

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

January
1990

Issue
No.220

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 January 1990, 7.45pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Free (Only
paid-up members may vote)

This month it is the

NB.: NEW VENUE - SEE BELOW!

Annual General Meeting

It comes round with amazing regularity, doesn't it? This is where you get YOUR chance to stand for a Committee position (and we do need new blood; don't just rely on the 'old faithfuls' to keep the Group running - they may not!); to have your say about how the Group is run, what sort of programme items you'd like, and so on. If you don't come, don't complain. . .

In addition, there will be an Auction, hosted as usual by Grand Master Mr Rog Peyton. But that, too, depends upon YOU, so be sure to bring along books, posters, unusual (?) items, etc., etc.

*The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified)
at the NEW IMPERIAL HOTEL, Temple Street, Birmingham at 7.45pm.
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)

NB. - THE ABOVE ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AFTER THE AGM.



GROUP NEWS

Last Month

The Christmas Party

This was perhaps the most incredible meeting of the year, and those who were present will long remember the remarkable events of this evening.

But, of course, everyone there was sworn to silence, and that includes me, so I am unable to make my normal report on the meeting. We can only feel sorry for those who did not attend. (Perhaps I could just mention that. . . No - I mustn't!)

THE AGM

COPIES OF THE CONSTITUTION, STANDING ORDERS, AND AGENDA WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO ALL MEMBERS ATTENDING THE AGM. ANY MEMBER UNABLE TO ATTEND BUT WHO REQUIRES THESE MAY HAVE A COPY ON REQUEST. LIKEWISE THE MINUTES (AFTER THE AGM).

Just one more time: a reminder that all Committee posts are open. We have a nominee for Chairman (someone who hasn't held the position before - now *there's* a novelty), for Treasurer (if he hasn't vanished to the Bahamas) (that's a *joke*, Chris!), and of course Novacon Chairman is not negotiable, but apart from that the field is wide open - though there is interest in a couple of positions at time of writing:

Secretary: must own or have regular access to a typewriter or word processor, attend all Committee Meetings, and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee members. Also of the AGM or other Group meetings, and may be asked to write letters to prospective speakers, etc.

Publicity Officer: needs to have access to some method of making A4-size posters, and the time and ability to get them put up in bookshops and various venues to advertise meetings. Should also contact radio, TV and other media in the event of big-name speakers. Also needs IDEAS.

Newsletter Editor: needs to have access to desktop publishing facilities, a word processor, or at least a typewriter and a pair of scissors. Also needs the patience of a saint, be willing to produce the Newsletter on time every month, cajole or produce artwork/cartoons, try to obtain written contributions, but usually to write virtually everything him/herself. . .

Reviews Editor: is actually an 'Ordinary Member' (see Constitution), but may be appointed to receive and distribute review copies of SF/fantasy books as fairly and appropriately as possible and collect/receive and compile (retype) reviews received each month, in time for inclusion in the Newsletter.

Another **Ordinary Member** may be appointed by the Committee at any time during the year, if necessary. Now - which job do YOU fancy?

EDITOR'S NOTE:

I should like to reinforce the 'thank you's in the copyright notice alongside. Martin Tudor has unfailingly provided his **Jophan Report** each month (and has kindly agreed to continue to do so despite his move to London - with which I wish him every success). Tim Groome has been a valuable source of illustrations. And of course, our reviewers are essential. Thanks to all!

Contents of this issue [c] 1990 The Birmingham Science Fiction Group, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Committee or the Group. Thanks to Tim Groome for artwork, to Martin for the Jophan Report, and to all book reviewers.

D.A.H.

The Christmas Competition

You still have until the January meeting to send or hand in your answers to these. As some of you sussed, the target number of '28' for the first was used to spur you on to think "I'm sure I could do it in much less than *that!*" Meanwhile, one of our entrants has sent in a new Word Chain:

Rog Peyton, who is a strong contender for winning one or even both of last month's competition at the time of writing, was inspired to ask whether anyone can turn **ELING** into **HARDY** in 20 moves or less. (And he does mean 20 this time.) Well - can you? It's quite a tricky one, and worth having a go.

SIGNING SESSIONS AT ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP

On Saturday 20 January at noon, **Robert Holdstock** will be signing copies of the standard paperback version of *Lavondyss*, as well as the re-issue of the superb *Mythago Wood* with matching cover.

On the same date and time, **Ramsey Campbell** will be signing his *Ancient Images*, which is about a long-lost movie about - well you've seen the story in a previous issue, haven't you? Sounds good.

Peter Straw will sign his new novel *Mystery* on Friday 9 February at 5.00pm. Peter has just won the World Fantasy Award for his last novel, *Koko*.

And finally, but certainly not least for the Trekkies (ers?) among us, there is a 95% probability (enough for Spock, perhaps) that **William Shatner** will be signing copies of his new novel *TekWar* in February, at a date and time to be announced. (Anyone catch him on *This is Your Life* recently?)

The drawing alongside is just part of Dave Hardy's new fine art print, '*Proxima's Planet*', which is published in the USA by Novagraphics at £75.00 in a signed, limited edition of 950. You can buy a signed (but not numbered) copy for only £15.00, while they last - from Dave himself, or from Andromeda. It's from his new book of work by international space artists, *Visions of Space*, published by Dragon's World.

AND FINALLY...

Because the AGM is held in January, this Newsletter is the last of the 'old year'. So, a few reminders:

A free 'small ads' service is available for members. You may use this to advertise anything vaguely science fictional - books, posters, T-shirts, fanzines, whatever. Very few members have taken advantage of this during the past year, so don't forget. . .

In order to keep down our subscription rates and admission fees, we do need a steady influx of new members. So please do tell your friends, and if there is an opportunity to put up a small notice in a local shop, library, college, place of work, etc., then contact the new Publicity Officer.

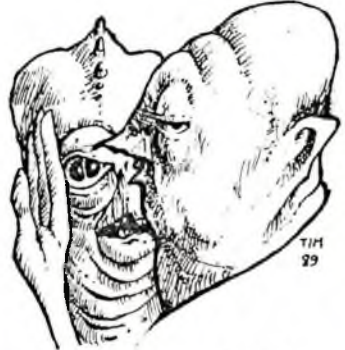
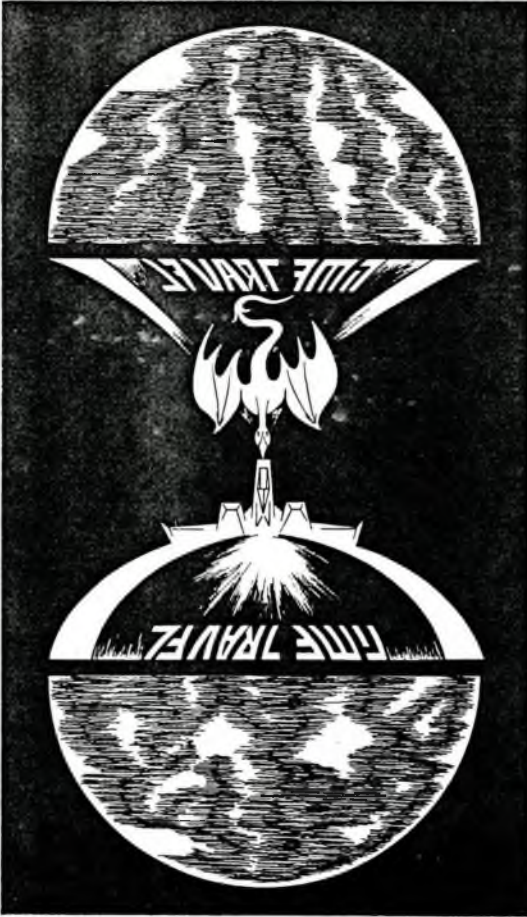
The Newsletter needs INPUT from YOU. It is hard work for one person to write everything, but surely you can find half an hour or so during the month to write and send in a small item of interest. Now *couldn't* you?? If you find blank pages in your Newsletter, you have only yourself to blame. . .

OUR CURRENT REVIEWS EDITOR HAS RUN OUT OF REVIEWS. DO YOU OWE ONE? PLEASE HAND IT IN IF SO!



The Blank Page

Well, it would be, but for the final artwork I have 'in stock' from Tim Groome (right) and Roy Barclay (below). Thanks again to both.



"DON'T LOOK NOW - THERE'S AN EARTHLING WATCHING."

DON'T FORGET THE CHANGE OF VENUE!!!!



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.**

THE OMEGA ZONE by Joe Dever; Beaver; 350 pages; £2.99 p/back.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Another role playing game, book 3 in the *Freeway Warrior Series*, taking the unlikely survival of one Cal Phoenix a stage further. In this scenario you (as Cal) attempt to escape to California, a California which, it appears, the "nuclear nightmare" has left virtually unchanged (?). Typical RPG with similar outcomes to previous Dever warrior games, although the positions you find yourself in get more unbelievable, as do the means of escape - desperation?

WHEEL OF THE WINDS by M J Engh; Grafton; 352 pages; £3.99 p/back.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Set on a nameless world which shows one face continually to its sun, this is a simple yet gripping tale of a stranded interstellar explorer told from the point of view of two of the natives who at various times escort, guide, follow, pursue and befriend him. The Exile, as he is known, first appears as a short, ugly prisoner with no memory in the dungeons of Sollet Castle. As Lethgro the castle warden sails with captain Repromar to report this oddity the Exile escapes and circumstances unite the three as fugitives to circumnavigate the world in search of the Exile's lost equipment so that he can contact his people and stave off potentially disastrous intervention. From the Exile's point of view this could have been just a stock SF adventure, albeit with a good backdrop; telling it through the medieval eyes of the natives gives it a welcome fresh twist. A good read. The only downside is the author's rather annoying penchant for parenthesis (if you know what I mean).

THE FALL OF FYORLUND by Roger Taylor; Headline; 467 pp; £3.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The second of the *Chronicles of Hawklan* tells of Hawklan's powers begining to awaken, but he does not fully inhabit the persona and abilities of Ethriss. The evil Lord Dan-Tor tightens his hold on the king, slowly perverting the law and its enforcers to the Dark Lord Sumeral. A fairly predictable and none too entertaining fantasy this, the story is over-long, the characters black and white, the good are irritatingly good, the bad are so malevolent as to be laughable, not recommended.

NOCTURNE: INDIGO BOOK 4 by Loise Cooper; Unwin; 291 pp; £3.50 p/b.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Indigo is travelling with a family of itinerent entertainers. They arrive in Bruhome to entertain at the Autumn Revels, but something seems to be slowly leaching the life from the area, the crops fail, people disappear or become walking zombies. The third demon seems to be a vampire that feeds on peoples' minds as well as their substance. To defeat this demon Indigo must enter the vampire's world of illusion and combat their illusions with her own. Indigo's travels through the demon's world are particularly well told, but the demon's dismissal from this world seems almost flippant. There is one major fault in this series, Indigo released the demons 24 years before but I think it's a bit hard to credit they would only become active just before she finds them. That apart, the series becomes more readable as it continues and is one I highly recommend.

WISE WOMAN'S TELLING by Fay Sampson; Headline; 229 pp; £2.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

I'm at a bit of a loss as to be able to say why Headline sent us this book to review, it is not SF or Fantasy, it is an historical novel based loosely on the early life of Morgan, King Arthur's half-sister. It tells of the death of her father Gorlois, the marriage of her mother Ygerne to Uther Pendragon and Morgans hatred of Uther. Not a book for an SF group, but an interesting historical novel none-the-less.

THE LIGHTLESS KINGDOM by Jonathan Wylie; Corgi; 351 pp; £2.99 p/back. Rev by Carol Morton.

At the end of volume one, Gemma moved the rocking stone and thus the river was restored to the magical valley; but in the upheaval caused by the river's return Arden is swept underground. Gemma refuses to believe him dead and goes in search of him. Arden is alive and was carried underground by the river where he finds himself among a strange subterranean race who nurse him back to health, and then ally with Arden and the underground movement to overthrow the guild in Great Newport. This is much better than the first volume in the trilogy but Gemma's travels overground are not as well told as Arden's underground, though the enchanting meycats and their interaction with Gemma are the highlight of the book. You will have to read the first volume in this trilogy and possibly the first trilogy but it will be worth the effort. Recommended.

THE DRAWING OF THE THREE by Stephen King; Sphere; 400 pp; £6.99 1ge p/b. Rev by Chris Morgan.

This is volume two of *The Dark Tower*. While the first volume in the series was too slow, this one is a great improvement. King has introduced more characters and excitement. His hero, Roland, the last gunslinger, is still in some other world, hunting for the Dark Tower, but he has massive problems to overcome. Right at the start he has two fingers and a toe nipped off by a giant lobster, and his ammunition gets wet (and thus no longer reliable). With an infected arm and untrustworthy pistols, he moves on along the never-ending beach, gathering companions from other worlds as he goes. To a certain extent this is standard King stuff, full of over-the-top emotional reaction, but it's always entertaining reading and a few scenes are very fine indeed - clever and unexpected. The ten coloured illustrations by Phil Hale are an expensive gimmick, adding nothing but cost to the book.

DUALISTS by Stephen Bowkett; Piper; 159 pages; £2.50 paperback. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

If you can get teenagers to read this, they will love it. Simon Hallam has more than his fair share of problems when, at the age of thirteen, his parents move. He has to make new friends, cope with a new school and with an increasing awareness of girls. Added to this, Simon and his new friends find some odd "stuff" on the beach after a storm. They call it slubber and find that it is capable of copying things. To begin with their experiments are a game, but they gradually realise that slubber is not as innocent as it appears and the book ends with a large question mark. The joy of this book is that the young people have to solve the problems themselves. Adults are there, providing security in the background but never intruding into the story. An excellent juvenile.

THE ARGONAUT AFFAIR by Simon Hawke; Headline; 195 pp; £2.99 p/b. Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

To write an ifworld or timetravel novel with any degree of plausibility requires a certain knack, especially if the genres are combined, and this author doesn't have it. Nor does he appear to have much originality, as the series of *Time Wars* novels, of which this is one, is a rehash of historical, mythological and fictional events to the point where even Hawke can't tell the difference between them. At some time in the far future Earth has developed timetravel and a method of dumping unrequired energy from industrial atomic explosions, via subspace, into a distant galaxy. In fact it rematerializes on a parallel Earth whose inhabitants are understandably annoyed at being blasted into radioactive rubble. A side effect of the timetravel-subspace activities is that travel between the two Earths becomes possible at various times in the past, so they construct and send rather peculiar agents through to Earth at these times to alter Earth's past. Although Earth always manages to foil these interventions they often give rise to legends such as that of the vampire or become enshrined in fiction like *Gulliver's Travels*. In this particular potboiler Earth turns the tables by sending her agents into the baddies' (?) past to join Jason and the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece. An eminently missable book.

KING OF THE MURGOS by David Eddings; Corgi; 443 pp; £3.99 p/b. Rev by Marika Charalambous.

In book 1 of *Mallorean*, Garion's son was kidnapped by the evil Zandramas, and everyone in Garion's party was running around the world chasing after them. *King of the Murgos* is book 2, and everyone is still running around looking for them. The party make their way to Nyssa and meet up with their old friend Sadi (Salmisra's chief eunuch) and then travel on to the Kingdom of the Murgos where they meet the King (of course) who turns out to be less of a Murgos than he would like to think. This book is even better and funnier than the last.

ROBOT ADEPT by Piers Anthony; NEL; 286 pages; £6.95 1ge p/b.

Reviewed by Bernie Evans

This sequel to *Out of Phase* was disappointing after I enjoyed the first one so much. and Mach & Bane are still swopping minds with each other and between the twin worlds of Proton and Phaze, but there the similarity ends. With their respective lovers also discovering the same ability, and all four of them swopping or taking over even more bodies in their attempts to evade and outwit the enemy, it all becomes a confused mish-mash, and disappears up the backside of its own cleverness. Recommended to those who can absorb ALL the detail.

THE HEAVENLY HORSE FROM OUTERMOST WEST by Mary Stanton; NEL; 336 pages; £3.50 paperback.

PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN by Mary Stanton; NEL; 306 pp; £6.95 1ge p/b. Rev by Pauline Morgan.

For any little girl who loves horses these books are an ideal present. The mature fantasy reader, however will find them silly. Yes, there are some interesting ideas here but I remain totally unconvinced by them. In *The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West*, Dancer, the mythical Breedmaster of the Appaloosas, comes to Earth to mate with the last Appaloosa mare (and a Shetland Pony!) and so save the breed. In the second volume, Piper, son of Duchess and Dancer, has to save his dam, and the breed, from extinction by battling against the arch-enemy of all horses - the Dark Horse of the Black Barns. Not only do these books misrepresent a breed but they also introduce the incongruity of all animals understanding each other - except man. By all means introduce your eight year-old daughter to these books but keep them away from people who know something about horses - or fantasy.

GALACTIC WARLORD by Douglas Hill; Piper; 127 pages; £2.25 paperback.

DEATHWING OVER VEYNAA by Douglas Hill; Piper; 125 pp; £2.25 p/b. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

These are the first two episodes in the *Last Legionary* series and tell of Keill Randor, one of the Legions of Moros. Some mysterious radiation has devastated his home planet Moros leaving its entire population, with the exception of Randor, dead. Randor was on the periphery of the radiation as it was released, and although not killed outright he was affected and is slowly dying. Using his remaining time he searches for any other Legionaries who may have escaped. Whilst doing so he is found by a group of scientists, calling themselves the Overseers, who cure him. They tell him that a being called the Galactic Warlord ordered the destruction of Moros in the belief that the legions would thwart his plans for galactic domination. Randor agrees to become an agent for the Overseers, and together with a long-lived telepathic alien searches out the Warlord and his minions, known as the Deathwing. Two reasonable SF novels, aimed at the juvenile market, with most definite similarities with 'Doc' Smith's *Lensman* series, an almost invincible hero, friendly alien, evil crimelords bent on galactic subjugation, all wrapped up in a 'Boys Own' style. Very young readers should enjoy these.

JAIN SAINT AND THE BACKLASH: THE FURTHER TRAVELS OF JAIN SAINT AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS MACHINE

by Josephine Saxton; The Women's Press; 167 pages; £4.95 p/back; Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Whatever Josephine Saxton does there is always an element of the bizarre in it. The novella and novelette that make up this volume share a theme of the Collective Unconscious, and are greatly influenced by the works of Jung. The novella, *The Consciousness Machine*, depicts the visions produced by a machine that interacts with and interprets the subconscious elements of a sick mind as pictures so that it can be understood and healed. The rest of the book, *Jain Saint and the Backlash*, involves the heroine of Saxton's earlier novel *The Travails of Jain Saint*, travelling through subconscious landscapes seeking a way of solving and resolving the problems that have arisen as a result of her earlier adventures. The benefits brought to the relationships between men and women have backfired and women are in danger of being more repressed than ever. Although there is a degree of humour within the seriousness of the novelette, it is not for the faint-hearted.

And finally, some news for all you reviewers out there. The good news is that the backlog of reviews that we have been carrying for some time now is cleared, completely, totally, the backlog is dead, it is a late backlog, it is no more, it is deceased. This of course leads us to the bad news. All you unhasilled reviewers are about to start getting hassled if your reviews aren't in with a reasonable degree of speed and alacrity, you can even send them in quickly, if you like!! I have NOTHING to hand over to who-ever will be doing the job next year, so do bring all your reviews to the AOM, and give him or her a good start, especially if it's me again!! - happy reviewing in 1990.

MATHENAUTS Edited by Rudy Rucker; NEL; 300 pages; £3.50 p/b. Reviewed by Wendell Wagner Jr.

It's hard to ask for more in a theme anthology than what you get in this book. As Rucker points out in the introduction, there haven't been any anthologies of mathematical SF since a couple of volumes by Clifton Fadiman in 1958 and 1962. Rucker not only manages to collect all the best mathematical SF published since 1962, he's put in this book most of the stories published since 1962 which qualify for this perhaps narrow genre. Luckily, they are consistently rather good, and the best, by Martin Gardner, William F Orr, and Norman F Kagan are wonderful. If you are surprised to hear that anyone has tried to write science fiction about math, all I can say is get this book and find out how good it can be.

PRIME EVIL Edited by Douglas E Winter; Corgi; 380 pp; £3.99 p/b. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

While not all of the thirteen authors in this prestige horror anthology are familiar names, some (Stephen King, Clive Barker and Peter Straub) are world famous. Most stories are good (or almost good) with interesting elements, though there's a noticeable lack of greatness. On balance I found Straub's piece (a terrifying child episode) the most impressive because of its poetic style. David Morrell's tale of mad artists is original and compulsive, Clive Barker's mood piece is beautifully written and Jack Cady's long novelette of Vietnam veterans has some startling scenes. In addition, the stories by Thomas Ligotti, Thomas Tessier and Ramsey Campbell are all worth reading in their own ways. Most disappointing is Stephen King's tale of a serial killer who pilots a small aircraft to the scenes of his crimes; it lacks credibility.

DAYWORLD REBEL by Philip José Farmer; Grafton; 333 pp; £3.50 p/b. Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Volume 2 of the Saga of Jefferson Caird, the most unique citizen of the 35th century. Not only can he remember his other six personae, but he refuses to obey the government's laws and live one day out of seven, and stay 'stoned' the other six. As a rebel he not only has to escape the organics that impose a totalitarian state authority, but also come to terms with his with his split personality. His schizophrenia does have one advantage in so much as he is able to live under the effects of the truth mist. *Dayworld Rebel* is the long awaited sequel to *Daywired*, and Philip José Farmer has put together another tour de force of SF literature, creating an altogether real world where drastic measures are taken to curb overpopulation and turn the populace into docile sheep in a perfectly ordered society.

DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS - Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman; Penguin; 905 pp; £9.99 p/back. Rev by Lynn M Edwards.

The original Dragonlance story was originally tied to a game. *Dragonlance Legends* is a continuation of the lives of the characters met earlier. It was initially published as three separate books, *Time of the Twins*, *War of the Twins* and *Test of the Twins*, and *Dragonlance Legends* is the trilogy in one volume. The twins are Raistlin, a mage, and Caramon, a warrior. Raistlin wants to rule everything, including the gods. Caramon is tricked into helping him at first but then he finds out what will happen if Raistlin is allowed to win and sets out to defeat him. I found the book hard to start as I had not read any Dragonlance before and the characters were not well introduced. Once started, however, it was hard to put down, especially towards the end. One for the Dragonlance fans - or people who don't mind picking up the tale halfway through.

REQUIEM FOR A RULER OF WORLDS by Brian Daley; Grafton; 334 pp; £3.99 p/b. Rev by Al Johnston.

A good lightweight adventure set in the third wave of Man's expansion into the universe. Hobart Floyd is a humble third class functionary on Earth, left a mystery bequest by an ex-slave who conquered 19 planets. The whys and wherefores are never fully explained but it presumably connects with Hobart's hobby of geneology. Alacrity Fitzhugh is a vacationing spacer blackmailed by the impoverished and paranoid Earth bureaucracy into acting as escort. Together they set out to claim the legacy and evade those who would simplify interstellar politics by eliminating them. On the way they encounter several varieties of humans, and a couple of alien types who add to the fun; Squeeb, the hyperbolarian who derives sexual gratification from the territorial gains in monopoly, and the Scillians, who Hobart hates for destroying Earth's beauty spots in a long post war, although their penchant for pseudo-pythonesque silly noise arguments provides a much better reason. After many adventures our heroes leave the way open for many a sequel as they flee from the Galaxy's worst SF hawk. No, it isn't Brian Daley.