

# BRUM GROUP

# NEWS

May  
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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 Chairman – Bernie Evans

# THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

Friday 18 May at 7.45pm Admission: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.00

This month's speaker is

## MICHAEL GUEST

with a talk entitled: **DOWSING: MY STRUGGLE WITH REASON!**

I have known Michael Guest (BA, FRAS) since the early 1950s, when we were both members of the Midland Branch of the British Interplanetary Society. We were both interested in, but sceptical of, phenomena like UFOs, and suspicious of the 'paranormal'. In 1977 we found that we had both watched a *Tomorrow's World* on dowsing, and could make a wire coat-hanger deflect when we walked over a buried water pipe or such.

Since then, Michael (an ex-Brum Group member) has taken it much further. He has explored archæological dowsing, the connection with earth mysteries and ley-lines, and latterly the effects on our health of the energies which seem to be involved with dowsing. He is a Council Member of the British Society of Dowsters, runs West Midland Dowsters, and publishes a bi-monthly magazine, *Rod & Pendulum*. His writings on dowsing have also appeared in USA, Canada and Japan, and he has appeared on radio and TV. If you are inclined to scoff, come along and be convinced!

*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 0AB (Telephone 021 777 1802, fax 021 777 2792)*



## Ramsey Campbell

*If you read your Newsletter last month, you will know that I am asking members to write the review of the last meeting. In fact, I was unavoidably absent last month anyway, so this review is written by Helena Bowles; my thanks to her.*

Last month's meeting opened in an unorthodox fashion with our guest in what was either a suicide bid occasioned by having to face the wild hordes of the BSFG, or else an attempt to outdo the fables of Iain Banks' hotel-scaling exploits. Having been talked down from the window ledge Ramsey proceeded to provide the low-down on "How I Got To Be In The Business I'm In", a dark tale starting with the terrors that something as innocent as Rupert Bear can inspire in a five-year-old, and taking in the horror of George McDonald fairy tales.

This story of depravity continued with evocations of Southport and unnatural cravings for pulp magazines – especially *Weird Tales* – with a sordid little diversion into the classifieds of said publication. The lowest point of this tale came with Ramsey's shamed confession that to obtain his first H.P. Lovecraft book he defrauded his poor Granny of two nightlights!

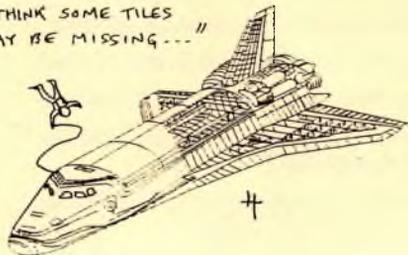
After this dark childhood, the only path for him was to become a writer, and his first book was apparently an imitation of Lovecraft. He then spent the next five years trying to bring some of the things he admired about 'literary' writing to the horror genre. The next book was described by August Derleth, his editor, rather guardedly as "an example of creative growth". Not deterred, Ramsay told us, he wrote only one novel "to please the market" – his second, the first having received "mixed reviews".

*[Everyone I have spoken to seems to have found this a very enjoyable meeting; none the less, it was rather poorly attended, and we made a loss financially. So please – don't only come to those meetings which are devoted to 'your kind of SF'; we only meet once a month, so come along and open your mind to what other fans enjoy, or just for the social side of the evening. . .]*

**Did you receive your copy of the Brum Group News last month? (It's the one with a sort of salmon-coloured cover). Apparently some members didn't, and many more received theirs late. Because of Eastcon, it was sent out from Liverpool on the Saturday, but that should be no excuse for very late or non-arrival.**

**If yours didn't arrive, please let a Committee member know, as we intend to complain to the Post Office if there are a lot. (Of course, if you were at Eastcon you will have been handed yours there.)**

" I THINK SOME TILES  
MAY BE MISSING... "



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

# You Write...

The page that contains contributions sent in by members. The more observant among you may have noticed that these usually come from 'regulars' - often Committee or ex-Committee members. However, this month we welcome two newcomers. Next month - YOU?

## ConRep: Eastcon '90 by David Sutton

One might have been forgiven for thinking that the S.S. Titanic was beginning to list awfully after a few Wobbly Bobs from the real ale bar. At some point they ran out, but no matter: conventions are plagued with mishaps. Eastcon '90 was no exception. Losing a major guest - Nigel Kneale - is just one such. *But*, it's the overall *frisson* that counts. Eastcon '90 'frissed', OK! And let's face it, with the twin talents of Iain Banks and Ken Campbell butressing the convention with their larger-than-life personas, there was surely nothing to worry about.

Multi-track programming at SF cons gives all fans something. It's impossible to review it all. The *Dark Voices* panel I was on began on time. So did other things I saw. The con appeared to be a well-oiled machine: each player rolled into place on silent ball-bearings, and off again; the committee's wires and hydraulics completely invisible! Good for them. At eleven on Sunday morning Dr Jack Cohen determined to demolish the determinism of genes. I think that's what he discussed so eloquently. It fitted the extra emphasis on science in SF which the con committee were committed to. This was reflected in the names of the programme streams. Charm, Colour, Strangeness; quarking hell! Maybe future cons will demonstrate Bell's Theorem: the resonance of telepathy accorded respectability for the first time ever, and at an SF event!

Pan Books held the climax of their major SF/Fantasy/Horror Pangelactic launch tour With an open party, to celebrate new books by Larry Niven/Steve Barnes, Chris Claremont, Stephen Jones/Clarence Paget and artist Chris Moore. Various other assorted worthies attended and Pan provided all-comers with wine.

The Art Show was smaller than I expected, but the variety was good. I liked the work by Artist Guest SMS, and David Hardy's space landscapes. The dealers' room was clotted With dealers and not too much space for pedestrian purchasers. All in all, the forced repatriation of the convention from Birmingham to the Titanic was skillfully mastered. The fact that we didn't hit one iceberg says it all for the industrious committee. SF Conventions are like a drug. I can handle it, I can stop any time: No, that's impossible. The drug is addictive, but not at all dangerous. Don't know about the Wobbly Bob though! *[For those who don't know, the interior of the Adelphi in Liverpool is based on the Titanic. The highlight of Jack Cohen's always excellent talk, for me, was when he picked on me to explain why I wasn't an albino. I pointed out that the reason I'm an artist and not an albino is because I have pigment on my jeans. To get*

*applause in a JC lecture is no mean achievement, I feel!*  
-DAH]

## Mental Telepath by Lynn M. Cochrane

*And now, for something completely different, a song! There isn't space here for the music (and most of us probably couldn't read it anyway), but no doubt Lynn will be glad to sing it to you, if you have a guitar handy. Lynn explains the background:*

Some time towards the end of 1968, when I was about 16, I picked up a book that my father had brought home from the library and looked inside to see what goodies he'd collected that week. The first line of the text read "A telepath is never alone". That must count as the only time I've ever picked up a book, read five words, and put it back down; because I then went upstairs, where it was quiet, and wrote this song. Actually it was three years or more before the music was really sorted out. Remembering that we're all rather older (and hopefully better) by now, take a trip back in time with me.

PS. Can anybody tell me the title of that story - ?

Use another thought, another mind, another way.  
Use a different feel, a different hurt, a different day.  
Use the night of fear, the night of greed, the night of dread.

Mental telepath, Mental telepath.

See another place, another world, another sun.  
See a different home, a different child, a different Mum.

See the work they do, the way they play, the path they tread.

See the things they like, the things they hate, the things they fled.

Mental telepath, Mental telepath.

Hear the sounds of youth, the sounds of old, the sounds of then.

Hear the busy feet, the busy road, the busy men.

Hear the sounds of love, the sounds of peace, the sounds of fear.

Hear the cry that's free, the cry that's far, the cry that's near.

Mental telepath, Mental telepath.

Talk of all the things that others saw that you have seen.

Talk of all the places few have gone that you have been.

Talk of all the things that others felt that you could feel.

Talk of all the things, the details small, that made them real.

Mental telepath, Mental telepath.

## The State of the Art – Science Fiction in 1989 by Chris Morgan

Science fiction is not what it was. If your name is Rog Peyton or Peter Weston, I know that you'll agree with me (so perhaps I should stop now). But, for the rest of you, I'd better explain my case and pontificate on whether recent changes in our chosen branch of literature are for better or worse.

Take the Nebula Award nominated novels as an example. That's what I've done. The Nebula Awards are given each year for the best science fiction in four length categories, voted on by members of the Science Fiction Writers of America. Previous novel winners have included *Dune*, *Rendezvous with Rama* and *The Forever War*. It all sounds pretty science fictional, doesn't it?

In recent years, though, there's been some movement towards fantasy in the nominees and award-winners. I've just finished reading the six final nominees for the novel category (which is being awarded as I write this; I don't know who won) and, in their diversity, they mirror what's happening in the science fiction, fantasy and horror fields today.

The only one of the six that's recognisably old-fashioned SF throughout, with aliens, spaceships, talking computers and so on is *Ivory* by Mike Resnick. It's set mostly in the far future (though its plot hops about in time) concerning a computer-aided search for the tusks of a giant African elephant which died in 1898. The tusks must be found – it's a matter of life or death. The story moves along at a cracking pace, contains considerable originality in places, and if some of the writing is distinctly terrible, well, that's all part of SF as it used to be, isn't it?

*Good News from Outer Space* by John Kessel is also set in the future, though only as far ahead as 1999. In its paranoia over conspiracies and its treatment of characters it is reminiscent of Philip K. Dick's work, yet it is more of a satire with occasional SF elements than an SF novel. It's slightly comic and rather over-long, dealing with a cult of the millennium headed by a charismatic preacher who may or may not be receiving messages from aliens. Either aliens are impersonating various characters, or else most of the characters are off their heads. For its originality and clever writing (and for being a lot of fun) this is worth reading.

On the face of it, Orson Scott Card's *Prentice Alvin* has several minus factors. It's the middle volume of a five-book series set in an alternate USA in about 1800 in which almost everybody has a talent (a kind of magical power). In other words, it's either fantasy or at the very soft end of

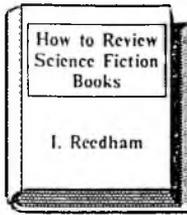
SF. Also, Card has won a couple of Nebulas for best novel already (more than his fair share, you might think). In fact, it's the outstanding novel among this sextet, full of wonderful characters, cleverly written and often surprising in its deceptively simple story of an apprentice blacksmith and the fight against various kinds of bigotry. The background is beautifully worked out. A sub-plot concerns the theories of our hero (Alvin) about the structure of matter – providing a hard-science edge. It is very definitely a novel that works on its own, though closely integrated with its predecessors (*Seventh Son* and *Red Prophet*).

*The Boat of a Million Years* by Poul Anderson is a strange, rambling combination of fantasy (300 pages) and SF (150 pages). It concerns a small number of individuals who are (perhaps for genetic reasons) extremely long-lived. They can be killed but, with luck, may live for thousands of years without ageing. Anderson's ideas are good but his treatment is bitty, repetitive and totally unsatisfying. The first 300 pages contain too many non-stories set throughout world history – well researched but boring.

Jane Yolen's *Sister Light, Sister Dark* is, by any criteria, fantasy. In most respects it's a hackneyed series of heroic adventures and camping holidays featuring juvenile characters, which doesn't finish but is to be continued in later volumes. For the most part it is embarrassingly bad, boringly predictable and not at all credible. But it has one excellent new idea buried in it. Yolen is a better writer than this book suggests, and she should have had the sense to use her good idea in one well-crafted novel rather than to prop up a series.

The horror novel in this bunch is *The Healer's War* by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough. It's another curiosity, being mostly a well-written story of one US female nurse's experiences in the Vietnam War (partly autobiographical). The writing is crisp and the situation all too horrifyingly believable. Grafted onto this is a supernatural element (not very strong) about a magical stone of healing. While there's much that is good about the book, no-one could possibly call it SF. It isn't even what I would call fantasy; it's difficult to see why this was nominated for a Nebula.

So it's a case of fantasy or borderline novels ousting real SF from the nominees. Is this what SF readers want? Or are we all including fantasy in our definition of SF? Has fantasy really taken over? Does anybody out there care? For me, the best and most award-worthy of these six is Card's *Prentice Alvin*, with Kessel's *Good News from Outer Space* second, though I have a nasty suspicion that Poul Anderson may get the Nebula, more for long service than for writing ability.



# 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.

As there is no JOPHAN REPORT this month, because most of the news that would be included in that can be found in the CRITICAL WAVE UPDATES enclosed with your newsletter, we've included an extra page of book reviews. Many thanks to those who've sent unsolicited reviews, and some thanks to those who've clearly made an effort to catch up on their reviewing backlog. Keep on catching up, and to those who STILL have some catching up to do, please do it real soon now, or I'll send Bernie round to sort you out!

EMPYRION by Stephen Lawhead; Lion; 900 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Orlan Treet, an historian, is offered eight million dollars to write up the history of a new colony ten light-years from Earth. Treet and three companions travel to Emyrion, and what they find is not a new colony but one that is three thousand years old and very divided. Treet and his companions are captured by the half of the civilisation that live in Dome, a highly structured and repressed society. The Dome dwellers have a almost pathological fear of the other civilisation, the Fierra, who split from Dome after a brief schism. Treet and friends escape from Dome and travel to Fierra to enlist their help in freeing the people of Dome from what is turning into a dictatorship. These stories were a bit slow to start but worth persevering with, don't be put off by the blurb saying 'an epic SF fantasy', it is most definitely SF. Highly recommended.

DOWN RIVER by Stephen Gallagher; NEL; 362 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Stephen Gallagher is one of the better British horror writers, combining a sense of realism with an unsettling atmosphere of menace. In this novel the horror comes mainly from a corrupt policeman, Johnny Mays, who breaks the law to suit himself. He gets his own back against anyone who crosses him - even after he seems to have died in a bizarre accident. This is a clever, well-written book, full of gripping twists and decaying landscapes.

INVADERS FROM THE CENTRE by Brian Stableford; NEL; 256 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Sequel to *Journey to the Centre* - and middle book of a trilogy? In this Rousseau with his new found wealth goes on the grand tour, culminating in a visit to Earth. However he's arrested on arrival and returns to Asgard once more a Star Force draftee. This time it transpires the Tetrax have been "displaced" by invasion from within Asgard, and Rousseau et al have the task of finding a way to defeat these invaders. The Tetrax have their own plots and the whole set-up degenerates into bedlam. Rousseau "escapes" and meets up with "superior" beings on lower levels of Asgard, who force a settlement in the war, only to become entangled in deeper mysteries from within Asgard's Centre - and leaving the way open for volume three. While having an amusing first person narrative, the whole somehow fails to grab the reader like *Journey* did. Conversely, some interesting sub-plots are played out to hold the story together and it does leave one wondering what will happen next.

VENUS OF DREAMS by Pamela Sargent; Bantam; 536 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Eastern-dominated Earth and independent space habitats co-exist in an uneasy peace. The only co-operation between them is the vast project of the terraforming of Venus, which has become a symbol of the future for both human communities. Iris Angharads escapes the idyllic, but limited, life on the Nebraska Plains to work on the Venus project. But not everyone wants the project to succeed. . . . . Whilst an interesting idea, I'm afraid the book itself did not grab me.

HOTHOUSE by Brian Aldiss; Gollancz; 206 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A "VGSF Classic" release of Aldiss' 1962 Hugo winner. The story is set in the far future, when Earth has ceased to rotate and life thereon is vegetable-based. A great forest covers the planet, and Man's remnants live amongst its branches. Revolving around one "tribe" of humans and their fight for survival, the story explains the life abundant in the forest eco-system, and the food chain inherent therein. Many adventures and dangers are met and overcome in this absorbing and original novel. Aldiss at his best, the story stands well the test of time, full of typical humour and invention. If you haven't already read this - buy now - highly recommended.

MAJESTIC by Whitley Strieber; MacDonald; 317 pages; £12.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

On 8th July 1947 the American Air Force announced the discovery of a crashed flying saucer, only for a denial to be issued the following day. On the basis that the first announcement was true Strieber, who claims to have had an alien encounter himself, has built a fictional account of what may have happened. His story starts well enough with a journalist meeting the leader of the team which was sent in to investigate the incident, but as it starts to get involved with sixty-year old disappearances and repeated flashback narratives, the whole structure of the novel becomes too complicated for its own good. Fanciful mysticism replaces any attempt to explain the aliens' motives and objectives, if there are any aliens, and I found the whole exercise unsatisfying and rather pointless.

SWORD AND SORCERESS A Edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley; Headline; 285 pp; £3.50 p/back. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This year's *Sword and Sorceress* anthology has darker themes than its predecessors, and I think it is much the better for it. Stories such as "Death and the Ugly Woman" by Bruce D Arthurs and "The Woodland of Zarad-Thra" by Robin W Bailey deal with important themes of life and death, in more than the superficial manner common to sword-and-sorcery. Dryads feature in "The Tree-Wife of Arketh" by Syn Ferguson, and "The Weeping Oak" by Charles de Lint (if you have not read "Moonheart", "Yarrow" and "Shava" by him, do so immediately!). The other stories in the book offer a great deal of variety, ranging from straight sword-and-sorcery to almost historical, and make this book well worth reading.

THE GREAT WHEEL by Joyce Ballou Gregorian; Orbit; 306 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Back on Earth Sibyl Barron has no memories of her life in Tredana as its Queen and mother to its crown Princess. After an accident falling from a horse Sibyl finds herself back in Tredana and wanders for days before finding the army of Fibir, who is conquering Tredana. She becomes his sword-bearer and unknowingly makes war on her husband and daughter, Ajjibawr, her lover, infiltrates the Fibir's army, eventually becoming Sibyl's bodyguard and her lover once again even though she does not remember him. Sibyl's memory does return, but not before she has confronted her mother Simiriara, now Queen of the Underworld. This trilogy has been told in a way similar to an intricate board game, but with the characters moving in such a way as to create their own destinies, not to any rigid set pattern. A complex and entertaining trilogy, highly recommended.

TERRAPLANE by Jack Wonack; Unwin; 227 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Some time in the not far distant future Russia and America are not exactly at war, but not exactly at peace either. Two American agents are in Moscow trying to abduct a Russian scientist, but he has gone missing so they lift his assistant instead. They evade capture only by using his discovery to "transfer" and accidentally wind up in 1939 on a different timestream. Only one makes it back, with neither the gadget nor the scientist. The story crackles along most of the time, with lots of weapons, gadgets and so forth. Wonack also introduces a kind of "futurespeak" which makes it a difficult read at first, as well as giving the initial impression of a cyberpunk story, which it is not, being at once both more and less. All-in-all, however, a rather average book which I failed to find inspiring.

BODY MORTGAGE by Richard Engling; Headline; 254 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This is a neat SF detective story in the "Mike Hammer/Philip Marlowe/Bladerunner" mould, set in Chicago at the turn of the millenium. The title refers to Human Resource Loans - HRLs, quasi-legal offshoots of deregulation and voluntary euthanasia legislation. An HRL is taken out with your organs as collateral, default and your body is "collected" and "redeemed". Gregory Blake takes on a client whose HRL foreclosure is imminent, despite having enough troubles of his own; his office has been trashed and the gangs want him dead for informing. From there he untangles a plot ranging from industrial sabotage to corruption, taking in mad science and murder along the way, revealing that HRLs are worse than anyone thought. This is an engaging and well constructed thriller, very enjoyable.

THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED by Anne Rice; MacDonald; 448 pages; £11.95 Hardback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

The third volume of *The Vampire Chronicles*, which started with *Interview With the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*, Akasha, the very first vampire, has woken from her sleep of thousands of years. Her plans start with the destruction of all other vampires, and proceed to domination over all the living. Only Lestat, a young vampire (200 years!), has any influence over her, and even he is powerless to deflect her from her chosen course. Sensitives all over the world have a recurring dream which in some way is connected with Akasha, of twin red-headed women who suffered a dreadful fate. This is an epic saga, covering the whole world and thousands of years. The trouble is, it is difficult to get to grips with the characters, especially as most of them are not human. Nevertheless, this series is well worth reading.

THE FOLK ON THE FRINGE by Orson Scott Card; Century/Legend; 243 pages; £11.95 hardback. Reviewed by Peter Day.

A lot of people still seem to be writing post-holocaust books, and Orson Scott Card, with this account of an America returned to barbarism after a nuclear exchange, is one of them. Only the Mormon community has remained cohesive enough, and strong enough, to act as a force strong enough, and cohesive enough, to tackle the long and arduous task of rebuilding and extending civilisation once again. This despite the fact that the Great Salt Lake has been flooded and the temple submerged. The fringe folk of the title are those few people who don't fit in - individualists, loners, the ones who are slightly different, and we see all this from their point of view. This is a series of five inter-related stories with this background, presenting a picture of a people struggling against adversity, striving for survival against the odds. It is an optimistic book, a heartwarming book - above all, an intensely human book, a book of affirmation. While perhaps not hitting the heights of some of his other work, it is, in its own quiet way, well up to his usual standard.

ESCAPE FROM KATHMANDU by Kim Stanley Robinson; Unwin; 314 pages; £12.95 hardback. Reviewed by Mick Evans.

Kim Stanley Robinson demonstrates his versatility with this book built around the myths and legends of Kathmandu. Four separate stories featuring two Americans, Freds Fredericks and George Fergusson, take in the Yeti, the Everest expedition of Mallory and Irving, the magical city of Shangri-La and finally an underground kingdom in Nepal. A writer who has given us some wonderful SF work in recent years (*The Wild Shore*, *Icehenge* and *The Gold Coast*) shows he can write humorous adventure as well. I once criticised him in a review of *Planet on the Table* for perhaps lacking a little humour in his work, and while this isn't uproariously funny it certainly works well enough, and is a pleasant surprise. It's not all fun though and there's a particularly moving piece on the search for Mallory and Irving's bodies on Everest. Overall an enjoyable departure and it will be intriguing to find out what he comes up with next. Recommended.

THE BAD PLACE by Dean R. Koontz; Headline; 372 pages; £12.95 hardback. Reviewed by Michael Jones.

This is the first book by this author that I have read and I quite expected not to like it. Instead I was pleasantly surprised. He uses some familiar SF ideas and, although these are not in themselves original, he puts them together in new ways, so that each time I thought I knew what was happening I found that I was wrong and I had to keep reading to find out what was coming next. The surprise and the suspense continue to build up to the very end as the story weaves its way through too many complications to summarise here. Recommended.

THE RENEGADES OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey; Bantam; 384 pages; £12.95 hardback. Reviewed by Lynn M Edwards.

Starting well before the events chronicled in *Dragonflight*, and ending soon after those in *White Dragon*, *The Renegades of Pern* often covers familiar ground from the point of view of unfamiliar characters. The first part of the book is concerned with Thella, elder sister to Lord Larad of Telgar Hold, who leaves rather than enter an arranged marriage and joins the ranks of the holdless. She is soon leader of a band of outcasts, and causing trouble, especially with Thread falling. This section has a very bitty, irritating start but the rest of the book is better, skilfully woven in with what we already know from all the other books set in the same time. An interesting read, which I thoroughly enjoyed, but probably one for the Dragonfans.

OF MAN AND MANTA by Piers Anthony; Corgi; 620 pages; £4.99 paperback. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is Anthony's first three novels: *Omnivore*, *Orn* and *Ox*, reissued in one volume. It tells of an unusual human triangle: Veg - the brawn, Aquilan - the woman and Calvin - the cripple she loves. An agent, Subble, is despatched to investigate an incident that took place on the planet Nacre which caused the once close trio to return to Earth and split up. When they returned to Earth they brought with them, illegally, seven Mantas, a Nacrean life form. Subble is killed by a Manta, which is itself killed. In order to stop Earth being infested by the Mantas, which reproduce by spore dispersal in a similar way to fungi on Earth, an island is atom-bombed, and the Earth trio and remaining Mantas are exiled from the planet. Not a very inspiring trilogy, obviously reissued to cash in on Anthony's ongoing popularity, the narrative is stilted and overlong. On the whole the stories are a bit of a slog to get through - NOT RECOMMENDED.

THE LABYRINTH OF DREAMS by Jack L Chalker; NEL; 399 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

An old-fashioned detective story coupled with travel between parallel universes makes this an excellent yarn, told in the first person by Sam Horowitz, in a style reminiscent of the voice-overs Bogart used to do. Horowitz, a Jew, and his black wife Brandy run a detective agency that is just about to collapse under its weight of debt. A new client offers them a case, to trace Martin Whittock, who has absconded with \$2,000,000 of the Mafia's laundered drug money. Sam and Brandy tangle with a company called "G.O.D. Inc", and set off on a chain of events that has them hopping between worlds. Wonderful stuff this, with a gripping plot-line and larger-than-life characters. An excellent start to a series - roll G.O.D. Inc # 2! Highly recommended.

BEAMRIDERS by Martin Caidin; Pan; 411 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

They flew by light, the pioneers of laser travel were making S.D.I. look as primitive as the catapult, or so Martin Caidin would have you believe. This latest foray into the world of the Techno-thriller, by the perpetrator of the *Six Million Dollar Man*, is an abysmal flop, boring the reader to sleep with repeated technical detail. Ninety five per cent of the book deals with the breakthrough, development and building of a laser technology, enabling matter to be transported anywhere, and the rest is a dismal sub-plot about a top Venezuelan TV reporter (a sexy female of course), who is trying to find the truth behind a rash of UFO sightings up-country. The last few pages are packed with the rescue of a scientist from the bowels of the Kremlin, saving the project from a meddling Congressman by blackmail, and finding an alien starship on the moon!! Not bad for the *Six Million Dollar Man*, but as for Martin Caidin - don't bother.

FLINX IN FLUX by Alan Dean Foster; NEL; 315 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

Alan Dean Foster's character Philip Lynx, alias Flinx, rides again, starting his latest adventure on Alaspin. Trying to release the young of his Minidrage, Pip, back into the wild, he discovers Clarity, a blonde, beautiful and exhausted. As he returns to civilisation with Clarity he finds himself pursued by a group of fanatical environmentalists, who will do anything to stop Clarity from continuing her work as a genetic engineer. Fleeing to Longtunnel to deliver Clarity back to her base, they continue to be hunted by the fanatics, and all Flinx really wants to do is be on his way to his ship, *The Teacher*. Flinx has been a central character in a number of Foster's novels set in the Humanax Commonwealth. In this one he takes the lead role, with more of his characteristics coming through, enlarging and fleshing out his personality. Some of the "loose ends" previously surrounding Flinx are also tied up here.

ORBITAL DECAY by Allen Steele; Legend; 414 pages; £14.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is a story of the near future, of Man's "investment" in space, where corporations vie for trade markets. Here we have the lives of the people building space stations; their "frontier" outlook and morality. We are told how these people interact and manage to live together in space. Moreover, the novel incorporates "hard" science as the everyday tool it must become to enable survival. The basic plot concerns the construction of a space station by beamjacks (space steelworkers), three of whom are "Popeye" Hooker - a depressive, Virgn Bruce - a displaced biker, and Captain Wallace - a stickler for rules who finds the pressure unbearable. The everyday goings on of these and the other beamjacks, the way they "get things done", forms the backdrop to the story. Plans by the Security Agency to install a telephone eavesdropping device are discovered by a corps of beamjacks, who decide to "do something for freedom". I thoroughly enjoyed this book, was captivated by the storyline, interactive sub-plots and real characterisation found throughout. Buy it, it's tremendous!

MY FATHER IMMORTAL by Michael D Weaver; NEL; 228 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Peter Day.

The last spaceship is leaving a devastated Earth, a planet inhabited by immortal, invulnerable mutants and inimical to normal human life. Aboard the spaceship, just before it transfers into subspace, three sisters conspire to put their children into individual life-capsules - programmed to care for and educate them on their long journey - and send them back to Earth. The bulk of the book is concerned with the events prior to the spaceship's take-off, and the conflict between Earth's present inhabitants and the last remnants of its 21st century population, awakened after thousands of years of cryogenic hibernation, and we learn the reason for these women's strange decision. Once again Michael D Weaver has produced an excellent book - full of colour and inventiveness and action and immensely readable, yet with plenty of solid matter for the serious reader to get his teeth into. This is an author worth watching out for.

BARE BONES: Conversations on Terror with Stephen King Ed Tim Underwood & Chuck Miller; NEL; 248 pp; £3.50 p/b. Rev Chris Morgan.

There's a great diversity of quality and interest in this collection of interviews with Stephen King. At best there are some startling revelations (though you may well have read them before because none of the interviews are new). At worst there's a great deal of duplication and rubbish. I recommend a 1983 interview from *Playboy*. The rest is eminently ignorable.

STORMWARDEN by Janny Wurtz; Grafton; 447 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Lynn M Edwards.

The first book of the *Cycle of Fire* trilogy, *Stormwarden* is a good beginning to an obviously longer story. The frostwargs were bound years before by Anskiere, wizard of wind and wave, and Ivain, master of fire and earth. In the binding Ivain let Anskiere down, and in reply Anskiere laid a geas on Ivain. *Stormwarden* is the working out of that geas, now operating on Jaric, Ivain's son. When Anskiere is again betrayed, Jaric is aided by Taen, a girl healed by Anskiere and who is the only person to trust the wizard when everyone else believes him to be wrong. An interesting yarn for those who enjoy the longer stories.