It isn't worth it. Eddings's style is typically easy flowing but the art of the first books is here overused and plodding. Technically I'm sure the plot will be constant but there seems to be no attempt to keep the internal logic of the story intact. It is very lightweight, and mildly entertaining if read uncritically.

AMBIENT by Jack Womack; Unwin Hyman; 259 pages; £10.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Ann Gay.

Seamus O'Malley, Shameless to his friends, falls in love with his boss's favourite. He can have her if he kills the boss's dad. And if he and the girl survive. Because after a nuclear disaster on Long Island, after devaluation and the destruction of the American government's power, when Elvis is God and it snows flakes of excrement, the boss is about the most powerful man in the Western hemisphere, and he's mad. In a way this is a love story. It's the only pleasant thing about the book, that and Shameless's love for his ultra-punk sister. Maybe it's the shining moral to brighten up a nightmare dystopia. Clever, perceptive, even brilliant - *Ambient* demands a great deal of the reader, a linguaphone course might help. And it's not for the squeamish.

HAUNTED by James Herbert; Hodder & Stoughton; 223 pages; £10.95 hardback.
Reviewed by Bernie Evans

If you're a James Herbert completist you'll want this book, but wait for the paperback. It must be the most inept ghost-story ever written, with a prologue that explains almost everything, to save you the trouble of reading the first two thirds of the book, and an ending telegraphed about 4 chapters before it happens, to save you reading the last part of the book. I wasn't mystified, or horrified, or afraid, I was bored.

THROUGH DARKEST AFRICA by Neal Barrett Jr; Hodder & Stoughton; 275 pages;
£2.95 paperback. Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A post-holocaust novel that shocks for shocks sake (i.e lacks content). Based on a son (Howie) whose family are butchered for non-payment of tax for the war effort to defeat the rebels. Howie escapes only to become involved in the struggle through firstly cattle rustling (with dumb sub humans - the only bit of S.F in there) then gun-running, both involving plenty of bloodshed. I found the novel boring - basically a western that could have been based in the 18th century U.S as much as the future. The characters didn't seem real and only reacted violently. O.K it's a tough world, but do we need it rammed down our throats?. The book is presented as an "Isaac Asimov Presents" sales hype - if this is the best I can promote he needn't bother. Avoid at all costs.

HUNTER/VICTIM by Robert Sheckley; Methuen; 238 pages; £10.95 hardback.
Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Hunter/Victim constitutes the third part of the *Hunt* sequence of novels - the dilation of an idea that first appeared in the short story "The Seventh Victim". Set against the dystopian background of Malthusian population problems, depletion of natural resources and global bankruptcy, it provides a classic doomsday scenario. Frank Campbell is embroiled in the murky goings on of the Hunt organisation after the death of his wife by terrorists. He is offered the opportunity to admonish society by killing a Nicaraguan terrorist and repairs to the target's mesme to do his level best to win the coveted Mercenary of the Month award. Unfortunately for Frank the Hunt organisation has "accidentally" alerted Guzman the Guerrilla of his "victim" status. This is a very enjoyable read as Sheckley is a master satirist with a penchant for inverting logic to create incredible but amusing incidents. Certainly a rip-roaring side-splitting romp of a book imbued with Sheckley's sardonic wit.

THE GREY HORSE by R.A. MacAvoy; Bantam; 247 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Steve Jones

This is another marvellous fantasy by the author of the *Damiano* trilogy. This time she has moved from Middle Ages Italy to 19th century Ireland. Anrai O Reachtaire finds a magnificent grey stallion, which is more than it seems. Ruairi MacEibhir is a puca or fairy horse, who assumes human form to persue the hand of Maire NiStandun. There is very little overt magic in the book, the setting and characters are the important thing. I can't say anymore without spoiling the story. Highly Recommended.

ALSO RECEIVED

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