

BRUM GROUP NEWS

November
1988

Issue
No.206

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

Special Sex & Violence Issue!!!



Tim Groom

The BSGF 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 BSGF, 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 18 November at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

This month's Guest Speaker is:

Gwyneth Jones

Gwyneth Jones burst onto the science fiction scene four years ago [she writes], with her astounding (some say whimsical, some say unreadable, some decline to comment [I repeat: *she writes*]) first novel, *Divine Endurance*... No, but seriously, I had six novels for children published before *Divine Endurance* came out, starting with the usual kind of autobiographical stuff, except that mine was dunked in psycho-fantasy. I didn't mean to be a children's writer. I didn't mean to be a science fiction writer. It's always been more of a case of my writing something, and then they tell me what it is and I say - Oh, OK, I'm one of those.

I've now written three SF books for adults (latest now OUT), and I'm still writing fantasy/SF for juveniles. I've also written SF cartoon scripts for children's TV (but if you've ever spotted these don't hold me responsible. They're ruthless in TV - they changed all my POWs to ZAPs). Since I'm a creature of habit, besides being very docile and impressionable, I don't suppose I'll ever write anything now that doesn't have at least a touch of the old *Astounding* and *Amazing* fx.

Born in Manchester 1952, convent educated, did a degree at Sussex University 1970-73. Various jobs, spent three years in Singapore and around, has lasting addiction to tropic climes and the smell of Kretek cigarettes, lives happily ever after in Brighton with Northern Irish mathematician and teacher, one BAD little boy, one wick-ED Burmese cat... What else do you need to know?

Well, Gwyneth says her talk will be concerned mainly with constructing worlds!

Last Month

The Great Debate

A packed and argumentative audience (packed largely with a claue from Birmingham University, no doubt bribed to vote for their team) appeared to thoroughly enjoy (how can you say that without splitting infinitives?) the debate, and

continued arguing about the Motion: "This House Believes that Fantasy is Diluting SF" long after the "official" debate had finished. In the event, the house did not believe any such thing, as the motion was defeated by 19 votes to 14. The University team consisted of Mike Ibeiji and Helen Wake (supported from the audience by her daughter), while the Brum Group team was captained by Rog Peyton, with Bernie Evans standing in for Pete Weston, who dropped out at the last minute, lured away by promises of mammon. Tim Stannard, who was to have Chaired the event as usual, also could not make it, so his place as Chairman was taken by yours truly.

SHOCK, HORROR: VIOLENCE AT BRUM GROUP MEETING!!!

A horrified audience saw Rog Peyton accuse Newsletter Editor Dave Hardy of showing favouritism to Hudson's Bookshop by mailing out their flyer advertising Signing Sessions, yet not publicising Andromeda's own Signing Sessions, or the publication of Drunken Dragon's first book. Hardy denied this hotly, saying that it was up to Andromeda to supply information if they wanted this included in the Newsletter. He then seized Peyton by the throat and proceeded to throttle him. They were prised apart by Bernie Evans, who, showing surprising strength for her small frame, then threw Hardy into the audience, where he fell into the lap of Pauline Morgan, much to her surprise as she was standing up at the time. However, Hardy and Peyton were seen having a drink together minutes later, leading to speculation that the whole event was staged for publicity...

NEWSFILE

THE JOPHAN REPORT # 21

Some other Awards announced at the 1988 Hugo Awards ceremony at this year's World SF Convention, *Nolacan II*, in New Orleans were - the First Fandom Hall of Fame Awards which went to Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, David Kyle, Charles P. Hornig and posthumously to Neal R. Jones. The Big Heart Award went to Andre Norton. The SEI-UN Awards (the Japanese word 'sei-un' translates to 'nebula', but the awards are usually voted on by the Japanese fannish community and are generally referred to as the 'Japanese Hugos') - Best Foreign Novel translated to Japanese in 1987 *Norstri-ia* by Cordwainer Smith. Best Foreign Short Story Translated to Japanese in 1987 - 'The Only Neat Thing To Do' by James Tiptree Jr. (awarded posthumously of course).

On the fan fund front the 1989 TAFF (TransAtlantic Fan Fund) race will be between Robert Lichtman (editor of the excellent fanzine *Trapdoor*) and Luke McGuff (publisher of *Live from the Stagger Cafe*). It had been hoped that Charlotte Proctor (the editor of the Birmingham SF Club's fanzine ANVIL - B'ham in the USA that is) would be running, but the decision to send the winner to *Contrivance* in March of 1989 (rather than *Mexican III* in May) has meant that she is unable to run due to commitments at work.

Up-and-coming conventions: it is rumoured that after the apparent success of *Conscription* (the con runners' con in Brum recently) that the BSFG's own Bernie Evans will be involved with *Electrician* - a convention for conrunners interested in the technical operations side of conventions. *Mexican III* will be held over the weekend of 26 - 29 May 1989 at the Albany Hotel in Nottingham. With the usual *Mexican* mixture of serious SF talks and fannish items, combined with draught Guinness and Real Ale (in the eminently palatable form of Everards medium strength bitter) and an experienced committee, it shouldn't be missed. Memberships are available for £15.00 from Greg Pickersgill, 7a Lawrence Road, South Ealing, London, W5 4XJ. The Belfast based convention - *Nicon* - has won the bid for the 1989 *Unicon*. It will be held over the weekend of 11-13 August 1989, at the Queen's University of Belfast Halls of Residence. Details from *Nicon (Unicon '89)*, 106 Somerton Road, Belfast, BT 15 4DG, N. Ireland. Guests will be Terry Pratchett and Iain Banks with the Fan GoH Iain Thomas and a Science GoH to be

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!!)

announced. Attending membership £6, supporting £2.50. Rooms will be approx. £5 per night (plus VAT). Finally on the convention front it has recently been announced that following the "success" of *Lucan* there will be another local Leeds convention over the weekend of 16-18 June 1989. *Icanoclasm* will be held at the Griffin Hotel, Leeds. Guests Diane Duane and Peter Morwood. Attend. £11 until 1/4/89. Support. £6. Details from - *Icanoclasm*, 16 Aviary Place, Leeds, LS12 2NP.

American agent Ralph Vicinanza has set up a deal for Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg with Bantam Books which will pay them "at least" \$1 million for three collaborative SF novels. In the November Science Fiction Chronicle Vicinanza is quoted as saying that the advance is "way over a million dollars". The three books will be novelizations of shorter works by Asimov - 'Nightfall', 'The Martian Boy' and 'The Ugly Little Boy'. Bantam have asked for the first book, *Nightfall*, by 1990 or 1991 and all the books will first be published as Doubleday/Foundation hardbacks, followed by paperbacks from Bantam Spectra.

Out for Christmas will be Robert Holdstock's *Lavondyss*, the sequel to *Mythago Wood*, from Gollancz in hardback and trade paperback, while in paperback Gollancz have *Windhaven* by George R. R. Martin and Lisa Tuttle and *The Instrumentality of Mankind* by Cordwainer Smith. Unwin will be publishing the second volume in Louise Cooper's Indido series, *Inferno* and *Other Edens II* edited by Christopher Evans and Robert Holdstock.

The World and British Fantasy Awards were presented at the World Fantasy Convention at the Ramada Inn, London over the weekend of the 28th - 30th October. British Fantasy Awards went to - Best Novel Ramsey Campbell's *The Hungry Moon*, Best Short Story - 'Leaks' by Steve Rasnic Tem; Best Small Press Publication Carl Ford's *Dagon*, Best Film - Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*; Best Artist - J. K. Potter and the Special 'Icarus' Award (for most promising newcomer) went to Carl Ford.

World Fantasy Awards went to - Best Novel - Ken Grimwood's *Replay*, Best Novella - *Buffalo Girls Won't You Come Out Tonight* by Ursula K. LeGuin; Best Short Story - Jonathan Carroll's 'Friend's Best Man'; Best Anthology - was a tie between Kathryn Kramer and Peter Pautz's *The Architecture of Fear* and David G. Hartwell's *The Dark Descent*, Best Collection

— *The Jaguar Hunter* by Lucius Shepard; Best Artist - J. K. Potter; Special Award Pro - David G. Hartwell (Arbor House/Tor Books); Special Award Non-Pro - another tie, this time between Robert and Nancy Garcia for *American Fantasy* and David B. Silva for *The Horror Show*.

Clive Barker recently had a peculiar experience when signing books in the New York version of *Forbidden Planet* when a (probably inebriated) man cut his own arm with a razor in front of the writer - so that he could have his book signed in blood. As it wasn't a suicide attempt the bleeding was minor and Barker took it in his stride, unfortunately *Locus* doesn't report whether or not Barker DID sign the book in his fan's blood.

On a more serious note the November issue of *Locus* also reports that the *Newspaper on Intellectual Freedoms* has published a list of books banned or challenged in U.S. schools over the period May '87 - May '88, amongst which are many works of fantasy and SF. The reasons given for banning or challenging these books vary, but range from "vulgarity to pornography, excessive violence, and lack of moral values". The titles of these foul works?

- *Watership Down* Richard Adams; *Ewoks Join the Flight* Bonnie Bogart; *The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451* (!!!!!) by Ray Bradbury; *The Witches* by Roald Dahl; *Alias, Babylon* by Pat Frank; *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding; *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley; *Flowers For Algernon* by Daniel Keyes; *The Bachman Books, Carrie, Christine, Cujo, The Dead Zone, Different Seasons, It, Night Shift, Salem's Lot* and *The Shining* by Stephen King; *Le Morte D'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory; *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and *Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut....

Further evidence of the wave of censorship sweeping the U.S. mentioned in *Locus* this issue is the banning of *The War of Science and Religion*, a painting by Carl Lundgren. It was banned from a recent SF art exhibition in Florida at the Orlando Art Center. Depicting a robot crucified on a cross made of slide rules, the Center's director thought the painting "a bit controversial", although she did hang it in her office for those wishing to view it in private!

On 6 October the director of the Goddard Space Center presented Virginia Heinlein with the Distinguished Public Service Medal, awarded to her husband Robert A. Heinlein, posthumously. The DPSM is the highest Services award which can be presented to civilians.

The Middle Kingdom and *The Broken Wheel* are the first two volumes of the *Chung Kuo* trilogy which David Wingrove has sold to NEL for £125,000. Due to appear next year Wingrove says they "cover 54 years of a society 210 years from now - a world state run by the Han (the Chinese), and follow five main

characters from their early childhood into their sixties." He doesn't expect to complete the third volume until December 1994. T.Gollancz have bought a new Elric novel, *Fortress of the Pearl*, and a new collection, *Casablanca*, from Michael Moorcock, for an undisclosed amount, while the U.S. publishers Tor have paid Ramsey Campbell \$100,000 for an undisclosed horror novel.

A new bi-monthly comic book from Marvel Comics, entitled *Ad Astra*, featuring such contributors as Barry Maltzberg, Joe Clifford Faust and Laurence M. Jannifer, will be appearing shortly. The series will be set "in the ninety-year period following mankind's discovery of pseudo-faster-than-light space travel."

Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun* have just been released as a video game in the U.S. by Kodak. Also released recently/soon in the U.S. are such movies as *The Land Before Time Began*, an animated film with Spielberg and Lucas as executive producers; *Cocoon: The Return* in which the entire original cast returns to Earth; *High Spirits* in which Steve Gutenberg falls in love with a ghost, played by Daryl Hannah, while visiting Peter O'Toole's castle; *Watchers* with Corey Haim (from *The Lost Boys & Stand By Me*) playing a teenager who encounters two genetically-altered lifeforms as a result of a government cock-up; *They Live* the new John Carpenter film in which "the aliens are among us"; *My Stepmother is an Alien*, a comedy starring Dan Ackroyd, and finally Arnold's new film, an INTENTIONAL comedy, *Twins*, where Schwarznegger co-stars with Danny DeVito. I guess we'll get to see most of the above closer to Spring '89.

Probably THE big film project in the SF world next year will be *Total Recall*, based on Phil Dick's short story 'We Can Remember It For You Wholesale' (which appeared in F & SF, April 1966). With a budget in the region of \$50 million, proposed Director Paul 'Robocop' Verhoeven, and being produced by Carolco (them what gave us *Rambo*) - the results should be 'interesting' at the least.

Finally, with Satellite and Cable TV VERY big in the States, both Macrovision and the Eidak Corporation are working on systems to prevent home copying of movies. Primarily aimed at the taping of 'pay-per-view' recent releases, there seems little doubt that if successful such a system will be used to prevent the copying of films completely.



The Mars Declaration

Mars is the world next door, the nearest planet on which human explorers could safely land. Although it is sometimes as warm as a New England October, Mars is a chilly place, so cold that some of its thin carbon dioxide atmosphere freezes out at the winter pole. There are pink skies, fields of boulders, sand dunes, vast extinct volcanos that dwarf anything on Earth, a great canyon that would cross most of the United States, sandstorms that sometimes reach half the speed of sound, strange bright and dark markings on the surface, hundreds of ancient river valleys, mountains shaped like pyramids and many other mysteries.

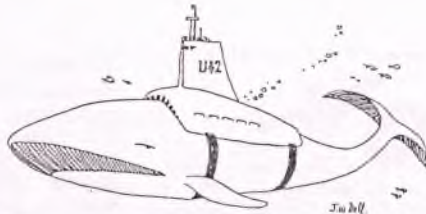
Mars is a storehouse of scientific information—important in its own right but also for the light it may cast on the origins of life and on safeguarding the environment of the Earth. If Mars once had abundant liquid water, what happened to it? How did a once Earthlike world become so parched, frigid and comparatively airless? Is there something important on Mars that we need to know about our own fragile world?

The prospect of human exploration of Mars is ecumenical—remarkable for the diversity of supporting opinion it embraces. It is being advocated on many grounds:

- As a potential scientific bonanza—for example, on climatic change, on the search for present or past life, on the understanding of enigmatic Martian landforms, and on the application of new knowledge to understanding our own planet
- As a means, through robotic precursor and support missions to Mars, of reviving a stagnant U.S. planetary program
- As providing a coherent focus and sense of purpose to a dispirited NASA for many future research and development activities on an appropriate timescale and with affordable costs
- As giving a crisp and unambiguous purpose to the U.S. space station—needed for in-orbit assembly of the interplanetary transfer vehicle or vehicles, and for study of long-duration life support for space travelers
- As the next great human adventure, able to excite and inspire people of all ages the world over
- As an aperture to enhanced national prestige and technological development
- As a realistic and possibly unique opportunity for the United States and the Soviet Union to work together in the spotlight of world public opinion, and with other nations, on behalf of the human species
- As a model and stimulant for mutually advantageous U.S./Soviet cooperation here on Earth
- As a means for economic reconversion of the aerospace industry if and when massive reductions in strategic weapons—long promised by the United States and the Soviet Union—are implemented
- As a worthy application of the traditional military virtues of organization and valor to great expeditions of discovery
- As a step towards the long-term objective of establishing humanity as a multi-planet species
- Or simply as the obvious response to a deeply felt perception of the future calling.

Advances in technology now make feasible a systematic process of exploration and discovery on the planet Mars—beginning with robot roving vehicles and sample return missions and culminating in the first foothold of human beings on another planet. The cost would be no greater than that of a single major strategic weapons system, and if shared among two or more nations, the cost to each nation would be still less. No major additional technological advances seem to be required, and the step from today to the first landing of humans on Mars appears to be technologically easier than the step from President John F. Kennedy's announcement of the Apollo program on May 25, 1961 to the first landing of humans on the Moon on July 20, 1969.

We represent a wide diversity of backgrounds in the fields of science, technology, religion, the arts, politics and government. Few of us adhere to every one of the arguments listed above, but we share a common vision of Mars as a historic, constructive objective for the technological ambitions of the human species over the next few decades. We endorse the goal of human exploration of Mars and urge that initial steps toward its implementation be taken throughout the world.



The Brum Group Christmas Party

As announced last month, we are holding an 'official' (but totally informal) Christmas Event this year.

The venue is Aston University, in the Senior Common Room - which has its own Bar. Directions will be available at the Main Door.

There will be a Video Quiz, organised by Colin Bayley, in which you can try to win a prize, a Buffet meal worth much more alone than the price of your ticket, and surprise items.

And the price of all this? A mere £2.50, payable at this month's meeting; or, if you can't make that, send your cheque (payable to 'BSFG') to Bernie Evans at the address on the front cover. You can bring a friend, spouse, alien pen-pal (no Betelgeusian Bloogs - they eat too much) or whatever. Just BE THERE!

THE MARS DECLARATION

Is there anyone reading this who *doesn't* think that Man should go to Mars? (Yes? What are you doing in a SF Group?)

The Planetary Society, which is US-based but has a UK Branch - details from me - has published a **Mars Declaration**, to be handed to all relevant governments, urging manned exploration of Mars. I'll have copies at the next meeting - PLEASE SIGN IT... To save time then, the Declaration itself is printed opposite. Thanks!

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Thanks this month go to Tim Groome for artwork, - and to all book reviewers, of course.

THE ANDROMEDA

TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks in May in the country's biggest and best SF Bookshop were: (may not be 100% accurate due to Novacon)

1. *Sleeping in Flame* - Jonathan Carroll, Legend.
2. *Dr Who: Edge of Destruction* - Star
- 3 *Intervention* - Julian May, Pan.
4. *Hammer of the Sun* - Mike Scott Rohan, Futura.
5. *King of the Murtgos* - David Eddings, Bantam.
6. *To Sail Beyond the Sunset* - Robert Heinlein, Sphere.
7. *Replay* - Ken Grimwood, Grafton.
8. *Victims* - Shaun Hutson, Star.
9. *Forging the Dark Sword* - Weiss & Hickman, Bantam.
- 10= *Fairy Tale* - Raymond Feist, Grafton.
- 10= *Backlash Mission* - Timothy Zahn, Arrow.

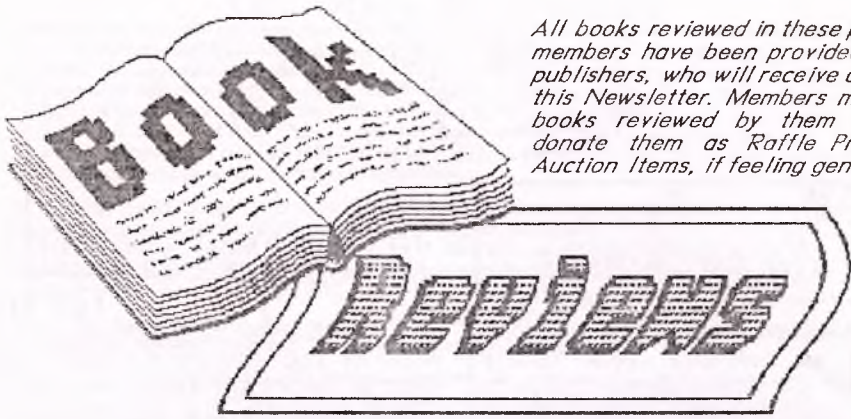
The Top Five hardcovers:

1. *Sleeping in Flame* - Jonathan Carroll, Legend.
2. *Dragonhiker's Guide to etc. etc.* - David Langford, Drunken Dragon.
3. *Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* - Douglas Adams, Heinemann.
4. *Last Sword of Power* - David Gemmeil, Legend.
5. *Return to Eden* - Harry Harrison, Grafton.



BRUM
GROUP





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...)

We have rather a lot of reviews piling up, so once again we have four pages of 'normal' reviews. In addition, a couple of books have arrived for which there hasn't been time to give them out for review, so I'm taking the unusual step of doing them myself. These are books by, and/or published by, 'friends' of the Brum Group, and to leave them another month would not do them justice.

As Rog pointed out at last month's meeting (for those not present, see LAST MONTH), I mentioned in the July issue that the first book from his Drunken Dragon Press was due out this month. Well, it's now out, and Rog claims that his slanderous remarks were leading up to his presenting me with a review copy. This he has now done (after letting me offer to buy a copy first) so:

THE DRAGONHIKER'S GUIDE TO BATTLEFIELD COVENANT AT DUNE'S EDGE: ODYSSEY TWO by David Langford: D.D.; 142 pages; £9.95 hardcover, £24.95 De-Luxe leatherbound edition. No p/b due.

When you think about it, much of today's entertainment consists of spoofs: of people having a go at, sending up and generally extracting the urine from other people. There are impressionists like Mike Yarwood and Phil Cool (whose Rolf Harris is more like Rolf Harris than Rolf Harris). There's *Spitting Image*. And so on. Dave Langford's book is another example of this. I always think that, no matter how talented the mickey taker is, the person they are taking off is at least more original, or he wouldn't be in that position.

Having said that, though, we all know that Dave Langford is himself capable of original work. His wit is also well known, so let's not pre-judge. And the fact is that his parodies of well-known SF writers such as Is**c As*m*v, F*rnk H*rb*rt and J*m*s Wh*te are aimed with deadly accuracy - and are very funny. If you are familiar with the writer concerned, you will recognise the style immediately. If you

aren't, this book may help you decide whether or not you want to become familiar with that writer. Get it, quick.

And now, Dave, how about another novel?

SCIENCE FICTION BLUES by Brian Aldiss; Avernus; 160 pages, £4.95 paperback only.

Many of us attended the stage presentation of *SFB* at the Midlands Art Centre, and enjoyed it thoroughly. If you were there, this book is a must in order to recapture that atmosphere - and to read the words you missed because you were laughing (or crying). If you weren't, you'll want to buy a copy to see what you missed.

It's all there: the stories, the poetry, the dialogue presented so ably by our co-President Brian, aided and abetted by Ken Campbell and Petronilla Whitfield, all edited by Frank Hatherley. Oh, and with a cover by yours truly. So it's a real Brum Group special: every member should have one.

The 1989 Committee

The January Meeting is, of course, the AGM, at which next year's Committee will be elected (or re-elected).

The posts are: Chairman (Bernie Evans stands again); Secretary (Chris Murphy hasn't had enough yet); Treasurer (POST VACANT); Publicity Officer (POST VACANT: one applicant so far); Newsletter Editor (Dave Hardy and Mick Evans (Reviews) are gluttons for punishment).

Just because present members are standing for re-election doesn't mean you can't apply for a post, though. And we do urgently need someone who can handle receipts, bank accounts and money generally, and present the Annual Accounts at the AGM. Please apply to the Chairman in writing, A.S.A.P.

ALPHA BUG by M.E. Morris; Grafton; 315 pages; £2.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Maureen Porter

Don't be fooled by this - whatever the blurb may say, whatever Grafton may want you to think, this is really a conventional espionage story which happens to have some action in space, because they're trying to get the plans for a spaceship. It's pretty tedious action as well. There's nothing here which hasn't been done elsewhere, and with considerably more verve. Basically the book is dull. The finale is utterly predictable, it doesn't take a genius to work out that the good ole U.S of A is going to triumph over those damn Ruskies again. In fact the only thing that I find puzzling is this mania for calling American fictional spaceships Valley Forge.

OLYMPIAD by Nigel Frith; Unwin; 220 pages; £3.95 paperback;

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

In the year of the olympics comes the story of the first games. Designed by the Gods to reduce bloodshed in Greece and organised by Heracles, it is the focus for the retelling of several Greek myths, including that of Atalanta and the golden apples. One problem with this book is that the stories on which *Olympiad* is based are very familiar, whereas the Chinese background for *Dragon* and the Indian for *Krishna* are less so. This makes them more successful as novels as they allow for surprises. *Olympiad* has none. Also Frith has tried to recapture the tone of the original sources for his stories and the style has thus become stilted and awkward. As with the Homeric epics, it is a volume for listening to than for reading silently.

THE BOOK OF THE DAMNED by Tanith Lee; Unwin; 229 pages; £6.95 lge p/back.

THE BOOK OF THE BEAST by Tanith Lee; Unwin; 196 pages; £6.95 lge p/back.

(The Secret Books of Paradys vol 1 & 2)

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

I must admit I wasn't too well aquainted with Tanith Lee's work, but after reading these two books I will be putting that right. Her creation of the city of Paradys has to be viewed as a success. I suppose macabre fantasy or gothic horror are the label these stories come under, but her writing is of a far higher standard than most of the stuff we are being overloaded with these days. Ms Lee weaves these stories with some wonderful imagery and the dialogue is excellent. Book 1 contains three separate stories 'Stained in Crimson', very Gothic, 'Malice in Saffron', a young girl living in a nunnery by day and leading a band of villains and cut-throats by night, and 'Empires of Azure', a curse from ancient Egypt. All excellent and quite different. Book 2 also seems to be separate stories at first, but it soon becomes clear that they're linked expertly together. The middle part of the book moves back 11 centuries to when Paradys is occupied by the Roman Empire. The Beast of the story is able to reproduce itself through generations of human beings. If you can only afford one the first book has more variety although both are recommended.

KEEPERS OF EDANVANT by Carol Nelson Douglas; Corgi; 383 pages; £2.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Although this is the first volume of a trilogy, it is also a follow up to *Six of Swords and Exiles of the Rynth*. Irissa, the silver-eyed sorceress, seeks the long lost home of her Torloc kind. At her side is Kendrick, a Wrathman with a mind-forged sword. Finding this home is easy, but what a home-coming! Men like her father live in Citydell, her mother and the seeresses dwell behind a wall of magic. Each group is at the others throat. The reader is drawn in at first to this tale. Characterisation is fair, one can identify with Irissa and Kendrick, who are both likeable and credible, but the reading starts to cloy. The texture of adverbs on top of adjectives is too curlicued. And the dozens of interesting events, though exiting in themselves don't seem to add to the plot. Still, perhaps it's for people who revel in the atmosphere of mystery and magic. And that, with appeals to every sense, is certainly here.

RATHA'S CREATURE by Clare Bell; Grafton; 252 pages; £2.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

This is the first novel from an author of what I think of as the Norton/McCaffrey school of writing. The book concerns Ratha, a tigress from a clan of felines who are in the process of making the jump to intelligence. Ratha is the first of the species to conquer her fear of fire (the creature of the title), and for this is cast out of the clan to live with the 'unnamed', the semi-intelligent mass of cats living by hunting rather herding. Although the writing is good the plot is a bit thin, a product of the subject matter. A major problem is that there is a limit to the achievements possible to an intelligent species with no useful manipulative organs. The writer makes up for this by going into great detail on the lifestyle and social customs of the cats, but again there is a limit to how far this can be developed. The sequel to this book, *Clan Ground*, is out, and it will be interesting to see how far the species can progress before grinding to an evolutionary halt.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION OF ISAAC ASIMOV; Grafton; 320 pages; £3.50 p/back.

Reviewed by Chris Ridd.

This book is another collection of Asimov short stories. The difference this time is that all the stories have been chosen by Dr Asimov himself, whilst all the other collections were arranged by publishers. The interesting little chats before each story give some clues as to why some of the stories were included - mostly they sank without trace on first publication. I can understand why some of the stories dived initially. Some of them, especially the couple of poems and the few short plays on words, aren't very good. One common theme through many of the 28 stories is the 'Multivac' computer, which grows to become the 'Cosmic AC' and finally the AC in one of the better stories "The Last Question". Another good story which isn't in Asimov's normal style is "Eyes Do More Than See", about energy beings recalling their original human forms. Overall a good book which has a couple of few gems that make reading it worthwhile.

NOT FOR ALL THE GOLD IN IRELAND by John James; Bantam; 348 pp; £2.95 p/b.

Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

I first read this book 16 years ago, and yet rereading it for review, it's as though I finished it for the first time only yesterday. So many events are fresh in my mind, and it's worn well considering it's nearly 20 years old. This, a sequel to the extraordinary *Votan*, concerns the adventures of Photinus in Britain as he searches for Irish gold. If you are not acquainted with the Norse Myth, or the Irish story cycles, then just take this as a rollicking adventure, told with a flair and mastery which some more recent novelists could do well to take note of. If you are familiar with the stories, well you can hate it for all the liberties it takes, or you can accept it as an imaginative synthesis. It's no good moaning that it doesn't tell it like it was, we don't know how it was anyway. My feeling is that if more fantasy writing was of this quality, we might be able to run the trilogy peddlers out of town. I can't recommend this novel too warmly.

THE DARKEST ROAD by Guy Gavriel Kay; Unwin; 420 pages; £3.50 paperback;

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The final part of *The Fionavar Tapestry* trilogy brings together the remaining Celtic themes not previously used. The 5 people taken to Fionavar by Loren Silvercloak in *The Summer Tree* play out their roles, the end seeming inevitable as again the Arthurian cycle draws to its conclusion. The one wild card is Darien, child of Jennifer and the evil Rakoth (against whom they are all fighting). It is Darien who may well decide whether good or evil wins. There are a lot of Tolkeinian elements present within the trilogy but it is well written, intricately plotted and action packed. Those who enjoyed the other volumes will not be disappointed.

THE GENESIS QUEST by Donald Moffitt; Sphere; 341 pages; £3.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Rob Whitmore.

In a distant star system in the far future, the Nor intercept messages from Earth. Using the information they re-create human beings. A human community evolves alongside the Nor, using Earth knowledge and culture as a model. Bram (a bioengineer) dreams of the impossible, travelling to Earth. The novel failed to hold my interest. I found the characters dull and the dialogue plain. The story line reaches a predictable end, with Bram setting off in a giant Nor starship, (Treeship in this case), into the thrilling sequel, *Second Genesis!*. The few good ideas don't make this worth reading.

THE CRYSYAL EMPIRE by L Neil Smith; Grafton; 511 pages; £3.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Carol Manton.

A priest in the middle ages discovers what caused the plague, but he is murdered by his brother before he can spread the word. After reading that prologue I had great hopes for this novel but was disappointed, it could have been better. The plague spreads and wipes out Europe before Western technology rises. Rome never fell but is now ruled by a Saracen Caliph with Jewish allies, the East is ruled by an Arab empire bent on mutual destruction. O.K that's the interesting bit and should have been greatly expanded, but degenerates into a routine heroic quest by Sedrich Sedrichson and his sword murderer. There are definite shades of Edmund Cooper's *Cloud Walker* in this novel and combined with a plague decimated Europe it should have produced an interesting story, but somehow it failed to deliver.

A MALADY OF MAGICKS by Craig Shaw Gardner; Headline; 235 pp; £2.99 p/back.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is yet another book of "lite fantasy" (you know, the ones that intentionally set out to be funny rather than do it accidentally). Terry Pratchett manages it by coming up with the inobvious jokes. This book unfortunately concentrates on the obvious ones. Even worse, it is the first in a trilogy. Wuntvor is apprenticed to the not so great wizard Ebenecum, who unfortunately is allergic to magic. They search for a cure, hindered only by stagestruck dragons, incompetent assassins and the like. Mediocre.

SECOND GENESIS by Donald Moffitt; Sphere; 329 pages; £3.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

I had previously read *The Jupiter Theft* by the same author, and enjoyed it. Unfortunately I cannot say the same for this book. This is the sequel to *Genesis Quest*, in which the alien Nar reconstructed humans from radio signals sent out from our galaxy thirty seven million years ago. Now the people they made set out in a living spaceship in search of their origins. Their journey, and what they find when they get to Earth, could have made this book one of the classics of science fiction, but the clumsy plot and the wooden characterisation drag it down. Don't bother.

THE HOUNDS OF GOD by Judith Tarr; Corgi; 363 pages; £2.95 paperback.
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This final volume in a fantasy trilogy begins and ends with joy - for some of its characters. Between there is anguish and tribulation. Alf, who spent eighty years in a monastery before realising he was of Elvenkind (*The Isle of Glass*), is delighted with the birth of his twin children. Then their mother, Thea, and the babies are snatched by sorcery. The peaceful kingdom of Rhiyana is invaded, a crusade being raised against it because the King, Queen and many of its people are either Elvenkind or practice religious tolerance. At a time in history when the Inquisition is tearing communities apart, Rhiyana is an anathema. When he is most needed, Alf is drawn away from the kingdom in search of his family. This is an excellent culmination to a well written, fast-paced trilogy of people touched by magic.

TIMEFALL by James Kahn; Grafton; 300 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Timefall is the third book in a trilogy that didn't need a final volume. *World Enough and Time* and *Times Dark* *Laughter* were set in the same world, around the same characters. *Timefall* is an Indiana Jones type adventure - paleontologist Joshua Green and friends head for the Amazon in search of fabulous wealth - but not nearly as gripping. With the exception of the characters having the same names there is apparently little connection with earlier volumes until you get halfway through, when they meet Jasmine, a survivor from the last time-cycle. It is she who explains that they must save the world. It is a pity the inventiveness present in the earlier works isn't evident here, as its lack spoils an otherwise enjoyable series.

THE LEGACY OF HEAROT - Niven, Pournelle & Barnes; Sphere; 399 pp; £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Marton.

Cadman Weyland is accused of having Cassandra-like tendencies when, after 12 months of peaceful existence on Tau Cet 4, he insists on extensive perimeter defences around the colony. The other colonists see no reason to waste time and energy on such projects, and begin to treat him as something of an oddity. But, Cadman is proved tragically correct when a voracious predator, something akin to a monitor lizard only bigger, is disturbed and attacks the colony. Such is the tenacity of this "Grendel" that it seriously damages the colony, bringing it almost to its knees. If this is the effect a single animal has then what happens if there are more? I must admit I found Niven and Pournelle's last effort, *Footfall*, a little heavy going, but the injection of new blood from Steven Barnes has made all the difference. I thoroughly enjoyed the book, the colony's situation is so believable, and the characters so well drawn, that I found the book unput-downable. Recommended.

SIGN OF CHAOS by Roger Zelazny; Sphere; 214 pages; £2.99 paperback;

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The second series of books about the Royal House of Amber are the chronicles of Merlin (son of Corwin prince of Amber, and Dara of the Courts of Chaos). Merlin's troubles started in *Trumps of Doom*, when a former girlfriend was savagely killed and he barely escaped with his life. It slowly emerges that his best friend, Luke, has been behind previous attempts on his life (but not this one) and has killed Merlin's uncle Cain as revenge for his own father's death. By the end of volume two, *Blood of Amber*, Luke has declared himself satisfied and is prepared to call off the vendetta. Merlin though finds himself beset from other directions, including a mysterious sorcerer called Mask. During *Sign of Chaos* matters become more complex and there is at least one more volume to follow it. *Sign of Chaos* is not great literature but it is an exiting romp through a number of fantasy worlds. It should not be read in isolation and it might be better to collect the whole set before you start.

THE MALACIA TAPESTRY by Brian Aldiss; Methuen; 393 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Helen Wake.

If you believe that friendship is folly, love bound to end in betrayal, and any attempt at honesty doomed to failure; and if, moreover, you wish to read about injustice, oppression and hypocrisy rather than escaping from it, then this book's for you. Personally I read for pleasure or instruction - both if I strike lucky - and I like the characters I read about to be people I'd choose to know if they happened to exist. He's everything I mistrust and dislike in a man - a snobbish, vain skirt chaser, who despises the women he catches, resents those who escape him. With one exception, the fair Armida, whose wealth and noble position inspire in the breast of our hero far more endearing emotions than mere lust, that is, avarice, envy, ambition and greed. Recommended only if you have a taste for futility.