

BRUM GROUP

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NEWS

Issue
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The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1990 Committee: Chairman - Chris Murphy Secretary - Helena Bowles
Treasurer - Chris Chivers Newsletter Editor - Dave Hardy Reviews Editor -
Mick Evans Publicity Officer - Andrew White Novacon 19 - Bernie Evans

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

Friday 16 March at 7.45pm Admission: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.00

This month's speaker is

ROBERT RANKIN

Robert Rankin last came to talk to the Brum Group some five or six years ago, and was a great success. His new novel is *Armageddon: The Musical*, which includes some of the characters from his popular Brentford Trilogy for Pan (which isn't a trilogy any more because a fourth book, *The Sprouts of Wrath*, has been added) - plus Elvis Presley!

A few biographical details are usual: Robert Fleming Rankin is the nephew of Edmund Crispin, the crime novelist, but never met him. His hobbies (Robert's, not Edmund's) include the study of the occult and paranormal, blowlamp technique, and the science of loft insulation. From which you can see that we are in for a riotous evening! Be there.

The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at the NEW IMPERIAL HOTEL, Temple Street, (off New St.) 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 Reviews Editor (below).

Chairman's Address: 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, Warley B69 4BA. (021 552 8912)

Book Reviews to Mick Evans at 7 Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7UY (Telephone 021 707 6606), which is also the Novacon 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)



Mat Irvine

It is very difficult to make notes in a darkened room while trying to watch slides (especially when one's projector decides that it doesn't want to show someone else's slides) so this review has to be from memory, over a week later. In the meantime, my back has just about recovered from carrying those boxes of Mat's into the hotel and upstairs!

Mat started by saying that as he was addressing a science fiction group he would show some science fact slides, and proceeded to show us models and special effects produced for BBC programmes such as *Horizon*. But he went on to show some from SF series like *Blake's Seven* (even a scene with one of my backgrounds) and *Star Cops*.

In passing, he imparted some snippets of information. Did you know that the attractive Dilly Bellingham, who appears with Mat on *Techno*, and Kate Bellingham, the new girl on *Tomorrow's World*, are not identical twins but one and the same person? Or that the BBC insists on calling its Special Effects Department 'Visual Effects'? (probably so that they can't label it 'SFX').

Mat gave away some of the secrets of the recent *QED* programme on Time: the effects which resembled Stanley Kubrick's 'Star Gate' sequence in *2001*, and which took him weeks or months (or was it years?) took mere minutes or hours using modern video technology. Other, very effective shots were achieved using lasers.

He concluded by bringing out many models and working (well, almost) laser guns and such. A large and appreciative audience looked as if it would ask questions all night until brought to a halt by Chairman Murphy, and Mat received a well-deserved round of applause.

By the way, have you noticed how (perhaps because we don't rattle around so much) there seems to be a much more intimate and lively atmosphere at the Imperial? Those walls could do with a lick of paint, though. . .

NEW MEMBERS - FEBRUARY

Christine Weaver lives in Halesowen, is 26, and heard of the Brum group from our Treasurer, Chris Chivers. She prefers fantasy, and especially books by Donaldson and May, and that's all the information we have.

Peter John Dunn is also 26 and comes from Coventry, and learned of us through Matrix, then got the details from Novacon. He actually comes from Belfast, and "thought the Brum Group might be a good idea". Well of course it is! He's interested in utopias and dystopias etc. His favourite UK authors are Brunner, White and Pratchett, and US authors Niven, Pohl, Pournelle. He's also a fan of *The Prisoner* and a member of 'Six of One'.

Richard John Standage is 24 and lives in Smethwick. His form states "Sorry not really into SF!?", which may make you wonder why he joined. The answer if of course Helena Bowles, our Secretary, to whom he is engaged; he's on the Novacon committee, so had to join!



Roy Barclay

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, and to all book reviewers and contributors of unsolicited (?) items. More please.

NEWS FILLER

News and Gossip from the world of Science Fiction, usually incorporating Martin Tudor's **Jophan Report**.

If YOU have any information of interest, please send or 'phone it in to the Editor.

DRIBS AND DRABBLES

Steve Jones has come up with a rather interesting story. It seems that *Interzone* published a very favourable review, by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh, of the new Games Workshop anthologies. Being interested in writing for them, Steve sent off a SSAE to GW Books – and was rather surprised to receive a reply signed 'Neil Jones, Deputy editor, GW Books'. Could this be a coincidentally similar name, or does *Interzone* make a policy of printing reviews by publishers? (Or could the fact that *Interzone* and GW Books have the same editor have anything to do with it?) Whatever, Steve lost interest at that point. . .

I mentioned last month that both Steve and I had drabbles accepted for the new book. I can now reveal that Pauline Dungate (Morgan to you) is also included. Steve has sent me a couple for possible publication in the *BGN*, and I may well do this; but perhaps YOU would like to have a go at writing one (or two, or three) SF/fantasy drabbles? The rules are quite simple: it must contain exactly 100 words, excluding the title; hyphenated words count as one, but mustn't be abused! Try it – it's fun.

By the way – speaking of last month, I haven't received or been told any SF jokes yet. Does this mean that there aren't any? (Or that nobody read the Newsletter, in which case there's not much point in my writing this.) No suggestions for a name for the Meddling Time Traveller, either. . .

ANDROMEDA SIGNING SESSIONS

On Wednesday 11 April, late afternoon (check for details), Larry Niven and Steve Barnes will be signing copies of their novel *The Barsoom Project*. This is part of Pan's launch of its new hardback SF series, and comic writer Chris Claremont will also be signing his first 'real book', *First Flight*, on the same day.

Also in April David Gemmell will be signing his fourth *Drenai* book, while in May, Tanith Lee will be signing *Blood of Roses*, and Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman will be signing *Good Omens*, about which we heard at the Group last year. And, lastly but certainly not least(ly?), Drunken Dragon's third published book will be Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road*, voted best first

novel by *Locus*.

MUSIC OFF SCREEN

The Total Record Company is releasing the music from a number of SF-type movies and other productions on LP, cassette and CD. The label is Silva Screen, and they are distributed by BMG Records. March releases include:

Star Trek: The Next Generation; *Star Trek: The Cage*; *Star Trek: Sound Effects*; *Children of a Lesser God*; *Music from the Hammer Films*; *The Time Machine*.

Product now available on the Filmtrax label includes;

Damien Omen II; *Alien*; *Krull*; *King Kong*; *Thunderbirds are Go!*; *Hellraiser*; *Warlock*; *The Prisoner*; *Legend*.

For more information, have a chat with member Rob Whitmore.

BSFA NOMINATIONS ANNOUNCED

The nominations for the British Science Fiction Awards, which will be presented at Eastercon at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, on Sunday 15 April, are as follow.

Novel: *A Child Across the Sky* – Jonathon Carroll; *The Child Garden* – Geoff Ryman; *Cyteen* – C.J. Cherryr; *The Gold Coast* – Kim Stanley Robinson; *Pyramids* – Terry Pratchett.

Short Fiction: *The Bridge* – Christopher Evans; *Gardenias* – Ian MacDonald; *In Translation* – Lisa Tuttle; *The Knot Garden* – Mary Gentle; *Once Upon a Time in the Park* – Ian Lee; *Tommy Atkins* – Barrington Bayley.

Dramatic Presentation: *Back to the Future*; *Batman*; *The Chronicles of Narnia*; *Dr. Who*; *Red Dwarf*.

Artwork: *Other Edens III* cover – Jim Burns; *Interior illos*, *Interzone 31* – SMS; *In the Drift* cover – Mark Salwowski; *The Great & Secret Show* cover – Manuel San Julian; *Scholars & Soldiers* cover – Nick Rogers; *Neverness* cover – Mike Van Houten; *Gold Coast/Interzone 30* cover – Keith Scarfe; *Interzone 31* cover – David A. Hardy.

FONENOTE

Messages for Arthur C. Clarke can (at last!) be accepted by *Hal* on 082 343 2001.

You Write...

Reviving this feature, due to the almost unprecedented response received to our pleas for contributions! You'll find other items from members under **Reviews** and **NewSFile**. Don't stop now you've started: let's have something from YOU. . .

PETER STRAUB: THE SIGNING SESSION **by Chris Morgan**

It was the ninth of February 1990. A dry but (surprise, surprise) windy Friday evening. There was a kind of hushed expectancy in Andromeda Bookshop – or maybe it was just a lack of noise due to the meagre number of people waiting to meet America's second-best-known horror writer.

Then the man himself arrived. In his suit and expensive overcoat, bald (though only in his mid-forties) and with heavy-rimmed glasses, he looked just like a successful executive. He towered over his guardians from Grafton. Within a few seconds he was installed behind a table by the till, pen poised to sign every copy of his books on the premises.

You really should have heard of Peter Straub. *Ghost Story* is probably his most widely known novel, due to the film. His earlier novel, *Julia*, was also filmed. He collaborated with Stephen King on a massive fantasy-horror book, *The Talisman* (a failure in literary terms, though it sold a lot of copies), and he won a World Fantasy Award for his last novel, *Koko*. Most of his novels are big – over 500 pages; though he rarely writes short stories there's one of his in *Prime Evil*, the much-hyped horror anthology. He was in Britain in February to sign paperbacks of *Koko* (Penguin) and hardcovers of *Mystery* (Grafton).

What's more important than the bare facts is that Straub knows how to write, not a particularly common attribute in horror fiction (or in SF, either). He is a superlative stylist, a magician with words.

As he signed books for me I questioned him closely about *Mystery* (which I had just enjoyed). It's set in 1963, mostly on the fictional Caribbean island of Mill Walk (which, he admitted, is a deliberately displaced Milwaukee). Although *Mystery* is complete in itself, Straub told me that he intends to write another novel about Tom Pasmore, his young hero, set in the present day.

I found Straub to be courteous and patient, a witty conversationalist. Just the sort of person we should have had as a Brum Group speaker.

NO TREAT FOR TREKKERS **by Andrew Wright**

For those of you who don't read the *Evening Mail* (or the Viva section), 20 February's edition contained an article of concern to many of us. Apparently Paramount Pictures are starting work on *Star Trek VI*. The bad news is that none of the original cast will appear in it. The film will be a prequel, set at the Starfleet Academy whilst Kirk & Co. are in training. Worse, some bright spark has come up with the idea of producing it as a *Police Academy*-style comedy. . .

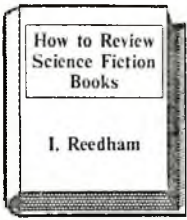
This is a guaranteed recipe for killing the series stone dead (and what other future epics can we expect to see if, God forbid, this film is a success – Indiana Jones played by Pee Wee Herman?)

None of the original cast have been consulted, or are involved with the production and George Takei (Sulu) is, understandably, livid about the plan. His fan club is asking people to write to the one man who can overturn the plan; and to do so within the month. After then the film will move into production (ie. the point of no return). His name is Frank Mancuso, President of Paramount Pictures, and can be reached at: 5555 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, CA. 90038, USA.

Get that pen out **NOW!!!**

The Meddling Time Traveller **by Tim Groome**





Book Reviews

All books reviewed here by members were provided by the publishers, who receive a copy of this Newsletter. Members may keep review copies (or may donate them as Raffle or Auction items. . .)

Please keep reviews to under 150 words unless instructed otherwise. Deadline for reviews: at least two weeks before next Group meeting.

This month, the first page of book reviews should be called 'Not Book Reviews'. Or something. I've received the following from Peter and William, which do not quite fit into the 'normal' review slot. . .

GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE by Robert A. Heinlein. Edited by Virginia Heinlein:

Del Rey; \$19.95.

Comments by Peter Weston.

It is not generally recognised, I think, just how much of a 'mystery man' was Robert Heinlein, and how little is known of the man himself.

For this reason I eagerly acquired his posthumous new book, *Grumbles from the Grave*, for whatever new insights it might bring. Once upon a time, years ago, I was known as a very keen Heinlein fan, and I had often speculated in my fanzine about the possible circumstances that might have influenced his various works. For example, what turned the cheerfully optimistic author of *Double Star* into the rambling pessimist responsible for *I Will Fear No Evil*?

Well, I think I have a few more answers now.

Not that the book is particularly enlightening in any personal sense. It is mostly comprised of extracts of letters to Heinlein's agent and to various editors and publishers. But the *tone* of those letters, the amount of space taken up with such matters as, for instance, how to deal with fan letters, or on Heinlein's attitude to writing itself, do show a certain insensitivity.

My theory, now, is that Heinlein actually didn't change much during his entire career; from the beginning he was pompous and long-winded. But I suspect he had to restrain himself in the earlier days, right up to *Starship Troopers*, in order to sell his books to the various editors. The frequent references to 'cutting' suggest he wrote manuscript at far greater length than was eventually published.

But, after *Stranger in a Strange Land* (an experiment which almost didn't get into print), he became a best-selling author, a celebrity, and thereafter he felt that he could write what he wanted, without check.

There are a few surprises, though small ones. For example, Heinlein considered 'By His Bootstraps' to be 'utter hoke', and was very unhappy with *Starship Troopers*, thinking it to be 'weak'.

And contrary to my past beliefs, Heinlein actually wasn't very good at titles (his suggestion was *The Man from Mars for Stranger, Brass Cannon for Moon is a Harsh Mistress; Young Atomic Engineers for Rocket Ship Galileo*). We obviously owe an unacknowledged debt to his editors, over the years.

But overall, the impression given is that here is a man who is totally sure of his own convictions, an intolerant, not-very-nice person. How odd that he should have that tremendous talent, that ability to look ahead of his time and tell us about it so vividly!

VINELAND by Thomas Pynchon; Secker & Warburg; 385 pages; £14.95. Reviewed by William McCabe.

So let's get this straight right from the beginning: this is not science fiction, it isn't and it doesn't wanna be. If this review gets printed (and I wouldn't count on it) [But you don't know how desperate I am for contributions - Ed.] it doesn't mean you'll be able to get the book in the specialist SF bookstores. You'll probably have to go to a regular book shop. I write this because the book is worth reading (even if you have to wait a year for the paperback). It won't burn your brain like the last (legendary) Pynchon novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, but it might expand your mind just a little.

If I was reviewing a regular novel I'd go into some kind of description of the characters or the plot at this stage but such is the nature of this book that it wouldn't be that easy. How would it be if I launched into a description of Zoyd Wheeler (professional crazy and occasional musician) and then had to explain that he was only in the story for about 50 pages? The same could also be said of Prairie (daughter of the above ?) Wheeler, her mother Frenesi Gates (left wing political activist/film maker), who is working for Brock Vond (right wing extremist Justice Department Supremo). Then there's the plot; well, there're a lot of them too - can Billy Barf and the Vomitoners survive a gig at a Mafia wedding? How can Takeshi Fumimoto survive the Ninja death touch? There are the usual secret organisations and oddities (the Thanatoids, who are somewhere between Zombie and disembodied soul) and all the usual Pynchon stuff.

Complaints? Faults? Maybe it's a little too American (I don't understand a lot of the references) and maybe a little too disjointed (life's like that), but you can't have everything.

CRESTWOOD HEIGHTS by Christopher Hyde; Headline; 504 pages; £4.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Crestwood Heights is a modern utopia for the 21st century. Into this modern Eden comes Kelly Rhina, who is left a house there by her uncle after his death. After taking up residence there Kelly begins to discover that even this Eden has its own serpent. The multinational corporations that funded the building of Crestwood Heights have made it into an ideal community to test new ideas and introduce them into the American nation. Christopher Hyde has crafted a well written horror story of technology being used to make life into an Orwellian nightmare. The story moves with well-paced action and has a well researched basis for the tale. The ideas could all too soon become a reality that we could all be living with.

FOR LOVE OF EVIL by Piers Anthony; Grafton; 359 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The sixth in a series of five books concerning the incarnations of immortality. Yes, Anthony has done it again and extended an already complete series as he did with the *Kanth* books and more recently the *Adapt* series. After saying all that I have to confess that I truly enjoyed this, it is undoubtedly the best in the series so far. It tells the story of Parry, who marries but loses his wife to the first stirrings of the Inquisition, becomes a monk, is corrupted by a demoness and lives out his final years in complete depravity to become the most evil man on Earth. He defeats the present incumbent of the incarnation of evil, he is then the Satan that the other five incarnations have been battling in the previous books. An excellent resumption of the series, but the final (?) volume concerning God should make interesting (if controversial) reading.

NEW MOON by Midori Snyder; Unwin; 280 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The fire queen Zorah destroyed her three sister queens of water, earth and air and so unbalanced the elemental magic of Oran. She also declared that any child exhibiting the faintest trace of elemental magic is to be put to death. A few children escape this killing each year, and are being sent into the mountains where the rebel New Moon organisation will train them with a view to defeating Zorah and restoring the old balance. One street urchin Jobber has shown great promise of fire magic but refuses to leave the city. This is a good story but I seem to have read bits of it before, nothing new but a different angle makes it good reading.

TALES FROM PLANET EARTH by Arthur C Clarke; Century/Legend; 313 pages; £12.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

I generally tend to avoid collections, as quite often the same stories appear over and over. However this is not only the first Clarke collection to appear for five years, but the stories have been selected to avoid those which have appeared in previous collections, and to include rarely published stories, including "On Golden Seas", which has never before appeared in a collection. It is certainly a worthwhile addition to the shelves of Clarke fans, including "The Road to the Sea", in which can be seen the roots of *The City and the Stars* and *The Songs of Distant Earth*. These are generally gentle, thoughtful little stories, sometimes with unexpected twists. But as an artist, I must object to the fact that nowhere can I find a reference to the illustrations; there is a line drawing at the start of each story (but usually not related to it, and adding very little to the book really), and occasional halftones which do illustrate the story. Who did them?

ALTERNITIES by Michael P Kube Mc Dowell; Sphere; 383 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A parallel universe story in which the US president of one universe decides on confrontation with "the enemy" knowing he has the safeguard of the parallels in which to hide from reprisals. Several of the minor players, notably Rayne Wallace one of the central characters, are sent to spy on other parallels. Wallace gets too involved and causes the plan to misfire (sic) and the "other" US blocks off any escape. The basic idea, while a good one, was done better in Pohl's *Coming of the Quantum Cats*, although the interplay between Wallace and his other (parallel) acquaintances provides a strong foil to the plot. Worth a read, but not overly original.

CYTEEN by C. J. Cherryh; N.E.L.; 690 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

As might be expected from a Hugo winning novel, this is excellent though it might not be to the taste of all readers. There is very little fast moving action. It has a complex plot interwoven with undercurrents of political intrigue. Ariane Emory has almost absolute power in the scientific establishment of Reseune on the colony world of Cyteen. Her influence stretches much further as she is a member of the Council of Nine, the body that governs the planets and stations of the Union. She is feared and hated. As a result of tremendous advances in genetic engineering, Reseune's labs produce and programme azi, people designed for specific functions and essential for the expanding colonisation programme. Then Ariane Emory is murdered. It is decided to recreate her, producing for her clone the traumas of childhood that made her what she was. *Cyteen* follows this attempt but also the effect on those the first Ari left behind and the repercussions produced by an Ari reborn. It is a long novel, packing more than twenty years into its pages. It is slow in places but the attention to detail shows how excellently crafted it is. This is hard-core SF at its best.

CHILDE_ROLANDE by Samantha Lee; Futura; 288 pages; £4.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Lynn M Edwards.

Perhaps giving a book set in post-holocaust Scotland to an ex-patriot Scot is a bad idea. I found *Childe Rolande* a very irritating novel to read. This was partly because of a mixture of Irish and Scots names for places and people and partly because, while the dialogue is written in a fairly broad, though understandable Scots dialect, the narrative slips back into the standard English with the occasional dialect word. The story, of being born and brought up a misfit in a society where women have taken supremacy and men are castrated at birth, is told by the pregnant hermaphrodite protagonist, while s/he waits for the birth of his/her "childs". Surviving against the odds, Rolande is proclaimed The Redeemer and sets about restoring the more equal society from before "the fall". Recommended? - Only for those who either won't notice the things that annoyed me or who collect Samantha Lee books.

CHILDE_ROLANDE by Samantha Lee; Orbit; 288 pages; £4.50 paperback

Reviewed by Sharon Hassall.

This is the story of a hermaphrodite mutant, Rolande, growing up in a post-holocaust matriarchal society which has divided the sexes, the males being totally suppressed. I am afraid I have to say this is one of the most awful books I have read, in fact I wonder how it managed to get published. Although the basic idea for the story is good, the plot has not been developed at all, such that I feel that if Ursula Le Guin or C J Cherryh, for example, had taken this idea they could have made quite a good book out of it. The whole book is badly written and the style does not seem very mature, although possibly this could have been deliberate as the book is narrated from the viewpoint of an adolescent. Good examples of this are the dialogues in the book - the book is set in post-holocaust Scotland, but they don't read as "Scottish" and the odd Scottish word thrown in here and there just jar and come across as a bit twee. I don't recommend this book at all, unless you're feeling masochistic or are an avid Mills and Boon reader.

THE AMTRAK WARS: DEATH BRINGER by Patrick Tilley; Sphere; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

In the fifth volume of *The Amtrak Wars* Patrick Tilley has kept up the pace of the previous four volumes. Steve Brickman, Clearwater and Cadillac continue their odyssey across a post holocaust America. After escaping the Iron Masters they gradually head back towards Texas and the heart of the Amtrak federation. As the journey continues Steve learns more about his own history and more of the pieces of the jigsaw fall into place. With his original mission to capture Mr Snow the clan McCaul's wordsmith, and with Clearwater and Cadillac still on his mind, Steve must reconcile himself with his changing view of the policies of Amtrak's first family. The Amtrak War saga has built up a large, loyal readership and they will not be disappointed in this latest volume from Patrick Tilley.

BLOOD OF THE TIGER - SAGA OF LOST LANDS by Rose Estes; Bantam; 198 pp; £2.99 p/back. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The first in a series of books about Emri, an outcast from the Tiger tribe and Hawk, also an outcast but from the Tiger's enemies the Toad tribe. They are forced to flee from Mandais, shaman of the Tiger tribe and murderer of Emri's father, the chief. Emri and Hawk are adopted by a pride of lions and remain under their protection throughout a long cold winter. It stretches the imagination a bit far to accept that a pride of lions would care for two humans, but that apart it is a mildly interesting tale of life in the stone age.

WYRD SISTERS by Terry Pratchett; Corgi; 252 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This novel is the sixth in Terry's *Discworld* series. The fact that it's on such a world is probably its only relationship to SF, but enough of labels, this is an extremely amusing book. The Wyrd Sisters are three witches who manipulate the politics of the kingdom of Lancre after king Venance is murdered by the Duke Felnet, who takes his throne. The main characters other than the witches are Venance's ghost, a group of travelling players who include Tomjohn (the old king's son), Hweyll the dwarf (a playwright), and the new kings 'Erol'. This is really all about Pratchett's delightful humour of course and if you haven't got a sense of one most of this will be lost on you. If you do like heroic fantasy with lots of humour this will cheer up the winter nights. It really should be available on the National Health, or what's left of it.

MYTHAGO WOOD by Robert Holdstock; Grafton; 319 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

A welcome reissue of the 1986 World Fantasy Award winner, this is great fantasy. A compelling story with fascinating elements woven through it, all too plausible. Mythagos, myth images, are the idealized forms of creatures from myth and racial memory, in some ways independent, in others requiring humans to give them life. They are centred in Ryhope Wood, around George Huxley's home. Shortly after World War II Huxley dies and his sons take up his investigations of, and fascination with, the wood. They themselves become part of the life and mythology of the wood through their involvement with girl Gwyneth: one as the dark Outsider, the other as the avenging Kinsman. An excellent book, well worth reading.

OTHER EDENS III ed by Christopher Evans & Robert Holdstock; Unwin; 237 pp; £4.50 p/b. Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The third collection within this series provides 16 new stories to digest. Frankly, however, overall they need not have bothered - if this is the "state of the art in British imaginative fiction" as declared on the cover, it will more likely turn away readers than attract them. I found the majority of these stories morbid, self indulgent and having unrealistic plots. The main theme throughout the book is of evil, death and some form of magic (i.e. sorcery/witchcraft) which, to me, is not "imaginative fiction" - read Poe or Stoker or any of the Victorian macabre writers for better. Like beacons within this disappointing collection shone "When the Music Stopped" (Lehmann and Milworth) which, although about death, has a reality feel and is well told; "The Droplet" (Baxter) the story of a scientist's endeavours to create, is superbly paced and well characterised; and "Losing Control" (Morgan) about a shipwrecked crew on an alien planet, and survival, again a well told story and the reader feels drawn in and involved in the plot. Apart from these three the collection is dull - I expect the writers concerned to provide more "immediate" stories and Evans/Holdstock to influence by editorial panache. Not as good as previous *Edens*, disappointing.

BARD II: THE FIRST LONGSHIP by Keith Taylor; Headline; 260 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by Peter Day

The continuing adventures of Felimid mac Fel, Bard of Erin. While attempting to flee Britain he falls into the hands of the notorious pirate captain, Gudrun Blackhair, and throws in his lot with her as she pursues her depredations amidst the Danes, the Wends and others, on the fringes of post-Roman Europe. There follows much swashbuckling, a fair amount of magic, and an encounter with a most unpleasant immortal wizard. This book has a more confident feel about it than the original *Bard*, probably because the author is starting to get into his stride, and the various episodes form a much more continuous narrative. As with that first book, this is competently written and is very readable. A pleasant piece of light entertainment.

LAST SHIP HOME by Rodney Matthews; Dragon's World/Paper Tiger; 134 pp; £14.95 h/b, £8.95 p/b. Rev by Dave Hardy.

Rodney Matthews' *In Search of Forever* was published in 1995, so this new volume certainly proves how prolific he must be. Many of the illustrations are quite small, and there are a few double-spreads. The general impression is "more of the same" - but what excellent work "the same" is! And anyway, closer inspection reveals quite a wide range of both technique and subject matter. Although he gets no credit on the cover or title page, the text appears to be by Nigel Suckling, and (perhaps because he worked closely with Matthews) it has more content than in some of the fantasy books he has written. The art includes posters, book jackets, record sleeves, and interesting insights on the artist's technique and the origin and development of some commissions, including pencil sketches. The section on logos and lettering is also fascinating. While I have not checked every illustration, some such as "Heavy Metal Hero" do appear in both books. But don't let that put you off.

SCHOLARS AND SOLDIERS by Mary Gentle; Macdonald; 192 pages; £11.95 hardback. Reviewed by Anna Gay.

You all know the feeling; - back in childhood, when a book could seize you, lead you to a strange land where you lived adventures in someone else's life. In this collection of short stories by Mary Gentle you can tread strange worlds of fantasy and science fiction, Mary Gentle handles these smaller canvases in a richer and more precise fashion. With her novels you may not always feel totally sure of your facts, here the background reaches out and grabs you. Not all the worlds are comfortable but in others you might like to travel, as do the scholars and soldiers of the title. Some have appeared in *Isaac Asimov's*, others have appeared in anthologies, but read together they are a kaleidoscopic vision of what life might be like.

GAY OF THE STARWIND by Douglas Hill; Piper; 124 pages; £2.25 paperback.

PLANET OF THE WARLORD by Douglas Hill; Piper; 128 pages; £2.25 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton

Keill Randor and the alien telepath Gir continue their search for the Galactic Warlord, first on the planet Rilyn where the Warlord's deputy has set up a base, and then finally at the Warlord's headquarters, where Randor finds that the Warlord is not a single being but twenty four beings whose minds are linked and enhanced by a creature called the Arachnis. A story with a very simplistic plotline and ideal for the juvenile market.

NAPOLEON DISENTIMED by Hayford Pierce; Bantam; 317 pages; £3.50 paperback

Reviewed by Wendell Wagner Jr.

I'm not sure why I don't much like this novel, since I'm usually a fan of alternate history stories. This is the story of an American con-man who finds himself tossed into a parallel world where France rules much of Europe and dominates the world, because Napoleon had defeated Great Britain at the "Battle of the Cotswold Encirclement" in 1805. The plot is concerned with how this con-man tries to fool people in this other world with his stories, true and false, of life in our world. It's also about how he finds his parallel self in this alternate world and discovers that he's an even bigger con-man. There are lots of clever ideas in this book, but I don't care for any of the characters. I guess that this just shows that clever ideas aren't enough.