

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

April
1990

Issue
No. 223

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 Chairman – Bernie Evans

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

Friday 20 April at 7.45pm Admission: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.00

This month's speaker is

RAMSEY CAMPBELL

Ramsey Campbell is regarded by many as Britain's premier horror author. He is President of the British Fantasy Society, and has won both World and British fantasy awards (but doesn't make as much money as Clive Barker!). He is a Scouse born and bred, and is married with two children, who have only one head each.

Among his best-known books are *Hungry Moon*, *Ancient Images*, *Incarnate*, and *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*. Ramsey is now with Futura/Macdonald, who are reprinting some of his earlier work and 'plan big things for him'. His latest hardcover is *Scared Stiff* – short stories about horror and sex. . .

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, or £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 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley B66 4SH, which is also the Novacon Chairman's address. (NB. NEW ADDRESS)

All other contributions and enquiries to Dave Hardy, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 OAB (Telephone 021 777 1802, fax 021 777 2792)



Robert Rankin

I give up! How can anyone hope to report on a meeting like this? It's all down to the personality of the speaker, which can hardly be translated to the printed page. So I'm not even going to try; if you wanted to know what Robert Rankin was like, you should have been there. . . (It was good.)

However, in my ceaseless quest for contributions (my post is supposed to be Newsletter Editor, not writer) it occurs to me that this would be an ideal way for members to participate. At every meeting there are some people who are fans of whomever is speaking (or at least are more interested in him/her than others), whether the subject is hard SF; fantasy, horror, comics, science, the mechanics of writing, publishing, or whatever. All you have to do is to take a few notes, if your memory needs them, and write 350-500 words. That shouldn't be too difficult, should it? And it means that the load will be spread fairly. I look forward to your offers; copy must be in *at least* two weeks before the next meeting, and the same rules apply as on page 3. Thanks!

And now, here is

THE CHAIRMAN'S BIT

Hands up all those who noticed that the WordChain playoff didn't happen at the last meeting. That was because the finalists weren't keen on the impromptu method we planned last month, and the new one required some preparation. It will be ready next month – but unfortunately Rog won't be there, as it's his parents' 50th wedding anniversary [congratulations]. The May meeting?

At the AGM we discussed making a loan or gift to help *Critical Wave* out of its financial difficulties, which arose because the editors purchased a photocopier on a promise of sponsorship which did not materialise. The meeting was in favour of giving the magazine a hand, providing that full details of the situation were made known to the Committee.

Nothing has been done since the AGM because we have not received any information. Hopefully some will have arrived by the time you read this, and we shall be able to make a decision; the result will be announced in the Newsletter.

We recently had some bad news about our current 'home': the Imperial is to be gutted and refurbished, which means that we shall have to find a new venue within the next year, at most. We may have had our ups and downs with this hotel in the past (and they will insist on calling us 'Sci Fi Group' on the notice board behind the Reception desk); nevertheless, they do provide us with a convenient and affordable meeting place, and we shall be lucky to find another so close to the City Centre. So please, ALL OF YOU, have a think about possible venues, and let the Committee know.

On a happier note, it's good to see that the Newsletter is starting to get the volume of contributions it deserves. Let's keep it up.

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.

NEWSFILE

JOPHAN REPORT #33

Arthur "ATom" Thomson, whose cartoons and headings were a familiar feature in British sf fanzines for more than 35 years, died on 8 February, aged 62. Winner of the TransAtlantic Fan Fund in 1964, his artwork was first showcased 10 years earlier, in the legendary Irish fanzine *HYPHEN*. A heavy smoker throughout his adult life, Thomson suffered a heart attack in 1983 and had emphysema diagnosed two years later, confined to his home in the final months. He is survived by his wife Olive, two daughters and a heartfelt sense of loss amongst fans throughout the world.

On the 28th of April some members of London based fandom will host A WIZZ FOR ATOM, the Arthur 'ATom' Thomson Memorial Day at the Cafe Munchen, London, (bottom of Denmark St., off Charing Cross Rd, nr. Tottenham Ct. Road tube). With auctions, book signings and donations & appearances from many big names in the sf world, proceeds will be going to ATom's family.

Geoff Ryman's novel *THE CHILD GARDEN* was presented with the 1989 Arthur C Clarke Award at London's Groucho Club on 8 March. The author himself was in the Ascension Islands, Unwin Hyman sf editor Jane Johnson accepting the £1000 cheque on his behalf from Fred Clarke, brother of the award's sponsor.

Steve Harris, whose debut novel *ADVENTURELAND* will be published by Headline on 19 July, is currently working on his second book, provisionally entitled *WULF*. A former photographer, van driver, painter, builder and musician, Harris currently lives in Basingstoke.

German sf fan Andrew Buschsieweke plans to launch a new European fanzine this year, *INTERZINE*; anyone interested can reach him at Strassbuckl 10, 8071 Appertshofen, Federal Republic of Germany. Meanwhile, Michael Schneiberg is seeking UK

News and Gossip from the world of Science Fiction, this month consisting of Martin Tudor's famed **Jophan Report**. If YOU have any information of interest, please send or 'phone it in to the Editor.

items for his column in *FANDOM NEWS LETTER*, "the most important non-professional zine for news, talks, etc, in Germany"; his address is Heinrich-Bilckenweg 5, 5657 Haan/Rhld, West Germany.

Here's a novelty: American small press publisher Bob Pagani is offering selected readers of his newsletter *BOBWORLD* inclusion in his will to receive an internal organ -- after his death, of course. Pagani can be reached at 1001 Belvidere Road, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865, if you're eager for a new conversation piece.

Brian Talbot's *LUTHER ARKWRIGHT* series is being reissued as a leather-bound single volume, in a limited edition of 200.

A combination of editorial unreliability and printing hold-ups has been blamed for the overdue appearance in late March of *THE EDGE #2*. Editor Graham Evans blamed fellow small press publisher Kevin Lyons, "who was supposed to be co-editing the magazine", for failing to typeset the issue as promised and for then failing to hand back material on time or in totality. "The other reason for the delay is that the magazine spent five weeks at the printer's; this was unexpected, to say the least," Evans added. "For pretty obvious reasons, this means that issue three won't be published until May." *THE EDGE #2* contains fiction by S M Baxter, Mike Chinn, Andy Darlington, t.Winter Damon and D F Lewis, plus articles on Sax Rohmer, Philip K Dick and last year's major horror movies.

Robert Adams, author of the *HORSE-CLANS*, died from lymphatic cancer on the 4th of January.

Sf author Ted Tubb is selling off his magazine collection, which includes such rare items as the first UK fanzine, *SCOOPS*, a copy of *MIRACLE SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY STORIES* from 1931 and a near-complete set of *GALAXY*. A full sales list from be obtained from 67 Houston Road, London, SE23 2RL.



VIDEO review

Blake's Seven: The Beginning

Duel) by Terry Nation
Orac)
Aftermath by Terry Nation
 & Tanith Lee

BBC Video; 120 minutes; £9.99 each.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

We truly live in a material world: rather than repeat the series, the BBC can make more money by selling it on video. Or in this case videos. [But watch out: they put *Fawlty Towers* and other progs on TV after they had released the videos. . . -Ed.] This set contains episodes from the first three series, helpfully edited to pile up the titles and credits at the appropriate ends of each tape.

The first three tapes run together the first series with the start of the second. This makes a pretty good film trilogy, from Blake's reintroduction to the resistance and acquisition of the *Liberator*, through the hunt and defeat of Space Commander Travis, to Orac's prediction and the showdown with *Liberator's* builders. The continuous presentation holds up well, although the need to end each episode with some dramatic climax or crisis means the joins can be spotted quite easily.

Aftermath skips forward by the best part of a series to the repelling of the Alien invasion of the Galaxy. The crew abandons a damaged *Liberator*; Blake, Gan and Jenna are dead or missing; Avon's 6 reforms with replacements Dayna and Tarrant. The continuity works less well in this tape; there is a distinct jump to the concluding episode where a psychic entity uses Cally's homesickness as a 'bridge' onto the *Liberator*.

Blake's Seven has often been perceived as a re-creation of *Star Trek*, and as a second-comer never achieved the same degree of following. The two shows had their similarities, especially when *Blake's Seven* left its adventure-serial format for *Star Trek*-style frame construction - each episode self-contained. Both series showed the usual callous disregard for guest stars, although

Blake did without red-shirted disposable crewmen. [Crew persons?] Eventually this meant rubbing out the principals, but thanks to Federation Crappy Aim Disease, they were able to live out their contracts.

For most fans *Blake's Seven* died with the *Liberator*, and the final episode was rightly sent up from many quarters (the Feds apparently found a cure for CAD). Thankfully these tapes precede all that, and although some of my favourite episodes are missing they are nonetheless welcome. In order of preference: *Duel*, *Orac*, *Beginning*, *Aftermath*.

MORE SCREEN NEWS

New videos in your library now include: *Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade* - quest for the Holy Grail; *Deepstar Six* - an underwater romp; *Batman* - the dark side of the Caped Crusader.

The new satellite TV station BSB is to screen a British-made SF 'soap', entitled *Jupiter Moon*. It will have a cast of unknowns, apart from Andy Rashleigh, who was in *Crossroads* and *Emmerdale Farm*. It has been made in Brum at Central Studios, has cost £6 million, and will be screened from April.

I bet that's made you go out and buy an aerial. . .

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The above was an unsolicited contribution, and these are, as you may have gathered, most welcome. (Incidentally, I have not yet received anything from several of the people who put up their hands at the AGM and thus got me into another fine mess re-elected into this post. They know who they are, so - please? Otherwise, we may start finding blank pages again. . .)

For those of you who are intending to send something - and I hope it is YOU - here are some notes which could help both of us. Hand-written copy is acceptable, if it's all you can manage. When sending type-written or word-processed text, please can you make it:

Letter-quality or as black as possible; single spaced; put the titles of books, stories, films etc. in normal type, NOT capitals, italics or (especially) underlined. This is because I use a scanner, and it doesn't like those.

Thanks to all who help to make my job a little easier!
 Dave Hardy [Ed.]

The
Drabbles
Page



As promised/threatened last month, here, for your delectation, are the first Drabbles received from members. Do have a go – it really can be quite rewarding to write a story of exactly 100 words. (You can have hours of fun, too, counting the words and writing to tell me there's one too many/few. . .) Incidentally, the second 'official' volume, The Drabble Project II (Double Century), edited by Rob Meades and our own David B. Wake, will be launched at Eastcon '90 over the Easter weekend, ALL profits going to the RNIB's Talking Book fund.

THE VERY LARGE TIME MACHINE

by Stan Eling

Captain's report, March 15th 2651. Professor Hamstring's theory proved correct. He stated, at the Whiteman Symposium, that size was the decisive factor in time displacement, and astonished his fellow scientists by proposing the whole Earth as subject for the experiment.

Once political fears had been allayed by promises of hidden economic advantage, we were given the green light for a five year jump. At noon today Hamstring Waves were synchronised with Earth's magnetic field and the contacts closed. At noon plus three seconds instrument readings indicate the loss of Earth's liquid core. We lack the data to predict what will follow.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH by L. RON HUBBARD; Reader's Digest Edition.

Written by Steve Jones, who adds 'Note: it is impossible to libel someone who is dead!'. (NB. disclaimer on page 2.)

Evil Psychlos invade Earth drone dribble drool. Jonnie Goodboy Tyler grows up in hiding, and is captured by Terl the Psychlo drone dribble drool. Jonnie escapes and destroys entire race of Psychlos (except Terl) drone dribble drool. Everyone runs around a lot drone dribble drool. Finally Jonnie kills Terl, hurrah and drone dribble drool. Jonnie makes several major contributions to (non)science drool dribble drone.

Jonnie argues with the galactic banks (honest, I'm not making this up), and wins of course dribble drool drone. Jonnie and the girl (oh did I forget to mention her?) live happily ever after drone drabble drool.

ENDLESS SLEEP

by David A. Hardy

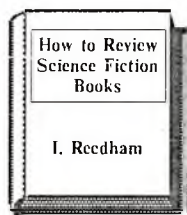
Joel clambered over the last piled mass of lava and stood, panting, on a fairly flat floor punctuated by mounds, cracks and boulders. The distant wall of the caldera was invisible. He was well satisfied with the result of his week's holiday from the terraforming project on the plain far below. The first human to climb this monstrous cone, unaided.

Was that a rumbling beneath his feet? Impossible! Then the rock beneath him split apart, and a great gush of gas and dust sent him into oblivion. After a million years asleep, Olympus Mons had chosen this moment to erupt.

The Meddling Time Traveller by Tim Groome



"Sorry, Leonardo, but it's crap!"



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.

PORTAL by Rob Swigart; Grafton; 346 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Swigart is the author of some wonderfully funny SF novels. Unfortunately, *Portal* isn't one of them. An astronaut on a highly unbelievable solo interstellar mission returns to find Earth empty of people and uses the world computer network (only slightly in disrepair) to discover why. It's a slow and boring book, totally lacking humour or entertainment. Perhaps the reason is contained in this bit of cover blurb: "based on the smash-hit computer mystery game".

WINTER IN ARHELION by Chris Dixon; Unwin; 220 pages; £6.99 lge paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the story of Skarry, a young goatherd who dreams of being a hero, protecting his tribe from their enemies the Ice Warriors, and finally bringing peace after centuries of war. Through a chance encounter, Skarry undertakes a journey, giving aid to various peoples before finding out the truth about the Ice Warriors and learning that his destiny is not to be a warrior but a Dreamer, a type of guide-cum-prophet-cum-magic user. An interesting first novel this, with very definite environmental undertones, it leaves enough loose ends for there to be a second (and even third) volume about Skarry which could make interesting reading.

STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER by J M Dillard; Grafton; 311 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by David B Waka.

"Based on a screenplay by David Loughery; story by William Shatner and Harve Bennett and David Loughery" does not inspire confidence, (especially when you know that this committee's epic was chopped about by budget problems). As you would expect the book accurately covers the story of the film; it tells how the crew of the Enterprise cope with a hostage situation on the Planet of Galactic Peace, Nimbus III, and the subsequent voyage to the Final Frontier. Although the novel hasn't spent any more money on special effects, it has been expanded and contains some fairly beefy, extra scenes. For instance, there is a whole sub-plot concerning a power struggle onboard the Klingon Bird-of-Prey. It has everything you would want from a novelisation. If you like this sort of thing this is a good book. Jo-ii-chu.

THE CRYSTAL SWORD by Adrienne Martine Barnes; Headline; 307 pp; £3.99 p/back. Reviewed by Marika Charalambous.

This, the sequel to the brilliant *Fire Sword*, carries on the plight of medieval England or Albion. It is set one generation later than the last book; for it is the task of Eleanor's son, Dylan d'Avebury, to carry on his mother's legacy. Dylan must find the Crystal Sword, sister to the Fire Sword, that his mother revered, and along with it rescue his future bride. I particularly enjoyed these novels because of the pagan and celtic symbolism, including old gods and legends which feature heavily in the story.

KENDERMORE by Mary Kirchoff; Penguin/TSR; 346 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Marika Charalambous.

Yet another TSR Dungeons and Dragons spin off, this one from the *Dragonlance Preludes* trilogy which recounts the adventures of the original Dragonlance heroes. Kendermore is of course about Tasslehoff Bunnyfoot, the infamous kender-thief of the series. I felt that this was written as a teenage book rather than an adult novel, as there were a lot of cheap laughs to make up for the lack of plot. What can you expect from a book that advertises 'Free Colour Stickers' on the cover?

SHIP OF DREAMS by Brian Lumley; Headline; 243 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

I am a sucker for the idea of flying sailing ships, as they are far more elegant and picturesque than boring old aeroplanes. There are plenty of them in this second tale of Eldin and Hero, who are two men of the waking world trapped in the Dreamlands. Princess Zura of the Land of Pleasures Unattained wants to destroy the floating city of Serannian, and all who die will become zombies in her undead legions. As usual only the two heroes can stop her evil plan to conquer the entire Dreamlands. This book is more like sword-and-soncery than Lovecraft's nightmare-filled Dreamlands, but it is a pleasant read all the same.

THE PILLARS OF ETERNITY/THE GARMENTS OF CAEAN by Barrington J Bayley; Pan; 414 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This omnibus edition brings together two of Bayley's finest novels. Most of his work brings to life some weird philosophy. In *The Pillars of Eternity* Joachim Boaz is a "boneman" (someone who has had their skeleton replaced by computer-laced silicon to enhance their natural abilities). He has been driven insane by unendurable pain, when his bonefunctions prevented him from dying or losing consciousness during an accident. As the universe is cyclical, Joachim cannot tolerate the idea that he will have to endure the same pain again and again. He tries to find the wandering planet Meirjahn, where the paradoxical timegans can be found, which will enable him to change the universe. *The Garments of Caean* is probably my favourite Bayley novel. He takes an old saying "The clothes maketh the man", and produces some of the most fantastic cultures in SF from it. The spaceship from Ziode sent to investigate the aberrant Caeanic culture finds the lost Sovyans, who live in space all their lives and regard their spacesuits as part of their own bodies. They meet the Caeanians themselves, who alter their personalities by just changing their clothes. Finally they explore the planet where "prossim" is harvested. Prossim is a mysterious material that all the finest Caeanic garments are made from, and which almost seems to have a mind of its own. Highly recommended.

THE WITLING by Vernor Vinge; Pan; 220 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

"In the land of the blind the one eyed man is king", so the saying goes. Vernor Vinge has taken this premise and reversed it. Out of this comes a very unusual tale of the planet Giri. A shipwrecked anthropological team from Novamerika discovers that the people on Giri are not all that they seem, and the abilities that they have are only partially recognised by the other human races. The world is ruled by an Imperial Family, and the Prince Imperial, after meeting the humans from Novamerika, starts a relationship with one of the alien families. What neither race can foresee is the change that will be made to the planet Giri by this relationship. Vernor Vinge has written a delightful story which is a good read.

JINX ON A TERRAN INHERITANCE by Brian Daley; Grafton; 412 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

The second adventure of Hobart Floyt and Alacrity Fitzhugh carries on where the first, *Requiem for a Ruler of Worlds*, left off, with our heroes fleeing for their lives through palace corridors, before embarking on a quest for a ship that Floyt has inherited. It ended with them sneaking off in pursuit of a ship that belonged to Alacrity's father. Someone should tell Brian Daley about the *Dunarest Saga* before this one reaches volume four. What comes in between however, is enjoyable if lightweight stuff, a good read to give your brain a rest, as the intrepid duo career through space, fighting injustice and exposing Galactic conspiracy. There are some very good elements in this story, and some that would be very thin ice if it took itself seriously (for example, the worst SF hack in the universe as a major character). Fortunately it doesn't.

IN OTHER WORLDS by A A Attanasio; Grafton; 222 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Helen Wake.

This book is full of nice mind-expanding theories - the stuff good old science fiction is made of. But I kept being distracted by feeling sorry for the characters. They belonged in a nice, cosy Woody Allen film, not zipping through time and having their molecules juggled. In the end, I was left with just a huge feeling of agoraphobia on their behalf.

BACK TO THE FUTURE II by Craig Shaw Gardner; Headline; 216 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Helen Wake.

I really regretted reading this. It deprived me of the nice happy ending to the first film, and finished: - 'To be concluded in...'. I'd already flinched as Doc dropped casually into conversation the fact that he was risking the fate of the whole universe to sort out Marty's personal problems, and winced at Mr Gardner's portrayal of a future where success is measured by having this year's gizmos, failure by having last year's. And this was the 'good' future. As bubblegum goes, this was pretty tacky stuff.

LAVONDYSS by Robert Holdstock; Grafton; 475 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is the second book in the *Mythago Wood* series. In it we discover Tallis Keeton (sister of Harry) and her 'powers' - inspired by her grandfather's letter drawing her to Rhyope Wood, and her lost brother's 'karma'. Tallis has visions and finds a way to 'track' Harry, but she becomes lost herself within the ancient woodland. Many adventures and misfortunes occur until finally Tallis becomes 'as one' with the forest. I am sure Holdstock himself became lost in his own creation, which here forms a mystique clouding the storyline. This novel is very disappointing by comparison with *Mythago Wood*. It meanders...could this be a device to keep the trilogy alive? I was disappointed reading this - I expected more after the excellent *Mythago Wood*, but felt let down by the 'Tallis' experience - which was somehow deflating.

DRAGONSDAWN by Anne McCaffrey; Gorgi; 467 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

As a "first colonist" novel, this is a fine example. It has all the right ingredients - people prepared to work together for the greater good, the odd dissenter, curious children, strange animals and daddy, unexpected peril. What defuses the tension is the fact that most readers will know that thread is about to fall on this new-found Eden called Fern, that the colonists will succeed in creating viable weapons - the dragons - to combat it. Devotees of McCaffrey's dragon books will readily accept this as the starting point of the symbiosis between rider and well-loved beast. But a new reader would be well advised to begin here, then all the tribulations and surprises will be fresh.

RIMRUNNERS by C J Cherryh; NEL; 238 pages; £12.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Cherryh has created a universe within which she can develop infinite variety, from aliens such as the Hani from the *Chanur* series, to the political complexities of *Downbelow Station*. *Rimrunners* is set in human space and is a relatively straight forward adventure. Bat Yanger was separated from her ship and is stranded in a space station that is out of the way and is being run down. Desperate, she joins a war ship, one jump ahead of the station authorities who want to question her about a couple of dead men. But this ship is hunting her own and if her new shipmates find out who she is she could be executed as a spy. This is an excellent novel focusing on characters and the way that people cope with problems and dilemmas. If you have had difficulty getting into a Cherryh novel in the past, this could be the one to show you how excellent a craftsman she is.

REVOLT ON MAJIPOOR by Matt Costello; Orbit; 243 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

GAMEBOOK WARNING! GAMEBOOK WARNING! This is a solo adventure set on the world of Majipoor, with an introduction by Robert Silverberg himself. You play Parris, Lord Valentine's lieutenant, who must first survive a mountain climb, and then travel across the world to rescue Valentine's son, who has apparently been kidnapped by the mysterious Metamorphs. The game system (by Bill Fawcett) is more detailed and complicated than in most gamebooks of this type, but it is not properly exploited in the adventure itself. There is a four page section on "Magical Items and Special Equipment", even though none actually appear in the adventure! There is also no provision for resting and healing - even when several days pass peacefully - so Parris tends to lose hit points and die after several fights. This book is of interest if you like Majipoor, but I hope future books make more of the game system. **END GAMEBOOK WARNING!**

MATADORA by Steve Perry; Sphere; 211 pages; £3.60 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The story of Divisha, a trained killer, who loses her way, becomes disillusioned and is recruited as a Matadora to protect the lives of rich "rebels" who oppose the ruthless tyrannical empire. A well balanced tale cataloguing the exploits of Divisha, her changing life and of 'finding' herself. This is the second book of *The Matadora Trilogy* but can be read independently as a self contained story, which in one respect is why it works so well - no dependence on having read volume one or a continued storyline. Divisha's further training and interaction with the other characters provide a good backdrop for the action within the story. The plus of mystical presence in the 'lost' leader (Khadaji) from volume one adds to the reality of the 'mission' undertaken by the Matadoras. Reasonably believable, worth a read.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE by Brian Stableford; NEL; 201 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Mixed plotlines within this story, interwoven by Stableford with the expertise one comes to expect. Rosseau, a 'scavenger' exploring the artificial world of Asgard, is the central figure reacting to events and finding himself accused of murder (a set up to aid the local gangster find the secrets within the levels of Asgard). The Tetrax, finders of the world and overseers to the work, are a highly ethical race and possess an enlightened view of criminals; however Rosseau is found guilty, and to add to his problems an android from the Earth war with Salamandra escapes into the lower levels. With an Earth force led by an over zealous star captain in hot pursuit they 'buy' Rosseau as a guide. Complex interaction within the plot between the characters results in a well told tale. If Rosseau manages to solve the problems of reaching the lower levels, and what is to be found?, as well as the subplots of the android/Earth forces, the outcome is worth reading for yourself. Recommended for the storytelling.

PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN by Mary Stanton; NEL; 306 pages; £6.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The sequel to *The Heavenly Horse from Outermost West* tells of Piper, son of Duchess and Dancer, and his quest to free his sire and dam from the evil schemes of El Arat, and to rescue their souls from eternal damnation. A fair enough plotline, but when you see that the protagonists (in the main) are horses the whole idea gets a bit silly. I have to admit the story is well written and would probably appeal more to those who love horses - especially young girls - but not one for the SF fan.