

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

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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 19 May at 7.45pm

**This Month's Programme**

Admission: Members £1.25  
Visitors £2.00

This month's Guest Speaker is:

**David Gemmell**

Asked what he would like to be said about him, Dave replied, "Tell them I'm an all round good egg". So, for a salmonella-free evening... He got fired after his first book, *Waylander*, was published, because its background was the newspaper group for which he worked and its staff. His employer now claims that he 'did it as a favour', as Dave has been writing full-time ever since... He says that if he sold as well elsewhere as he does in Birmingham he would be travelling up to visit us in a silver Rolls Royce. Last year he dedicated a book to the Group, Bernie Evans, Chris and Pauline Morgan, and several other Brummies.

The subject of his talk is 'The Craft of Writing Fantasy', and as he doesn't like to stand and 'lecture' for long periods he wants this to be an interactive event. So that he won't confront a sea of blank faces, please prepare some questions in advance and justify his faith in the Group!

*The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at the PENGUIN (ex LADBROKE) HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham at 7.45 pm. Subscription rates: £6.00 per person (£9.00 for two members at same address)*

*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)*



# GROUP NEWS

Last Month

21 April: Jack Cohen

As I was down with the dreaded lurgie, the following is based on notes by Chris Murphy:

Jack said that he could tell at least six stories about how he came to write his new book, *The Privileged Ape*, but instead he would talk around the slides he had brought. The book began as an attempt to tell the truth, as he sees it, about the human race, but he fears it is really "All my prejudices laid end-to-end". It deals with the origins of social problems and what he calls "the deprivations of affluence".

He believes that many people are 'diminished' by affluence. The welfare state offers only the illusion of security. People in all classes of society have problems with their social and sexual relationships. He added that he can talk to dolphins, but doesn't know what he is saying to them! People, he said, are very 'teachable': they can be persuaded to accept things they *know* are untrue from their own experience. He attributed to John W. Campbell the theory that there are three types of people:

'Tribesmen', who accept the values of society and are conformist.

'Barbarians', who reject these values and rebel against them.

'Citizens', who compromise between these two positions.

SF fans, he said, are Citizens - valuable because they venture into new ideas (unlike Tribesmen) but are not destructive (unlike Barbarians).

Fairy stories were originally meant to teach children values, especially sexual values, but the versions we have today have been heavily censored and rewritten by the likes of Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm. Traditional cultures confer a sense of belonging, which people in advanced societies lack. This is not understood by teachers and educationalists, who want to 'paint everybody grey'. Orang-utangs have got it right: for instance, there are no orang-utang rabbis...

Jack's final conclusion (predictably) was that we should all buy his book. Chris's verdict: overall, excellent (but can't afford it). [Have we had a review copy - ?]

28 April: C.J.Cherryh

Caroline started by saying that she is 'an old school teacher', and went on to talk about our present preoccupation with 'food scares' - salmonella, listeria, etc. The US public is currently worried by apple sauce, and has to decide whether it wants fruit that is perfect or free from chemicals. But, she pointed out, our ancestors ingested or inhaled just as many (or more) adulterants and pollutants as we do - from glazes on pottery, metal implements, charcoal fires inside buildings, daubing on lead-based 'cosmetics', and so on. It's just that modern man has become *aware* of chemistry. They also used to die pretty young in those days, so on the whole she feels safer living today! We have the ability to produce food in abundance, so if we vary our daily diet we won't get much of anything...

SF folk, she said, fail to realise how potent what we know *is*. We have a sense of perspective - we know what has been, is being, will be done to our planet. But a responsibility goes with it: we *have* to believe in the future. Her talk went on to cover computer viruses, humanity's migration into space (she would rather trust alien space pilots than human politicians - and who wouldn't), and alien whales. An excellent evening, which, for some, went on long after the main talk.

# 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 #26

Noreascon Three, the 1989 World SF Convention, in their recent 'Noreascon Three Hugo Release', preface their announcement of the nominees for the Hugo Awards in the following manner: having first pointed out that there are more than the customary five nominees in a number of categories and explained that this was partly due to 'tie votes', they go on to make the following statement (which will appear in modified form on the final Hugo ballot).

*In counting the nominations, we observed a significant pattern of what appeared to us to be bloc voting, amounting to over 50 votes in some categories. The number of these votes was sufficient to place nominees on the final ballot in five categories. More seriously, about half of these ballots were received with new Supporting Memberships, nearly all of which appeared to have been paid for by the same person or persons (the payments were made with blocks of consecutively-numbered \$20 money orders, purchased at the same post office).*

*We were highly disturbed by this practice. While we did not consider it appropriate to invalidate the ballots in question, we did not wish any potential nominee to be deprived of a place on the ballot because of them. We therefore added a sixth nominee to the ballot in those categories where the presumed bloc voting had been successful (except where fifth-place ties had already produced the same result). We recognise that there is nothing in the WSFS Constitution authorizing this action; but we felt that this was the course that would do the least damage to the Hugo process. For the same reason, we allowed on the ballot Campbell Award nominees with only 11 out of 230 votes, marginally below the 5% required by the Hugo rules. We trust that the voters will render an appropriate judgement.*

*After the original version of this press release was distributed, we were asked by Todd Cameron Hamilton, on behalf of himself and P.J.Beese, to remove from the ballot the following nominees: The Guardsman by P.J.Beese and Todd Cameron Hamilton, from the Novel category; and Todd Cameron Hamit >*



"I THOUGHT IT WAS MY TURN FOR THE NOVA"

ton, from the Professional Artist category. These nominees were among the beneficiaries of the bloc voting described above. Because we are satisfied that Mr Hamilton did not take part in arranging the bloc vote or purchasing memberships for voters, we have agreed to his request to remove the nominees in question from the ballot; we have also eliminated the list of categories affected by the bloc voting. We wish to emphasize that we have not clearly established who was responsible for the bloc voting; any inferences that people have drawn as to who was responsible are not supported by the published facts.

Noreascon Three, the 47th World SF Convention, will be held at the Sheraton Hotel, Boston [a good hotel, but watch out for false fire alarms in the middle of the night, caused by persons smoking unidentified substances near the sensors - Ed.] over the weekend 31 August - 4 September 1989. Guests include Ian and Betty Ballantine and Andre Norton. Further information, about both the convention and the Hugo Awards, is available via Box 46, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA.

After all this I'm not really sure if you will all be up to ploughing through the actual Hugo Award nominees themselves, but here they are anyway. **Best Novel of 1988** - *Cyteen* by C.J. Cherryh (Warner; Popular Library/Questar); *Falling Free* by Lois McMaster Bujold (*Analog*, Dec. 87-Feb. 88; Boen); *Islands in the Net* by Bruce Sterling (Morrow; Ace); *Mona Lisa Overdrive* by William Gibson (Gollancz; Bantam Spectra); *Red Prophet* by Orson Scott Card (Tor). **Best Novella of 1988** - 'The Calvin Coolidge Home for Dead Comedians' by Bradley Denton (*F&SF*, June 88); 'Journals of the Plague Years' by Norman Spinrad (*Full Spectrum*); 'The Last of the Winnebagos' by Connie Willis (*IASFM*, July 88); 'The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter' by Lucius Shepard (Ziesing; *IASFM*, Sept 88); 'Surfacing' by Walter Jon Williams (*IASFM*, April 88). **Best Novelette of 1988** - 'Do Ya, Do Ya, Wanna Dance' by Howard Waldrop (*IASFM* August 88); 'The Function of Dream Sleep' by Harlan Ellison (*Midnight Gaffiti 1*; *IASFM*, mid-Dec. 88; *Angry Candy*); 'Ginny Sweethearts' Flying Circus' by Neal Barrett, Jr. (*IASFM*, Feb. 88); 'Peaches for Mad Molly' by Steven Gould, (*Analog*, Feb. 88); 'Schrodinger's Kiten' by George Alec Effinger (*Omni*, Sept 88). **Best Short Story of 1988** - 'The Fort Moxie Branch' by Jack McDevitt (*Full Spectrum*, where it was mistitled 'The Fourth Moxie Branch'); 'The Giving Plague' by David Brin (*Interzone 23*; *Full Spectrum 2*); 'Kirinyaga' by Mike Resnick (*F&SF*, Nov. 88); 'Our Neural Cherenobyl' by Bruce Sterling (*F&SF*, June 88); 'Ripples in the Dirac Sea' by Geoffrey A. Landis (*IASFM*, Oct. 88); 'Stable Strategies for Middle Management' by Eileen Gunn (*IASFM*, June 88). ('Kirinyaga', which has close to 7,500 words, received appreciable numbers of nominations both as a novelette and as a short

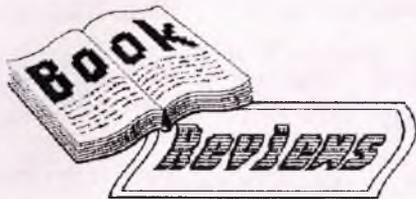
story. It was placed in the category where it received the most votes.) **Best Non-Fiction Book of 1988** - *First Maitz* by Don Maitz (Ursus); *A Biographical Dictionary of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists* by Robert Weinberg (Greenwood); *The Motion of Light in Water* by Samuel R. Delany (Morrow); *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* edited by James Gunn (Viking); *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror: 1987* by Charles N. Brown and William G. Contento (Locus). (A *Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking received enough votes to appear on the ballot, but was ruled ineligible, since it is not a book 'whose subject is the field of science fiction or fantasy or fandom', as required by the Hugo rules. [So - *Empire of the Sun* is? - Ed.]) **Best Dramatic Presentation of 1988** - *Alien Nation*; *Beetlejuice*; *Big*; *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*; *Willow*. **Best Professional Editor of 1988** - Gardner DuZois; Edward L. Ferman; David G. Hartwell; Charles C. Ryan; Stanley Schmidt. **Best Professional Artist of 1988** - Thomas Canty; David Cherry; Bob Eggleton; Don Maitz; Michael Whelan. **Best Semiprozine of 1988** - *Interzone*; *Locus*; *The New York Review of Science Fiction*; *Science Fiction Chronicle*; *Thrust*. (While *Interzone* had a print run of over 10,000 by the end of 1988, its average for the entire year was only 9,000 and it thus remains eligible as a semiprozine this year.) **Best Fanzine of 1988** - *File 770* ed. Mike Glycer; *Fostax* (ed. Timothy Lane); *Lan's Lantern* (ed. George 'Lan' Laskowski); *Niekas* (ed. Edmund R. Meskys); *Other Realms* (ed. Chuq Von Rospach). (The final Hugo ballot will also include the addresses of all nominated semiprozines and fanzines.) **Best Fan Writer of 1988** - Avedon Carol; Mike Glycer; Arthur D. Hlavaty; Dave Langford; Guy H. Lillian; Chuq Von Rospach. **Best Fan Artist of 1988** - Brad W. Foster; Teddy Harvia; Merle Insinga; Stu Shiffman; Taral Wayne; Diana Gallagher Wu.

That leaves no room for the 'news' side of the JOPHAN REPORT: it will be included next time!

## FOR THEATRE-LOVERS

From 18 May to 17 June, the Everyman Theatre, Hope Street, Liverpool is staging Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse 5*. Ticket prices from £3 to £6, with discounts for certain categories. Box Office phone: 051-709 4776.

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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

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FAIRIE TALE by Raymond E. Feist; Grafton; 393 pages; £11.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is apparently Feist's first trip into the supernatural, and the journey is well worth taking. The story concerns the Hastings family, particularly the eight year old twins Sean and Patrick. The Hastings move into an old house known as the Kessler Place. Everything seems normal until the twins discover a fairy wood. Then, as the saying goes, strange things begin to happen. Treasure is found, and its removal from the grounds of the house unleashes a nightmare existence for the family, particularly Sean. Patrick is kidnapped by the malevolent creatures living in the wood, and Sean has to rescue his brother by entering the fairy domain and return with his brother before the Fairies leave for a new home. Feist stunned us with the excellent *Riftwar Saga*, and this new departure for him is just as good. Highly recommended.

ANCIENT IMAGES by Ramsey Campbell; Century; 299 pages; £12.95 Hardback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Always a competent writer, Campbell has reached new heights in his recent novels (perhaps spurred on by the efforts of Clive Barker). *The Influence* was very good, *Ancient Images* is even better because it is more ambitious, with an audacious mixing of real people in with the fiction. Sandy Allen is a TV editor hunting down a copy of a lost Karloff & Lugosi horror film made fifty years ago. She has already seen a good friend die nastily just when he had obtained a copy of the film. As she takes up his quest and tries to interview anyone surviving who was connected with the film's production, she soon discovers how ill-fated the project was. Then strange, unsettling things begin to happen around her, as the author weaves a net of very stylish horror.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S ROBOT CITY, BOOK ONE, ODYSSEY by Michael P Kube-McDowell; Futura; 210 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

The first of a series to come, this book would have been better off compressed and used as the first chapters of book two. *Odyssey* contains all the ingredients of a good adventure, and introduces some previously unheard of aliens into Asimov's Spacer/Settler universe, but it fails to satisfy because, by the final page, none of the plot elements have been resolved to any degree. The sole revelation about the amnesiac hero is that his name is David, nothing else is explained at all. The appendix would also be better in book two and the pencil drawings it contains only detract from your own visualisations. All in all a disappointment.

DEATH ARMS by K.W Jeter; Grafton; 239 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

I preferred this novel to *The Glass Hammer*, which I reviewed last year, mainly because the characterisation is better, although this is at the expense of the plot, which was tighter in *The Glass Hammer*. Legger is the main protagonist, with Dortz and Anne Manx and, probably the most interesting, Rachel who has a gift for reanimating dead flesh. As in the previous novel there seems to be a preoccupation with cars racing over desert landscapes and looking at scenes in the novel through a video camera. For the most part I enjoyed it well enough and then Jeter won me over completely with a really weird ending. He may have an excellent SF novel in him when he gets plot and characterisation together in the same book. Worth investigating.

OUT OF PHAZE by Piers Anthony; N.E.L.; 288 Pages; £6.95 Lge Paperback.

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

To quote the astonishingly accurate blurb "Phaze and Proton are parallel worlds, impassably divided". On Phaze magic works, and all is green and (almost) delightful. The inhabitants are human plus were-beings of almost every animal, together with harpies, unicorns etc. On Proton science works, and has almost destroyed the planet in the past. The humans must live under domes, and live alongside robots, aliens and robo/organic creations. Every place and person on the one planet has an equivalent on the other, and it is through the minds of two (human) such equivalents that contact and passage between the worlds becomes possible. A love story between the Proton human and the Phaze girl/unicorn/hummingbird is essential to the plot, which concerns the two equivalent humans seeking to overcome the "Evil" on both worlds. This sequel to the *Apprentice Adept* series stands up well on its own and should satisfy fans of both Fantasy and Hard SF. Highly Recommended.

DOOM OF THE DARKSWORD by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; Bantam; 383 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the second book in the *Darksword* trilogy. Joram travels to the city of Merilon to claim his birthright, while trying to conceal the fact that he has no magic. Unfortunately Bishop Vanya has other plans for him. The floating city of Merilon is very well done. The fop Simkin is so obviously putting on an act, in the third book he will undoubtedly turn out to be incredibly important. Fun, but not deep.

VENGEANCE OF ORION by Ben Bova; Methuen; 342 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a sequel to *Orion*. Orion the hunter is getting tired of being bounced around through history at the whim of the godlike Golden One. He finds himself at the siege of Troy with orders to make sure the Greeks lose. He decides to do the precise opposite. The Trojan Horse he comes up with is rather different from the legendary one, but makes perfect sense. Later he has a similar influence on the siege of Jericho, and on Egyptian history as well. This book is good fun action adventure, with a slight science fiction veneer.

THE SEA AND SUMMER by George Turner; Grafton; 427 Pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Set in the middle 21st century, this book is about overpopulation, pollution, economic collapse and the runaway Greenhouse Effect. The population is divided into 'Sweet', the lucky few with a job, and 'Swill', the masses of unemployed who live in appalling conditions. From this you might expect the book to be incredibly depressing, but it is not entirely. The characters get on with making the best of life, the Swill are developing skills of scavenging and improvisation which mean some of them will survive the inevitable collapse, and lastly the story is told by a historian and a dramatist of a saner future age, who are digging in to the distorted legends of the Greenhouse Culture. This winner of the Arthur C. Clarke award is very highly recommended.

DESOLATION ROAD by Ian McDonald; Bantam; 355 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Chris Ridd.

Don't read the blurb on this book - it is far too terrible for words, although its writer tried hard! It is set on a desert planet (unnamed until the last sentence - I don't know why) whose first settlers are held to be Gods. The story starts with a doctor becoming stranded at a small deserted outpost which he names Desolation Road. The outpost soon thrives as strangely talented people arrive and the town becomes a city. One child grows to become a prophetess, her brother becomes the Greatest Snooker Player the Universe has Ever Known, and another becomes a freedom fighter. The seeds for a religious revolution are sown in Desolation Road. The book is very well written, has vivid descriptions, and a decent plot with good characters. Excellent.

THE LADY OF HAN GILEN by Judith Tarr; Pan; 310 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This volume is the sequel to *The Hall of the Mountain King* and is written in Tarr's usual slick style. The first volume told how Mirain, son of the Sun-god Avaryon, became King of Ianon. This is the story of Elain, Mirain's foster sister. Under pressure to choose one of her suitors, Elain dons boy's clothing and flees to join Mirain and the army that is moving south. Heard it before? Yes, but Tarr is such an excellent story teller that this is forgivable. There are small flaws - the narrative may become too emotional at times for some readers, and Mirain's adversary for power, the Exile, appears briefly at the start then is not seen again until much nearer the end. I would have preferred to see this character developed more fully throughout.

A FAR MAGIC SHORE by Keith Timson; Futura; 299 pages; £4.99 paperback. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

I wish I could say nice things about this, the first novel by a new British writer. Unfortunately the writing style is unimaginative and passionless, even when the characters are throwing fits of emotion. The island of Sanctuary is the last place where magic exists. The High Lord, Talango, intends to conquer the isle and make it part of his empire, while Princess Rosamile has to organise her island's defences and repel his attack. The story is such that it might well have worked as a children's novel (or even a romance that just happens to be a fantasy), as an adult book it does not. The fact that the proof-reading of the manuscript was non-existent does the book no favours at all.

THE ORCHARD by Charles L Grant; Futura; 287 pages; £2.99 paperback. Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The orchard is on a derelict farm outside town and one evening a group of high school students go there for a picnic. One of them is killed in a traffic accident and his tragedy is followed by a series of deaths, murders, mutilations and hauntings. However, whether these events have a common cause, a supernatural origin, or any connection with the orchard is never made clear. Grant appears to have some reputation as a horror writer, but for me this book does not justify it. It rambles on without accomplishing anything constructive, and although this may suit the kind of readers who like to interpret things for themselves, it was all a bit too obscure for me. Indeed, I found it difficult to sustain enough interest to be able to finish it.

TALES OF NEVERYON by Samuel R Delaney; Grafton; 335 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

So complex and, from time to time, beautiful is this episodic novel (despite its title) that no brief review can penetrate even its surface. It is a fantasy work, containing many of the trappings of such (barbarians, swords, slavery, castles, dragons) yet it is almost wholly original in its concerns (sexual equality, ritual, perceptions) and its plot revolves around something like a squash ball, used as a common child's toy. As one might expect from Delaney, there are wonderful characters doing and saying strange things (sometimes things which are difficult for the reader to comprehend and sometimes at too great a length). Also included is one of the most superbly written action sequences in all fantasy, it begins on page 283 if anybody's interested. This volume is the first in a series of four.

2061; ODYSSEY THREE by Arthur C. Clarke; Grafton; 302 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

More updated continuation than sequel, this volume explores mankind's further evolution into a space culture. 'Lucifer'/Jupiter is now well established with Europa (forbidden to humans) also developing, but something of interest is noticed, or so Van Der Berg thinks. This sets off a reaction to find out if he's right. Via subterfuge a spaceship is forced to land on Europa, getting stuck there. Fortunately, another cruiser/liner space craft on tour to Halley's comet is sent to the rescue. The reappearance of the black monolith further enhances the mystique. A typical Clarke story, with his usual panache and flair, this concludes the Odyssey saga and ties up all loose ends to provide an entertaining read. Characterisation is well thought out, and I particularly liked the Lawrence Tsung character. If you're not familiar with his work it's well worth a read.

THE COSMIC BLUEPRINT by Paul Davies; Unwin; 224 pages; £5.95 1ge paperback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

The Greek philosophers believed that the cosmos unfolds like a developing organism, according to a set plan. Isaac Newton formulated a regular-as-clockwork universe. But, asks Professor Paul Davies, how can such forces produce intricate and elaborate structures such as snowflakes, or galaxies, or living creatures? Here he suggests that the universe as a whole tends to develop towards progressively higher and more complex levels of organisation. This is not a book for late night reading, to put you in a restful state of mind. It asks pointed questions about predestiny, and indeed about Creation, the Meaning of Life, the Universe and Everything. And there is no easy answer, like 42.

THE FALL OF THE FAMILIES by Philip Mann; Grafton; 416 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

Continuing from *Paxwax the Gardener*, and in which Pawl Paxwax is elevated to the position of family head helped by the secretive Inner Circle, a group of aliens trying to free the universe from the genocidal rule of the families of which Pawl is a part. The aliens are convincingly incomprehensible in their motives and the human characters believable in their continued disregard for, and ultimately panicked reaction at, the alien vengeance which will ultimately destroy the human grip on known space. The book is a good read with enough twists in the plot so that you are not quite sure how the aliens will eventually succeed in their design and what the fate of Pawl will be. Worth a look (but only if you've read the first book!).

MOON OF ICE by Brad Linaweaver; Grafton; 319 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

Once again I have to take issue with a publisher over the way they market a book. The title is *Moon of Ice*; the cover is by Chris Foss and shows an obvious Nazi base on the Moon (which appears to have an atmosphere). The back cover blurb refers to the Nazi's victory in World War Two, and to a "bizarre occult religion which teaches that the Earth is hollow - and that the Moon is made of ice". Now I generally like "alternat(ive) history" stories, so this looked like a good one. In fact it consists mainly of the imaginary postwar diaries of Dr Joseph Goebbels and his daughter Hilda, and whilst it may be very clever, and even controversial, I found it rather boring. Horbiger's (genuine) theories that practically everything in the universe is made of ice take up barely more than a few lines. SF it isn't!

ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S CHRONICLES OF THE STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS by John Fairley and Simon Welfare; Grafton.

189 pages; £5.99 1ge paperback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

John Fairley led the team that produced the two ACC series for Yorkshire TV, and Simon Welfare was also a producer on these. In his Foreword, Arthur explains that whilst it would have been easy to have made a third series, he had grown rather tired of standing in front of cameras in the Sri Lankan sun, even with his notorious beach-umbrella for protection. He also promises that this trilogy of books will not grow into anything larger, and adds his own notes to some of the entries. It's the usual collection of Fortean mysteries - strange artifacts and animals, rains of frogs and fish and chunks of ice, and so forth - usually explained fairly rationally. I was interested to note, on page 73, Arthur's reference to Horbiger's weird theories on ice in the universe (see above review). Intriguing reading.

INTO THE OUT OF by Alan Dean Foster; N.E.L.; 376 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This is an interesting fantasy novel, set in modern times and built around African mythology, in particular that of the Maasai. The Shetani, evil creatures of manifold hideous forms, threaten to emerge from the Out Of (out of which all life originated) and spread chaos and destruction around the Earth. Olkeloki is the eldest laibon of the Masai. After consulting the omens with the others he travels to Washington, where he recruits Joshua Oaks, an FBI agent on leave, and Merry Sharrow, a tele-saleswoman on holiday. Together they safari into the Out Of to confront their nightmares and prevent the emergence of the Shetani. Well written, the tension, and more importantly, the credibility of the story is maintained throughout, as an ancient, perhaps wiser, world preserves the sceptical new.

A NIGHT IN THE NETHERHELLS by Craig Shaw Gardener; Headline; 194 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Jon Weeks.

Humorous fantasy books with Josh Kirby covers seem to be enjoying a run of popularity for some peculiar reason, so out comes the *Ebenezur* (of which this is the third book), a pretty typical example of the genre (complete with usual loose ending to allow for a sequel of course). This is quite a different style from Pratchetts' work however. The emphasis is more on one-liners and throw away jokes which share more similarities with Robert Asprin's *Myth* books, than the subtle humour of the discworld. To summarise the plot: Inexperienced wizard's apprentice gets sent on hazardous mission to rescue lost city, throw in the usual motley assortment of magic items and companions, and there you have it. A nice book, but lacking the style of other works, and there's no substitute for the real thing of course.

THE WARRIORS APPRENTICE by Lois McMaster Bujold; Headline; 315 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

This is a follow up to Ms Bujold's book *Shards of Honour* and although it does involve some of the characters from that novel it can be read as a separate book in its own right. Miles is the son of Count Vorkosigan and Captain Naismith, who were married in the first book. Due to an attempted assassination attempt on his mother he is crippled, a fact which does not deter him from attempting to gain entrance to the military. When he fails to do this he takes a sabbatical to his mother's home space of Beta colony, from where he sets out on a series of adventures that eventually lead to him commanding his own battle fleet. The plot is classic space opera, but, like the first book, has been written in such a way that it should appeal to a broad range of tastes, having a bit of everything without being artificial.

BROTHER AND OTHER STORIES by Clifford Simak; Methuen; 165 pages £2.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Four stories by Clifford Simak, you think at once of rocking-chairs and country evenings on the porch. From the warmth and strength of such a background the author himself came, in an interview he admitted with surprise that many angles in the *Brother* parallel his own life, but the breadth of Simak's writings shows that he, at least, like one of the brothers, has gone over the mountain and down the road. In a sense these stories are philosophical explorations written on an understanding, human level, with all the author's usual craftsmanship. In another sense they're just pure entertainment. If you like Simak you'll read this anyway. If not but you're a fellow armchair traveller to the stars, invest in this collection forthwith.

THEIR MASTER'S WAR by Mick Farren; Sphere; 295 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

Hark has been recruited by unseen aliens to fight against the minions of another alien race, using high power lasers and wearing a symbiotic battle suit in interminable warfare across space. Yes, this is another battle suited space novel out of the same mould as *Starship Troopers* and the *Forever War*. While the idea certainly isn't new a few wrinkles have been added, and the book is well written. If the blurb at the back of the book didn't say that the author is British I would have suspected that this was written by a Vietnam veteran. It has the same feeling of resigned fatalism regarding a war which the participants don't understand, as the veterans of that war seem to put across. If you liked the other two books mentioned above then you will probably like this one too, but don't expect many surprises.

INFERNO: INDIGO BOOK 2 by Louise Cooper; Unwin; 241 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

When Anghara, Kalrid's daughter, demolished the tower of regrets she was doomed to wander her planet for all eternity, or until she destroyed the seven demons released when the tower collapsed. In her search for these demons she has found a companion, an outcast telepathic she-wolf Grinya. Indigo, as Anghara is now known, and Grinya go in search of the first of these demons, which has a mining village in its thrall, and dispenses its 'favours' in the form of a stone that induces a type of radiation poisoning in its victims. Indigo, Grinya and Jaster, a young priest whose religion was ousted by the demon, have the seemingly impossible task of destroying the demon. An intriguing continuation of the saga but one wonders if Ms Cooper can keep the impetus going through all eight volumes. One to keep an eye on.