

BRUM GROUP NEWS

February
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The monthly Newsletter of the
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1989 Committee: Chairman - Bernie Evans Secretary - Chris Murphy
Treasurer - Chris Chivers Newsletter Editor - Dave Hardy Reviews Editor -
Mick Evans Publicity Officer - Helena Bowles Novacon 19 - Martin Tudor

This Month's Meeting is on:
Friday 17 February at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00
Visitors £1.50

This month's guest speaker is:

Terry Pratchett

Terry Pratchett has two new books coming out in May - but we couldn't wait that long to get him along to the Brum Group. The books in question are the paperback of *Sourcery* and the hardcover of *Pyramids* (the latest in his 'Discworld' series). There will be a Signing Session at Andromeda at that time.

Terry has continuous links with the Brum Group. He used to work in the electricity supply industry (the CEBG to you), with which our Chairman also has close connections (electrical, of course). He became a member of the British Science Fiction Association at the age of 14 - a time when our own Rog Peyton was editing *Vector*! At the same age he (Terry) sold his first story to John Carnell. The rest is, as they say, history... Don't miss this one.

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. Subscriptions for 1989-90 are under review.

Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer, c/o the Chairman (below). 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, fax 021-777 2792)

Last Month

The AGM

You should find enclosed with this Newsletter a copy of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, so there is no point in my reporting on it here. Except to mention that, at the beginning of the meeting Vernon and Pat Brown walked out in protest at the cavalier fashion in which requests for 'no smoking during the meeting' were brushed aside by the (cigar smoking) chairman of the meeting. Tim apologised at the end of the meeting for any offence he may have caused - but the offendees (some of them) were of course not there to hear him... Members (and visitors) are reminded that as a general principle they are requested not to smoke during the 'formal' part of the programme - ie. while the speaker is talking (the speaker him/herself being exempted). The whole question of smoking during other types of programme item is being discussed by the Committee.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be an EGM at the beginning of the March Meeting, as agreed at the AGM (not February, because we don't want to hold up Terry Pratchett, who has to leave after his talk) in order to present the Accounts and Balance Sheets in a more understandable form. The subscription rates etc. for 1989 will then also be announced. An interesting programme item will then follow, so it is hoped to keep the 'business' part of the meeting as short and to the point as possible...



New Members - January

Last month we were joined by John Efstathiades, who lives in Harborne and is 'over 18', and Chris Ridd. They are not entirely 'new faces' at the Group, however, as they are members of the Aston University SF Society and have been to our meetings. Chris became interested in fandom after Novacon 18; John lists his special interests as 'EVERYTHING!', so should find plenty to appeal to him during the year!

NEWSFILE

THE JOPHAN REPORT #23

Collectors of plastic may be interested to hear that Davis Publications are about to offer the SF field the first SF credit card. 'The Far Travellers Credit Card' will be a Mastercard (Access) offered through a US bank, with full-colour artwork by Vincent di Fate on the front. The card will be an 'affinity card', similar to those issued by a large number of US professional and trade groups and organisations; by using it you show your support for said organisation - and a small percentage of the money involved in the transaction goes to said organisation. Naturally the card will be tied in to *Analog* and *Isaac Asimov's SF* magazines, but as yet Davis are unwilling to say what percentage they will receive, how much (if any) the annual fee will be, or even what the APR will be. They promise a press release within the next few months.

New World Entertainment have finally sold Marvel Comics - for \$82.5 million to the Andrews Group, a Los Angeles based company owned by the chairman of Revlon Inc.

William Shatner has sold an untitled SF novel to Berkeley. The manuscript is due in February and it will first appear as a Putnam hardcover. Paul Anderson has sold a 175,000 word novel entitled *The Boat of a Million Years* to Tor, who have also recently bought an untitled Ramsey Campbell horror novel for \$100,000.

SIGNING SESSION AT ANDROMEDA:

Saturday 25 February - Ramsey Campbell will be signing *Ancient Images* (the story of a long-lost film starring Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi) and anything else he's written.

John Brunner, who was recently GoH at the Polish National SF Convention, has edited two anthologies of Kipling's SF and fantasy for Baen. *Divine Invasions: The Life of Philip K. Dick*, by Larry Sutin, will be published by Harmony Books in the summer. (Did ya know there's a rock group called 'A Scanner Darkly' - ?) 'For Better or Verse', a new MythAdventures story by Robert Asprin, illustrated by Mel White, will appear in the next issue of the MythAdventures Fan Club Newsletter - available only to club members. Membership is \$18 (over here) - send a couple of IRCs for details to: MythAdventures Fan Club, Box 95, Sutter, CA 95982, USA.

On this side of the Atlantic the Book Club Association has acquired Piers Anthony's *Out of Phaze*, Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fioravari Tapestry* and David Zindell's *Neverness*.

News and Gossip from the world of SF, including Martin Tudor's celebrated JOPHAN REPORT.

If you have any information, don't keep it to yourself - send it in. (This does mean YOU!)

In the US the National Association of Evangelicals is urging a boycott of the video of *ET* in retaliation for MCA/Universal's theatrical release of *The Last Temptation of Christ...* However, it is unlikely that MCA/Universal will be overly concerned since advance sales were over \$11 million - surpassing the previous sales records (Disney's *Cinderella*, 5.3 million and *Lady and the Tramp* 3.2 million) by a considerable amount!

Robin has been written out of the script of the long-awaited *Batman* film, except for a brief appearance towards the end, just in case they want to use him in sequels. Michael Keaton, Jack Nicolson and Kim Basinger will star, along with Jack Palance.

(All news courtesy *Science Fiction Chronicle*)

THE ANDROMEDA TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks last month at our well-known SF Bookshop were:

1. *2061: Odyssey Three* - Arthur C. Clarke, Grafton.
2. *Dreams of Stone* - Jonathan Wylie, Corgi.
3. *Still River* - Hal Clement, Sphere.
4. *Enemy Within* - Ron Hubbard, New Era.
5. *Vengeance of Orion* - Ben Bova, Methuen.
6. *Replay* - Ken Grimwood, Grafton.
7. *Janissaries II* - Jerry Pournelle, Futura.
8. *Mort* - Terry Pratchett, Corgi.
9. *The Sky is Filled with Ships* - Richard Meredith, Venture.
10. *Lavondyss* - Robert Holdstock,

TOP FIVE HARDCOVERS:

1. *Dragon's Dawn* - Anne McCaffrey, Bantam.
2. *The Dragonhiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey Two* - David Langford, Drunken Dragon.
3. *Sleeping in Flame* - Jonathan Carroll, Century.
4. *Demon Lord of Karanda* - David Eddings, Bantam.
5. *Wyrd Sisters* - Terry Pratchett, Gollancz. (which, incidentally, came in at No 1 as the best-selling hardcover in Birmingham...)

The Christmas WORD SQUARE Competition

Remember it? There was quite a good response, and we have in fact not one, not two, but *three* winners. Unfortunately, tearing a £5 Andromeda Voucher in three renders it worthless; so your Committee has agreed that I should run a play-off.

To add a new dimension to this month's meeting, therefore, during the interval the three finalists will be confronted by the Ultimate Challenge (I hope they're reading this!). Be there to witness a three way dual (trial?) between

Peter Day, Michael Jones and
Wendell Wagner, Jr.

each of whom found 45 books in the word square (including a few that even Pauline didn't know were there?). How many did you get? The words present were:

SOURCERY STRATA ICE EON RING-
WORLD WASP MIRAGE EARTHWORKS
HOTHOUSE ROADMARKS SANTIAGO
MECHASM TIMEFALL GHOST
GREYBEARD PSION GLORIANA HESTIA
WYRMS DHALGREN MORT ONE TRI-
TON CLONE VAR DUNE WE TELE-
PATHIST HEGIRA TELEMPATH
ANTHEM OX ORN MOON TITAN
CITY FURY LEGEND MACROSCOPE
ASGARD FOOTFALL DRAGONSANE
CRASH NOVA KINDRED SUBB
MUTANT POWER MAIA JEM XAN
BOLO RUR GOG TELEPATH SHE.

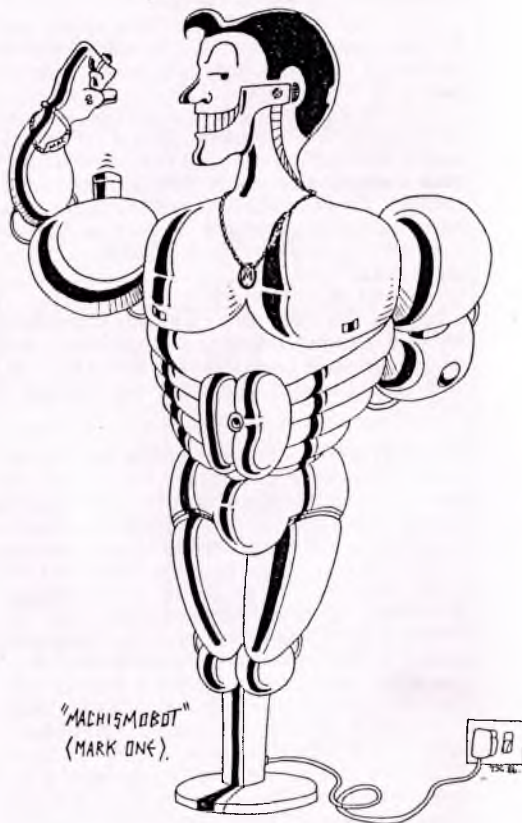
Thanks again to Pauline Morgan for setting such a brain-teaser, and to all who entered - well done or hard luck!

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Thanks to Tim Groome for artwork (right) and to all book reviewers.

ON THE SMALL SCREEN

I have been heard to complain about the BBC-2 TV series *Red Dwarf* because (although it could be funny at times - on the few occasions when I watched it) it used all the trappings of science fiction without any regard for science. Which didn't make it fantasy either, of course - but we won't get into all that again... It doesn't help *our* cause any, though, in trying to tell the public what SF is really about. 'Holograms' that are solid flesh and blood, indeed!

So I wasn't terribly pleased when I watched the latest episodes on video of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Our Captain apparently tries to find relaxation by telling the ship's computer to open up an entire holographic world (which has been kept very quiet until now), in which he can take on the persona of a private detective from (I think) 1941. A world from which he can return with lipstick on his face, and in which crew members can be shot - and die???





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

We start our reviews this month with a tribute to our guest, Terry Pratchett, in the form of an extra-long review of *MORT* by Carol Morton, and an overview of his other work by Bernie Evans.

THE MAGICAL LUNACY OF TERRY PRATCHETT - BY BERNIE EVANS

The wonderful Josh Kirby covers to Terry's books reflect perfectly the anarchic idol-shattering humour which lies in wait for us inside the covers. Terry has taken this form of humour and made it entirely his own, not only do all the well known exponents of hard SF come under his laser-pen, even old Will Shakespeare is not immune. I feel a bit of a fraud writing this, as I've only actually read TWO of Terry's books, but I can honestly say that EVERY one I haven't stands right now on my pile labelled "to be read for pleasure". As someone well known for her (much voiced) preference for "old-fashioned REAL hard SF", that's the greatest compliment I can pay a writer. The two I have read are, by the way, *The Dark Side of the Sun* and *Strata*, if you haven't read them yet, you have a treat in store.

MORT by Terry Pratchett; Corgi; 271 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Death decides to take an apprentice and chooses a youth called Mortimer, better known as Mort (appropriate?). Mort learns much of the working of Death's office, even going so far as to usher on a few souls himself while death has a night off (the first for 2000 years). The king of Sto Lat is about to be assassinated and as Death and Mort attend to his "Passing on" Mort sees and falls in love with the King's daughter Keli. Mort then finds out that Keli is also due to be assassinated and that he is to do the ushering on of her soul. He rebels and ushers on the assassin instead. At this point the novel becomes truly bizarre, in the style of the Pratchett novel. Reality and the people of Sto Lat know that the princess should be dead but she refuses to co-operate and be buried. I had previously read two of the *Discworld* novels and found them so-so but this novel is funnier, more entertaining and has a better storyline. There are some gems of "Pratchettian" humour here:- Death's horse is called Binky(?!?!); Death plays hookey, and becomes a short-order cook; Death experiments with food, drink and fishing, to name but three. This excellent novel will have you chuckling from the the first page through to the end. Highly recommended.

INTERVENTION by Julian May; Pan; 668 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Jonathon Weeks.

This is a pretty weighty book for what is a prelude to May's new *Galactic Millieu* trilogy. The story centres around the memoirs of one Rogatien Remillard, dealing with his involvement in the emergence of paranormal abilities in man over a period from the mid 1970's to the turn of the millenium. The subject is dealt with on a more down to earth level than a scientific approach, concentrating on the personal lives of Remillard's family and their approach to the unusual powers present in the family line. Outside this, alien spacecraft orbit the Earth monitoring these developments in preparation for man's imminent emergence into psychic maturity, although they take a back seat throughout most of the book. The book is basically an exploration of the emergence of psychic abilities within a modern day setting, devoid of any of the motifs of traditional "hard SF". Enjoyable for what it is, but may not appeal to the hardened fan.

TOOLMAKER KOAN by John McLoughlin; Futura; 344 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

In 2031 a strange object slowly dismantles a space probe. On Cold-War-torn Earth the two Earth governments rush to be first to send a spaceship to investigate. Each mission has orders to prevent the other achieving First Contact, by force if necessary. These plans do not get very far, and the two crews are forced to cooperate with each other to survive. The combined team has to solve the deadly Toolmaker Koan to save humanity from extinction. The trouble is, by definition a koan is a riddle with no answer. This is one of the few books I have read recently that brings back the thrill of logically worked out hard S.F. The Whiteelin are some of the best aliens I have come across, and the *Toolmaker Koan* has no glib simple answers. Highly recommended.

CHIAROSCURO by Tim White; (text by Linda Bertram); Paper Tiger; 144 pages;

£14.95 hardcover; £7.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

The July 1988 Brum Group News contains my review of *The SF and Fantasy Worlds of Tim White*, in which I said that over ten years of Tim's work remained unpublished in book form. No longer. This new volume contains 122 colour and 74 black and white illustrations, including a new departure - jewellery. I have followed Tim's work since his early days (remember the Christmas Cracker Spaceship on *Science Fiction Monthly*?) His work has matured and developed since then, until he has a unmistakable and individual style. The title, which means "the artistic distribution of light and dark", is appropriate, since Tim is a master in achieving three dimensional effects using light and shadow. I would have preferred full titles and date under each work (and no authors' names are given), instead of the rather confusing alphabetical index at the back. But that's a minor quibble about a truly beautiful book. Get it.

DREAM MAKERS ed by Martyn Dean, text by Chris Evans; Paper Tiger; 127 pages;

£14.95 hardback;

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This book is a good introduction to modern day Fantasy and S.F artwork, it covers six artists, Melvyn Grant, Michael Kaluta, Julek Heller, Berni Wrightson, Chris Moore and Charles Vess. We get a brief interview with the artists themselves, by Chris Evans, followed by a cross section of their work. The book contains a whole variety of different styles - fantasy, horror, some excellent spaceships and even some comic art. Recommended.

A MULTITUDE OF MONSTERS by Craig Shaw Gardner; Headline; 201 pages; £2.50 p/back.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Ebenezum sneezes uncontrollably in the presence of magic. This is a major flaw in a wizard. With his apprentice, he continues his journey to Vushta, the City of Forbidden Delights, to prevent the "Forxnagel", the great spell that will do unfortunate things to all of creation. The cover blurb sums it up really. "The inevitable sequel to *A Malady of Magicks*". It is very easy to parody hack fantasy, but Gardner sometimes forgets you also have to make it funny. Legendary monsters forming a trade union, and hordes of Brownies determined to make a mark on world affairs, are theoretically humorous, but this book did not get that many laughs out of me. Buy *Mort* instead it's much better.

INFERNAL DEVICES: A MAD VICTORIAN FANTASY - K.W Jeter; Grafton; 283 pp; £2.95 p/b

Reviewed by Wendell Wagner, Jr.

This is another of the genre of pastiches of late Victorian prose. Unusually, Jeter does this without involving Sherlock Holmes, Jack the Ripper, or anyone from one of H.G. Wells's novels. (Jeter previously did a sequel to *The Time Machine* called *Marlock Nights*). This book is full of imaginative and downright bizarre ideas. Indeed, if it has a problem, it's that the ideas are so bizarre that the plot comes across as a little too arbitrary. Furthermore, some of these ideas are never explained later in the book. Not quite, then, the classic the book promises to be in the beginning.

A MATTER OF OATHS by Helen Wright; Methuen; 282 pages; £3.50.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

It may be worth getting this book before it's banned under the infamous "Clause 28". Inhabited space is controlled by two emperors on whom a tenuous peace has been imposed by the Guild of Webbers (a series of oaths, hence the title), the Webbers being the only people who can fly starships. Commander Rallya takes on a new officer for her ship, Rafe, who is a memory wiped oath-breaker with an aristocratic background. Giving away too much of the plot would spoil what is a complex and well thought out story in a politically complex universe. My only complaint about the book is that a lot of the detail is introduced only through a preface to each chapter and can leave the reader wondering what the characters are talking about, although things become clearer later on. A glossary might have helped. Rafe's relationship with his Webmaster Joshim (essential to the plot) may upset the Government, but it is treated in a sensitive manner, without the background bitterness found in accounts dealing with homosexual relationships.

THE UNBEHEADED KING by L. Sprague De Camp; Grafton; 208 pages; £2.75 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

This book is the final volume in the *Reluctant King* trilogy. Unfortunately it is not as good as the first two books and as such is a little disappointing. Jorian, the hero of the saga, once again attempts the freeing of his beloved Estrildis from the city of Xylar where he was once king. Kings of Xylar are normally beheaded after a five year reign and since Jorian fled the city before meeting this fate (hence the title) returning to rescue his queen is more than a little risky. The book seems to be mainly a collection of stories told by Jorian and other characters, somewhat eclipsing the central quest. I found this rather frustrating since, just as something seemed about to happen in the main plot, things suddenly stopped as Jorian told another story. Apart from this complaint the book is superior fantasy, as one would expect from the author and its only real disappointment is that it is not up to his usual high standards.

THE HEAVENLY HORSE FROM THE OUTERMOST WEST by Mary Stanton; N.E.L.; 351 pages;

£6.95 lge p/back. Rev by Carol Morton.

The heavenly horse of the title is Dancer, last true Appaloosa Stallion, second to Equus in the army of 105. Duchess is an abused buckskin mare that arrives at the Bishops' farm. El-Arat, the Arabian mare at the farm, is the dream speaker for the herd, and in dreams she discovers that Duchess is the last true Appaloosa mare. Equus sends Dancer to the farm with instructions to protect Duchess and get her in foal, ensuring the continuation of the line, endangered because the Dark Horse betrayed Equus and vowed to wipe out the Appaloosas to diminish the 105, so reducing Equus' powers. Duchess must therefore be protected from the Dark Horse and his executioner Arnor. If the protagonists in this story were human it would be a love story, but as they are Equine it becomes fantasy. It is a nice book, a bit sweet and syrupy in places but the disclosure and detailing of the Equine beliefs raise it above this, to an entertaining read. Recommended.

VIRICONIUM by M. John Harrison; Unwin; 276 pages; £33.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

This is a re-issue in one volume of Mr Harrison's short novel *In Virconium* and his short story collection *Virconium Nights*. The common setting for all these tales is the city of Virconium - a city purely of the imagination, yet which has echoes in every real city (including Birmingham!). Despite the common background the stories are very different, and explore the relationships of the people who live in and around the city. The stories themselves are well-constructed and well-written, commanding this reader's undivided attention from the start. There is no feeling that, having created the background for *In Virconium*, the author is simply saving himself the trouble of creating new settings for the short stories. Not for those who like their reading to contain lots of adventure, this book will appeal to those who like good writing and stories which, in reflecting reality, reflect both its successes and failures.

A FEAST UNKNOWN by Phillip Jose Farmer; Grafton; 255 pages; £2.95 p/back.

Reviewed by Wendell Wagner, Jr .

This is a reprint of a novel originally published in 1969. It contains most of the standard themes of Farmer's works; immortality, manipulation of the characters by a mysterious secret society, Tarzan, Doc Savage and large amounts of intensely pornographic sex. This isn't my favourite of Farmer's works, but other people consider it one of his best novels. If you can stomach the strong sex and violence scenes, you might enjoy this.

THE WHITE RAVEN by Diana L. Paxson; N.E.L.; 390 pages; £12.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The legend of Tristan and Isolde is well known. This novel places it firmly in history. By the middle of the sixth century AD Artor has been dead some years and Marc'h of Kernow is High King of Britain. It was a period when Christianity was for kings and princes and the people still firmly believed in the Old Gods. Sometimes the boundary between religions blurred. The story is retold from the point of view of Branwen (whose name means White Raven). She is cousin and servant to Esseilte (Isolde) and goes with the Irish princess to Britain for her marriage to Marc'h. As a result she is an intimate witness to the tragedy that unfolds. This is an excellent historical fantasy and gives a different slant to a familiar tale, especially as this is one American author who writes about Celtic mythology after having done her homework.

FORGING THE DARKSWORD by Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman; Bantam; 391 pp; £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the *Darksword Trilogy; Volume 1*. Weis and Hickman are previously known for the *Dragonlance* books, whose success has spawned endless spinoffs, and the current tide of *Dungeons and Dragons* write-up books. It will be interesting to see how they do, having severed all links with TSR. In the land of Thimhallan, everyone can do magic, except Joram. Being Dead is a capital offence, as the Living still remember their persecutions at the hands of non-magicians before they left Earth. Joram grows up sheltered in an isolated village, before escaping into the wilderness and joining the practitioners of the forbidden magic called Technology. He uses their knowledge to forge the magic-destroying Darksword. This book reverses the usual hero-with-magic-sword formula, to antihero with antimagic sword. It is good fun but not very deep.

WITH A SINGLE SPELL by Lawrence Watt-Evans; Grafton; 304 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Tobas had persuaded the Wizard Raggit to take him on as an apprentice, but he had only managed to learn one spell - a fire spell. Now Tobas was homeless, penniless and very much alone after his master died and he had accidentally burned down their cottage. Tobas leaves his home, Telven, and travels to Ethshar of the spices where, in preference to being sold into slavery he undertakes a quest to kill a dragon. Whilst searching for the dragon, Tobas finds a crashed flying castle, tapestries that are transference portals and of course the dragon. This is a light-weight, amusing read, nothing too involved but entertaining non-the-less.

ALSO RECEIVED

SPACE RANGER	Isaac Asimov	Lightning	144 pp	£1.99.
PIRATES OF THE ASTEROIDS	Isaac Asimov	Lightning	144 pp	£1.99.
SWAN SONG	Robert R. McCammon	Sphere	956 pp	£3.99.
THE DELUGE DRIVERS	Alan Dean Foster	N.E.L.	311 pp	£2.95.
BLOODSHED	Lyndan Darby	Unwin	262 pp	£3.50.
TROUBADOUR	Richard Burns	Unwin	250 pp	£3.95.
THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN	Michael Crichton	Pan	289 pp	£3.50.
THE DELTA/SPIDERWORLD	Colin Wilson	Grafton	352 pp	£3.50.
QUEENSBLADE	Susan Schwartz	Pan	275 pp	£2.99.
THE FACE	Jack Vance	Grafton	271 pp	£2.95.