

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

March  
1989

Issue  
No.210

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 March at 7.45pm

## This Month's Programme

Admission: Members £1.00  
Visitors £1.50

This month's programme item is:

### How To Write SF!

Yes - everything you've always wanted to know! Secrets previously known only to famous authors! A guide for everyone who's ever said "What a load of rubbish! I could do better than that..."

Not a boring lecture, but an interactive programme item involving readings, discussion, questions and argument, all led by CHRIS MORGAN.

If you don't already know him, Chris is the mustached and handsome (he wrote 'slightly wrinkled', but I want to get people *in*) bloke who sits in the second row of the audience each month. He is in fact a professional writer, critic, editor and writing teacher, so has had experience both of selling his own stories to magazines and anthologies and of buying other people's stories (for his anthology, *Dark Fantasies*, to be published by Century in August.)

*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

### Terry Pratchett

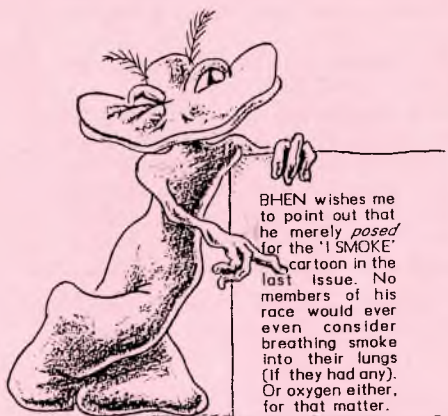
Terry produced the largest audience the Group has seen for a long time - the room was bursting at the seams! There just isn't room to report in any detail on what was said, and anyway it was the sort of evening that 'you had to be there'. So if you missed it - tough! We hope to see many of those new faces at the Group again (hopefully as members), and must also thank Brum's bookshops for their co-operation in publicising our meetings: Andromeda, Waterstone's, Hudson's, Smith's, Nostalgia & Comics - all helped.

The play-off of the WORDSQUARE was won by Michael Jones - congrats.

**MEMBERS:** Don't forget that the March meeting will commence with a (brief) EGM. The agenda will cover adoption of the Minutes for the 1988 and 1989 AGMs, and adoption of a new Treasurer's Report.

**SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:** We are holding an EXTRA MEETING on Friday 28 April (that's the week after the usual meeting) - same place, same time - for US writer C.J. CHERRYH. More news in the next *BGN*, but make a note in your diary! Signing Session at Andromeda that pm.

**NOVACON 19 - POSTSCRIPT:** please note that registration is currently £10.00, but that after Eastercon it will be raised to £12.00. So get your sub in to Bernie A.S.A.P....



## New Members — February

Last month our ranks were swelled by three new members - though at least two of them are not exactly 'new faces'.

Neil Talbott gives his age as 'mediaeval!'. He lives in Catshill, has known of the BSFG for over a decade, and was formerly a leading light of the Leicester Group. His first con was a 70s Novacon, and he enjoys SF in computer games, SF comics, Russian SF, Time Travel and Alternat(ive) Histories, and much more.

Robert Sneddon, though his accent gives him away as a Scot, lives in Worcester and is 34. He likes funny fiction and films, and is a computer buff, to boot (?).

Gavin McIntyre *sounds* as if he hails from north of the border too, but lives in Dudley and is 24. He lists his favourite authors as Harrison, Asimov, Feist, and Clarke, and heard of the Group through a handout in a book shop.

# NOVACON 19 NEWS

Now it can be told:  
THE INSIDE STORY  
by Chairman  
MARTIN TUDOR

Yes! There will be a NOVACON this year - although certain mere details, such as date and venue, have taken a little longer to settle than in previous years. As I explained at the AGM NOVACON has been forced to move again. Despite the fact that I started making approaches to the Royal Angus Hotel long before NOVACON 18, it wasn't until two weeks after the convention that the General Manager finally gave me his answer - it was "No!" He phrased it very pleasantly of course, but it boiled down to the fact that although he realised and appreciated the vast amount of business NOVACON brought to the hotel - they had to work too hard for their money! Mr Thirwell didn't believe his hotel could cope with the level of business a NOVACON entailed. Bernie Evans had a shot at dissuading him, but he would only consider hosting a NOVACON if the membership was limited to between 200 and 250. We considered this out of the question.

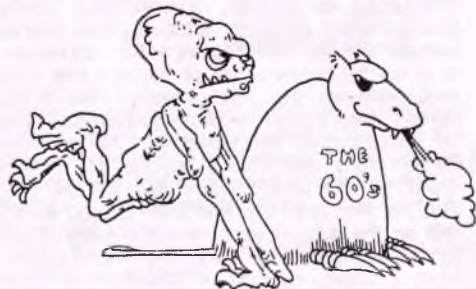
Fortunately, because of the initial difficulty of getting a reply from the Royal Angus, I had already begun to make overtures to alternative hotels. However, I swiftly discovered that due in no small part to the amount of business the NEC is now attracting (10,000 people one weekend, 30,000 the next, and so on), very few hotels were in a position to help us. Finally having struck out at twelve other hotels, we discovered THE EXCELSIOR, which was not only available, but perfect for a NOVACON. All of the more than ample function space is on the ground floor (the Book Room, Art Show and Main Program just a few feet away from each other), along with the comfortable lounge reception, a large bar and a spacious snooker room with two full size tables. So far the hotel have been very helpful and I have no doubt they will continue to be so. But that is more than enough on the venue, you can read all about that in our progress reports, it is time to talk about the convention.

Our Guest of Honour is Geoff Ryman, in fandom Geoff is probably best known for his superb stage presentations such as *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* at the first MEXICON. But as Geoff is also an equally superb published writer I hope you will all take this opportunity to familiarise yourselves with some of the excellent work he has had published such as his two novels *The Unconquered Country* and *The Warrior Who Carried Life*. In my opinion Geoff is a perfect GoH for a Novacon - both professional writer and fan,

I'm sure you will agree.

Our theme for the convention is 'the music, the science and the fiction of the sixties', which is admittedly a fairly tall order to cram into one con but we will be doing our best. The idea of the theme first came up during a pre-committee meeting drink when several people tried to define when 'the sixties' began and ended. One year mentioned as being the year in which they 'really' ended was 1971 - thus 'proving' the birth of Novacon marked the death of the sixties... The more we talked about the idea the more enthusiastic we became. So much happened during 'the sixties' in so many fields - New Wave SF; genetics; space travel; psychedelia; synthesizers... the list is almost endless, but we will be covering as much as is possible in our, hopefully, innovative programme.

Finally a few words about my committee - Tony Berry, the NOVACON 19 treasurer, you probably know already as he has chaired two previous Novacons; Helena Bowles, who is in charge of our programme, may be a new name to some of you (although she has been a member of the group for a few years), but she has the major advantage of being young and enthusiastic (and the disadvantage of being our 'token 19 year-old') as well as the backing of an experienced committee; Bernie Evans is dealing with our registrations, a job she knows inside out having occupied the same position on Novacon 17, 18 and Fifteencon (two of which she also chaired); Nick Mills, who worked on Novacon 16 and the Conspiracy fan programme, will be dealing with our operations on the day and Pam Wells, a name new to Novacons, but not to convention running, will be doing our publications. Personally I think this an excellent committee, and I'm sure that we can guarantee you an enjoyable time in November - So join, already...



# NEWSFILE

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!!)

## THE JOPHAN REPORT #24

GUFF RESULTS (Get-Up & Under Fan Fund - Europe to Australia 1988/89)			
	UK & EUROPE	AUSTRALIA	TOTAL
ROELOF GOUDRIAAN	16	34	50
LINDA PICKERSGILL	31	11	42
NO PREFERENCE	0	3	3
TOTALS	47	48	95

Roelof will attend the Australian National SF Convention in Perth at Easter.

TAFF RESULTS (Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund - Europe to USA 1988/89)				
	UK & EUROPE	N.AMERICA	FOREIGN	TOTAL
ROBERT LICHTMAN	26	77	6	109
LUKE MCGUFF	10	34	NIL	44
HOLDOVER FUNDS	5	5	NIL	10
MISCELLANEOUS	2	NIL	NIL	2
TOTALS	43	116	6	165

NB: 'MISCELLANEOUS' = 'OLIVER NORTH' and 'T.D. THE CYBERPUNK TEDDY BEAR'

Robert will be attending CONTRIVANCE (24-27 March), the British National SF Convention in Jersey at Easter.

British Rail will scrap their cut price rail fare outfit Conference Connection from the end of April 1989. BR say they don't need the business because they already have as much passenger traffic as they can handle - they also claim that they haven't yet got enough passenger traffic to justify (ie. make it profitable) to put on more rolling-stock... Convention organisers who still want to offer members cheap rail fares might try - THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT, PO Box 1, St. Albans, Herts., AL1 4ED. (Tel. 0727 34422).

The ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD nominations have just been announced: the following works are on the short-list for the £1000 Award to the best SF novel of 1988 - *Empire of Fear* by Brian Stableford, *Rumours of Spring* by Richard Grant, *Life during Wartime* by Lucius Shepard, *Kairos* by Gwyneth Jones, *Whores of Babylon* by Ian Watson, *Unquenchable Fire* by Rachel Pollack, *Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas* by Michael Bishop. The winner will be announced at a special presentation at the Groucho Club in London on the 15th March. But if you haven't been invited I'm afraid you'll either have to subscribe to the newszine *Critical Wave* (British subs are £5.00, payable to "Critical Wave" at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ) or wait until the next Brum Group News... Still on the subject of awards the nominations for the Philip K Dick Award are *Neon Lotus* by Marc Laidlaw, *Orphan of Creation* by Roger MacBride Allen, *Wet Ware* by Rudy Rucker,

*400 Billion Stars* by Paul J. McAuley, *Becoming Alien* by Rebecca Brown Ore, *Rendezvous* by D Alexander Smith.

Still on the subject of awards the British SF Association's annual awards will not be presented at this year's Eastercon (Contrivance in Jersey), the first time in more than twenty years that the ceremony has not taken place at our national sf event. Instead, the announcements will be made at Mexican III, being held in Nottingham during the May bank holiday. The latest issue of *Matrix*, the BSFA newsletter mentions that in addition Mexican III will also be the venue for this year's BSFA AGM. (26 - 29 May 1989: MEXICON III. The event for fans of written SF, at Nottingham's Albany Hotel. Membership is £15, write to - 7A Lawrence Road, South Ealing, London W5 4XJ, for details. Please note that PR 2 is now available containing the hotel booking forms which need to be completed and returned in March.) According to members of the Contrivance committee, awards administrator Mike Moir told the BSFA more than a year ago that he would be unable to organise the 1989 ballot; despite this, Moir was apparently advised shortly before Christmas that his resignation had not been accepted and that he was still slated to run the poll. He agreed, but told the BSFA that other commitments forced a rescheduling to Mexican III. Contrivance has now announced plans to present its own awards and is issuing ballot forms with its final mailing.

Moving on from awards, but still on the 'fan-front', a group of British fans have formally launched their campaign to bid for the World >

SF Convention, setting their sights on either 1995 or 1997, depending upon the result of moves to set up a fourth, non-American worldcon zone. February saw the creation of a governing board which will both oversee the bid and organise the recruitment of the convention staff. Several sites are under consideration, among them the Scottish Conference & Exhibition Centre in Glasgow, the Jersey Conference Centre and Birmingham's new International Conference Centre, the largest facility of its kind in Europe.

Cash donations in the order of £5/person (to be counted as a pre-supporting membership) and offers of sponsorship should be forwarded to Vince Docherty at 26 Larch Close, London SW12 9SY (01-673 2178). The committee is also urgently seeking fans willing to work on the bid and/or assist on the day, particularly those with worldcon experience (even if they prefer to act in a purely advisory capacity).

November is a big month in Birmingham this year. There's Novacon of course (see elsewhere in this issue). Birmingham bookstore Nostalgia & Comics intends to host another of its weekend events at the Midlands Arts Centre this year, although the original June/July date may be moved back to November in order to coincide with the city's annual Readers and Writers Festival. Finally, just to prove it is all happening in Brum in November - TV89, describing itself as "the ultimate experience in television conventions", is scheduled for a Birmingham venue over the weekend of 25-26 November. Proceeds from the event will be donated to the BBC's annual 'Children in Need' charity fund. The registration is £12 (£7.50 for one day); details can be obtained from 9 Titford Road, Oldbury, Warley, West Midlands.

On the publishing front Stephen King has signed a four-book deal with Viking/NAL worth a reported \$40 million - a world record. The first novel, titled *The Dark Half*, will appear from Viking in November. Steve Green, Birmingham fan and co-editor of *Critical Wave*, has sold a story entitled 'Cracking' to *Fantasy Times*, the paperback magazine - for considerably less than \$40 million...

**SMALL AD.** *Critical Wave* announce that due to the fact that they now possess a brand new Cannon copier they will be offering a cheap, near-litho printing service for fanzine publishers, conventions and hucksters. Contact Martin Tudor at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick B66 4SH (tel. 021-558 0997) for a quotation.

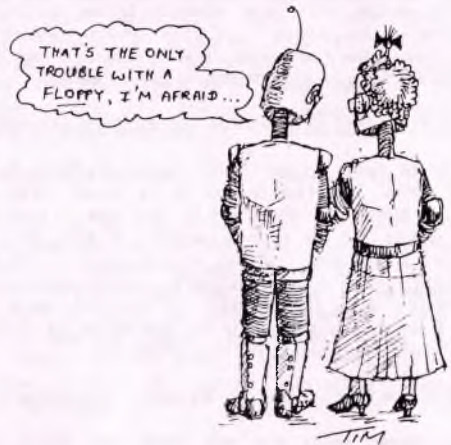
They are also selling two duplicators - a Gestetner 300 (manual) @ only £45.00, and a Gestetner 320 (electric) @ only £85.00, as well as a Gestetner scanner (used to prepare stencils). Details from Martin.

## THE ANDROMEDA TOP TEN

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

1. *Dr Who & The War Machines*, Star.
2. *Dr Who: Delta & The Bannermen*, Star.
3. *Star Trek: Vulcan's Glory*, Titan.
4. *Cabal* - Clive Barker, Fontana.
5. *Torch of Honour* - Roger MacBride Allen, Arrow (Venture #21)
6. *Dreams of Stone* - Jonathan Wylie, Corgi.
7. *Survivalist #16: The Arsenal* - Jerry Ahern, NEL.
8. *2061: Odyssey Three* - Arthur C. Clarke, Grafton.
9. *Doom of the Dark Sword* - Weiss & Hickman, Bantam.
10. *Proteus Unbound* - Charles Sheffield, NEL.

No Top Five hardcovers this month, but you may be interested to know that Bob Shaw's collection of short stories, *Dark Night in Toyland* (Gollancz), which has spent since 1972 sitting on Harlan Ellison's desk waiting for his *Last Dangerous Visions* to be published - until Bob withdrew it - is out at last...



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



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

TOOL OF THE TRADE by Joe Haldeman; Futura; 261 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Glyn Jackson.

This is the story of one Nicholas Foley, an activated Russian "sleeper". While conducting experiments in hypnosis with his wife, he inadvertently discovers that he can control people through the use of a sound generator at ultrasonic frequencies (28,430 hertz). From here on in the story develops into a more than average espionage thriller, with Foley wanted by the CIA, FBI and KGB. The story is told in the form of three different narratives - Foley's, Valerie's (his wife) and Jacob's (a CIA agent), and it's pieced together well. Overall the book is a worthwhile read, and the possibility of a film is not beyond reason.

Book One.....THE ROAD AND THE HILLS by Spedding; Unwin; 431 pages; £3.95 paperback.

Book Two.....A CLOUD OVER WATER by Spedding; Unwin; 348 pages; £3.95 paperback.

Book Three...THE STREETS OF THE CITY by Spedding; Unwin; 338 pages. £3.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is an historical trilogy, with the overall title *A Walk in the Dark* telling of the woman Aleizon Ailix Ayandra who joins the all conquering army of Ailixond, Lord and king of Safi. Book one, tells of Ayandra's rise in the army and how, despite her sex, she is made a Lord of Safi, becomes a trusted friend and advisor to Ailixond and eventually his lover. On his death Ailixond entrusts the royal ring of Safi to her to be passed on to his son Parakison, by his second wife. In Book Two, Ailixond's death has caused turmoil in the empire. As Parakison is under legal age, a Regent has to be elected for him. Lord Sulakon, Ayandra's bitterest enemy, is chosen. She refuses to return the ring to him, escapes Safi and starts a civil war in an effort to halt the disintegration of the empire. Ayandra has defeated Sulakon and in Book Three, she has been declared king of Safi, but finds the position not an easy one to hold on to. Some of her friends begin to desert her, going over to Sulakon's cause. Even with the aid of a neighbouring country, Suthine, she cannot defeat Sulakon's army in the final battle. This is an absorbing trilogy paralleling in the first volume the latter years of Alexandra of Macedon's life. Whilst a historical trilogy, and not the usual trilogy an S.F group would receive, this one is excellent, the time period is well researched and the characters imaginatively drawn. Ms Spedding is to be congratulated on an excellent trilogy. Highly recommended.

THE SHAPING OF MIDDLE EARTH by J.R.R. Tolkien; Unwin; 380 pages; £4.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

This is the fourth volume in *The History of Middle Earth*, in which Christopher Tolkien presents his father's earlier works. The period covered by the present volume is from about 1926 to 1930, at the end of which Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit*. The major part of this book is taken up with earlier versions of *The Silmarillion*, initially as an outline then an expanded version. In both cases, Christopher Tolkien discusses where these fit in with his father's evolution from his original ideas to *The Silmarillion*. Also included is *Ambarkanta* ("The Shape of the World"), which outlines Tolkien's imagined universe, and the *Annals of Valinor* and *Beleriand*, which go into some detail about the chronology of the First Age on Middle Earth. Like the earlier books in this series, I found I was more interested in the development of Tolkien's ideas than in his actual writings. A book that by and large will only appeal to die-hard Tolkien fans.

ODDKINS by Dean R Koontz; Headline; 183 pages; £12.95 Hardback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Koontz's horror novels have sold "forty five million copies in fourteen languages". This isn't one of them. It's a large format illustrated hard cover sub-titled "a fable for all ages" - one of those ominous sounding phrases spanned by publicists determined to sell a children's book to adults. *Oddkins* is a children's book with very little to offer those over the age of twelve. It concerns a small group of magical toys, the eponymous Oddkins, on a journey pursued by another group of magical toys who are out to stop them. The Oddkins, led by Amos the bear, are honest, courageous and boringly good; the others are nastily evil, helped on their way by the devil himself. This is very much formula fantasy, good versus evil, the members of each side clearly marked. The characterisation is shallow, the plot is contrived and full of holes, and the writing is often preachy or oversentimental. By contrast the illustrations, by Phil Parks and mostly in full colour, are both attractive and accurate.

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT'S REVENGE by Harry Harrison; Bantam; 196 pages; £2.99 paperback. Reviewed by Alasdair Johnston.

Contrary to all the rules of military economics, Ciaand is waging interplanetary war with great success. This, of course, is their big mistake, as it gets Slippery Jim di Griz, aka the Stainless Steel Rat, on their case. Given such odds, one man against an interstellar empire, the result is inevitable, especially when the Rat's new bride Angelina joins in, making things perhaps a tiny bit unfair. Rat fans will probably have read this re-issue, already, now everyone else can join the club.

HOMUNCULUS by James Blaylock; Grafton; 301 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

James Blaylock is one of that group of younger writers who latterly gathered round Phillip K Dick, and in common with Tim Powers and K W Jeter, he produced a novel described as 'Steampunk'. This is it. I can't begin to do justice to a plot that incorporates the resurrection of Joanna Southcott, the walking dead, a series of curiously manufactured boxes, and two aerial machines, one of which has been flying round the world for a few years, all of this with the Trismegistus Club in hot pursuit. It's an unashamed romp, with a good many in-jokes, and probably many more I didn't spot, not to mention more improbabilities than the mind can comfortably accommodate. Blaylock can write, he's not that brilliant at plot, characterisation, little things like that, but he can write, and it's that fact which lifts this novel way, above the ordinary. Very highly recommended.

DAUGHTER OF THE EMPIRE by Raymond E Feist; Grafton; 528 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Mara is just about to take her vows to become a nun, when news arrives that her father and brother have been murdered. At seventeen she finds herself in charge of the Acoma clan, at a time when their enemies are gathering for their destruction. She must learn to play the deadly Game of Council, for very high stakes. One of the side effects of The Great Fantasy Boom is the widening definition of what is included under fantasy. This book falls into the sub-genre of 'historical fantasy'. Apart from one magic spell and some intelligent insects, this novel, could just as easily have taken place in medieval Japan or Korea. The intricate political plotting is quite intriguing, even if the novice heroine does get it right too often for credibility. If you liked *Shogun* this is the book for you.

THE FINAL PLANET by Andrew M. Greeley; Century; 302 pages; £11.95 hardback. Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

The pilgrim vessel Iona has been travelling for a quarter of a century, seeking a place for its crew to settle. Their problem is that one of the rules of the holy order that governs them states that they must be invited to land if a planet is inhabited. With the Iona unable to journey much further, they reach the inhabited planet Zylong. In order to get the necessary data to assess the situation on the planet one man, Seamus O'Neill, is sent down to spy out Zylong's people and culture. The novel relates his adventures as he tries to act out a role to which he is not suited, and finds himself drawn into the problems facing the Zylongi. The religious elements actually play little part in the story as most of the action takes place on Zylong itself, and O'Neill is not exactly religious. In fact he is obsessed with women and sex, which constantly intrudes into the story, and consequently ruined for me what would have been an entertaining, if unremarkable book.

OTHER EDENS II Edited by Chris Evans & Rob Holdstock; Unwin; 269 pages; £3.95 paperback. Reviewed by Tony Marton.

A second helping of original SF and Fantasy stories covering the spectrum of the genre. The sixteen stories included are varied and well written, the names both well known and new. The content of these stories ranges, as would be expected, in space, time and place-time travel, Mars, parallel universe, Ancient Greece and even a dragon are encountered within the pages. While the standard is high I found several of the stories stood out better than others, particularly "A Madonna of the Machine" by Tanith Lee (supreme automation), "Waltz in Flexitime" by Michael Cobley (time travel), "Roman Games" by Anne Gay (dragons) and "Remaking History" by Kim Stanley Robinson (parallel universe). Two of the stories, "Dazzle" and "The Wish", I found uncomfortable within the setting of the other stories. Overall an enjoyable read and Evans and Holdstock must get full marks for their presentation of this book and the choice of stories included. Recommended.

THE EYE OF THE QUEEN by Phillip Mann; Grafton; 264 pages; £2.95 paperback. Reviewed by Anne Gay.

The blurb headlines this as being about an extraterrestrial way of death, and so it is. Not a very uplifting theme, and the prose is, in places, rather off putting as well, being rather dense. The start of it all is the death of linguist Dr Marius Thorndyke on the world of Pe-Ellia, and the delivery of his diaries to the young assistant whose help he had rejected. However, the originality and sheer alien-ness of Pe-Ellia help both the student and the reader to come to terms with death in a positive manner, showing how destinies may be interlinked and that the effect one person has upon those around him is, in effect, a life after death. If you don't mind staggering across mountains of beautifully written but weighty prose, this book will reward you for your trouble.

PENNTERRA by Judith Moffett; N.E.L.; 382 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

In this book, the planet is hero, perhaps too much so. The first colonists of the planet Pennterra were Quakers. Because of their beliefs and life style they found it easier than most to accept the restrictions laid on them by the Hrossa - the intelligent natives. But now the second colony ship has arrived and the crew are not prepared to be dictated to and give up machines and remain in the originally colonised valley. The plot is thin and slow but the natural history of Pennterra is worked out in beautiful detail. Also the book has a powerful message about pollution and indiscriminate destruction of habitats - the reason people wish to emigrate from Earth, taking their bad habits and greed with them.

ABANDONATI by Garry Kilworth; Unwin; 162 pages; £12.95 Hardback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This tells the story of an earth where everyone lives in poverty. The buildings have crumbled, food is so scarce people catch cats, dogs and rats to eat, there is no transport except walking and the entire population is disease ridden. Within this mess we meet Guppy, a loner who decides to leave the city on the premise that life must be better elsewhere, and the two friends he meets on the way, Rupert and Trader. Rupert has a dream to build a spaceship to "go where everyone else went" - into space - one of the many ideas people have of what's happened. These ideas include nuclear war, collapse of world trade, rich/in the know left for pastures new leaving others behind, (hence "Abandonati"). The trio have several adventures before arriving at the derelict airport to find spare parts for the ship, only to find it barred as others have set up a farm there, and don't want intruders. This is a wonderful story, well told and written in such a way it's hard to put the book down. Highly recommended.

IMMORTAL BLOOD by Barbara Hambly; Unwin; 306 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

If we hadn't been having guests for dinner I would have read this book in one sitting. It has the atmosphere of a traditional Victorian vampire novel but with original differences. The hero, James Asher, is hired by Don Simon Ysidro (a vampire) to find out who is killing the vampires of London. Barbara Hambly has given the novel the flavour of the times but without the excessively flowery prose of the original writers of such novels, thus making it extremely readable. Realism is added by small touches, like the characters making disparaging remarks about the novels of Bram Stoker. There are faults, the ending is disappointing, and the cover is very off putting (the quality of the book deserved better).

TROUBADOUR by Richard Burns; Unwin; 250 pages; £3.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

*Troubadour* picks up the story where Richard Burns left off in *Khalindaine*, a novel I criticised for being severely overwritten. *Troubadour* has a much lighter tone, but I am still not convinced that Burns has yet found a voice with which he feels comfortable. On the other hand, I did find this quest, ultimately intended to convince Consatine that he really is Emperor, infinitely more readable. Yet there is only so much one can do with a quest, and despite one slightly unexpected twist, the real interest in this novel lies in the development of Streetpoet's moral angst and a very touching friendship with a disillusioned member of the Brotherhood. The humour, and there is a lot of it in this book, is fairly wry, sometimes a little intrusive, but it encourages me, as I do believe that Richard Burns, once he finds his full voice, and lets go of the formula fantasy, will become a force to reckon with in this genre.

THE HAMMER OF THE SUN by Michael Scott Rohan; Orbit; 509 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the third in *The Winter of the World* trilogy. In the last Ice Age, the Powers of the Ice seek the utter extinction of all life by spreading all over the land. Elof the Mastersmith has defeated the Ice twice, and won the love of Kara, who is herself one of the Powers. Elof tries to bind Kara to him forever, and succeeds only in driving her away. Desperately he follows her east across the sea to fabled Kerys, the cradle of civilisation. Here the Ice plans its final assault, and Elof must find a weapon to use against it. These books are sometimes slow, but gripping in the descriptions of a magesmith's art. Many mythical echoes are woven into the tale; Wayland the Smith, Daedalus and the Minotaur, Thor and the Ring of Nibelungs. Excellent.

IN THE CAVES OF EXILE by Ru Emerson; Headline; 310 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

After her perilous flight through the haunted mountains in Volume One, Volume Two finds Ylia Queen of the remnants of the people of a once powerful city. As more stragglers arrive at the caves where the Nedoans now live in exile, conditions rapidly become overcrowded and insanitary. Attacks on their trading parties, herds and guardposts by the malevolent Mathkkra cause Ylia and her Nedoans to find a new homeland. The search for this is done by means both magical and mundane. As the volume progresses Ylia slowly grows into her fildran magical powers. I had great hopes for this trilogy on reading *The Haunted Mountains*, and this volume is, if anything, better. Recommended.