

BRUM GROUP NEWS

June
1990

Issue
No. 225

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 15 June at 7.45pm Admission: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.00

This month's speaker is

DAVID BRIN

David Brin is a popular visitor at the Brum Group, and is over from the States again. His latest novel is *Earth* (hardcover from Macdonald, 601 pages, £13.95). It is 50 years in the future and a black hole has accidentally fallen into Earth's core. Are we all doomed. . ? The action moves from an underground laboratory in New Zealand to a space station in low Earth orbit, among other locations.

David was born in California in 1950, has a doctorate in astrophysics, is a graduate level physics professor, and has been a NASA consultant. So I think you can take it that his science is right! But that apart, he is a very entertaining speaker, so this meeting is not to be missed.

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)



Michael Guest

Ex-member (and now member again) Michael explained how he became interested in dowsing and how, despite his initial scepticism, he became 'hooked' on it. Using a variety of instruments, he showed how he progressed from finding underground pipes and water (using wire coathangers bent into a right angle and held in an empty Biro; first pointing straight ahead like a pair of sixguns, they move inward as one walks over something that affects them) to being able to dowse from a map, and to gauge the health of a person using a pendulum or another strange device. The dowser can ask questions, like "how deep is the water?" or "What metal is buried here?" and get responses. A number of (mainly intelligent) questions were asked by members, too, and later they were able to borrow instruments and find out whether they have 'the power'. But was *is* it that a dowser detects? Michael confesses that he doesn't know — all he knows is that it *works*, despite the fact that at a conscious or academic level he knows that it shouldn't! It could be changes in electrical, magnetic or gravitational fields; certainly interesting effects are detected around standing stones. But mainly, the effects are caused within the person him or herself. Intriguing stuff, which obviously gave members food for thought.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HEAR AT MEETINGS?

The audience at this meeting was generally receptive and interested in the subject, but two members, who shall be anonymous but whom I shall call Mr. P. Take and Mr. W. Agony, made it very plain that they had no time for such rubbish, and did so, I felt, to the point of rudeness to our speaker, who came to tell us about his own experiences and abilities quite voluntarily and without asking any fee or expenses. Mr. W wanted Michael to engage in a party game in order to 'prove' himself, and loudly pronounced the proceedings "a load of crap" when he declined, while Mr. P declared it to be "all bullshit". In my capacity as temporary chairman I did not wish to disrupt the proceedings further, and left it to Michael to deal with, which he did in his own mild-mannered way.

Mr P. was later to be heard asking everyone what the talk had to do with science fiction. I tried to point out to him that dowsing is an aspect of the paranormal (and one which lends itself to proof more easily than most, with many well-documented positive cases), and that this is a staple part of SF; had he never read a science fiction story based around ESP, mind-reading, or other psi powers? His well-reasoned reply was "Bollocks!"

All I can say is that if authors had the same sort of closed mind to the idea of senses or powers which are beyond the norm, there would be no science fiction or fantasy! SF fans, of all people, should be open to all such ideas, though obviously they will make up their own minds as to their plausibility.

Incidentally, Mr. P., despite many promises of contributions to this Newsletter, has yet to take his typewriting finger out and put it where his mouth is. . . (and if this doesn't get him writing, nothing will!) We do however have him to thank for several authors who will appear at future meetings. But what do other members think? Do YOU object to the occasional 'off-beat' subject for our meetings? The only way we can give you what you want is by your telling us.

Contents of this issue © 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.

The Drabbles Page

Our Drabbles page seems to have sparked ~~out~~ more contributions than most previous attempts to pry you out of your lethargy! This month we have a most unusual one from Vernon Brown, which should get you counting if nothing else, and one from Lynn Cochrane; but Lynn has also sent a Drabble-Poem, which will appear in a later issue. Incidentally, apologies to Lynn for missing out the fourth line of the first verse of her song last month. It reads: "Use the mind of young, the mind of old, the mind of dead." . Now what can you come up with?

Alternatives by Vernon Brown

One of the difficulties encountered when writing Time-travel fiction is the 'Grandfather Paradox' or a variant thereof, which occurs when a time-traveller kills his grandfather before his father is sired, thus preventing his own birth. Not having been born he cannot travel back in time to kill his grandfather, who therefore sires his father, who sires him, whereupon he travels back in time to . . . and so on.

There are a number of solutions to this problem, the 'correct' one depending on how the author intends to direct the storyline — much as a Multiple Choice Question in an examination is given with several answers, only one of which is right; the difference being that an incorrect solution in one Grandfather Paradox story may be correct in another.

Although many stories of this type have been written, the solutions usually fall into one of the following categories:

- A. The traveller is prevented from killing his grandfather by one means or another, including the disappearance of the Universe.
- B. The traveller kills his grandfather and creates a new 'future' that replaces the 'original' one. It may or may not include him!
- C. The traveller kills his grandfather and creates another 'future' that is separate from but 'co-exists with' the 'original' one. It may or may not include him!

So where do we place the following offering, and does it Drabble?

The Meddling Time Traveller by Tim Groome



"Oooh! Great-Grandmother!"

M.C.Q.

Please read each column separately before answering

The Minister carefully re-positioned his spectacles _____ monocle and re-read the report on 'Project Darkroom'. He smiled to himself. "Good publicity," he thought. "Demonstrate that time-travel works *and* answer the old question of why the entire War Cabinet ran from the shelter's rear exit away from _____ front door straight into the bomb-blast that destroyed the building. A lucky break that probably altered the whole course of the War _____ in Europe: _____ of German Rights: such a loss of all effective leadership _____ would have _____ had completely demoralized British resistance." He glanced at the clock. "The camera must have returned," he mused as he replaced his _____ spectacles. "The results should be interesting."

On Consumption of a Story by Lynn M. Cochrane

Sarah looked at the screen in disbelief. The computer was whirring away as it usually did when editing her work, buzzing to itself and flashing its light from bright to dim and back. She had just finished writing the story, typing it in with fingers that cramped and hit wrong keys far too often. Her back ached from sitting on a bad chair for so long and her left leg had 'gone to sleep'. She eased away from the screen, trying to relieve the pain, rubbing her eyes.

"That was a tasty story," read the computer's screen.

BURP!

"Pardon me!"

You Write...

The page that contains contributions sent in by members. This month we have a welcome contribution from one of our 'oldest' members: ex-Chairman, Newsletter Editor and I'm not sure what else. Peter Weston shows that sometimes it is not the 'official' programme item that leads to ideas and discussion, but what goes on in the Bar...

Mysteries of the Universe by Peter Weston

At the last meeting a few of us congregated in the bar rather earlier than usual, having fled from the programme item on dowsing*

Sure enough, we started talking about science fiction, and I mentioned Chris Morgan's interesting article in the May *Brum Group News*, which commented that the majority of this year's Award-nominated novels seemed to be oriented towards fantasy, rather than science fiction.

"What's the difference?" a new member asked innocently, causing Rog Peyton and myself to launch into explanations at considerable length, not always totally agreeing with each other [how unusual! - Ed.]

But afterwards I started thinking, and I wonder whether we *do* really all appreciate the fundamental difference between the two, similar genres.

The dividing line can be elusive, and hard to pin down. Some people try to argue that science fiction deals with things that are scientifically possible, while fantasy trades in impossibilities. However, that doesn't hold water. For what is 'possible'? How can pure SF stories routinely make use of concepts like antigravity and FTL-travel, when science tells us these things are forever unachievable?

And what is 'impossible'? For instance, most fantasy relies upon 'magic', yet many of our day-to-day activities would have seemed magical, just one generation ago. [I don't agree. . . A few hundred years, perhaps? - Ed.] As Arthur C. Clarke says in his famous Third Law, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic". (A good example is Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth*, which can be read either as pure fantasy, or as an SF tale of our decadent descendants in a far future who no longer understand their own gadgetry. A more recent example is Iain Banks' *Player of Games*, undoubtedly science fiction, but in which the technology is so far beyond our own as to seem almost magical.)

"No," I concluded wisely, "It's nothing to do with the subject matter at all. The difference between SF and fantasy depends totally upon the *treatment* of the story, upon the author's view of the world."

And, I might add, upon the attitude of the *reader*.

When I was a bit younger, we used to believe that SF fans were supreme rationalists, a cut above the herd. We used to take a certain pride in *understanding* things (like A-bombs and Moon rockets) which bewildered the layman.

Back slightly further, in the days of John Campbell's *Astounding* during the 1940s, SF writers and their readers were speculating upon genuinely new and

exciting concepts, ahead of anyone in the world.

For instance, Robert Heinlein not only wrote about atomic power in 1940 (that was easy), but in 'Blowups Happen' he effectively predicted Chernobyl. In 1943 he not only suggested that nuclear weapons would end WWII, but also foresaw the subsequent Cold War and balance of terror between East and West, both possessing the bomb and afraid to use it (in the story 'Solution Unsatisfactory').

The very best science fiction then, as now, took an idea and played with it, extrapolated trends, tried to look beyond the here-and-now to give us sight of new perspectives. We understood that the Universe had rules, there were answers, rationality would triumph!

Back in those days, fantasy was a very poor relation. Campbell actually tried to launch a separate fantasy magazine (*Unknown*), which just didn't sell. A decade later, *Galaxy* tried a fantasy twin, *Beyond*, which lasted for about ten issues. There was simply no market for stories about dragons and sorcerers!

But now — how strange that we are now living in a science fictional world, surrounded by marvels [this article was faxed to me; now *that's* magic! - Ed.] and yet the pure SF story appears to be in decline. How strange that readers appear not to want to understand, but prefer to believe that the Universe is full of mysteries beyond our comprehension.

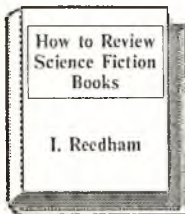
Like dowsing, and circles in cornfields. "Bloody rubbish!" snorted Rog, and went upstairs to do battle with the speaker. In the bar, the conversation continued. "What would be useful," our new member said, "Would be to have a list of the 'Top Ten' SF books."

And off we went again, swapping our recommendations and disagreeing noisily. Maybe next time I'll name my own 'Top Ten' and cause a few surprises!

*I have a fair amount of sympathy for dowsing, but unfortunately was put off by the speaker's monotone delivery, his total faith in the ability of dowsing to do just about anything (would you believe IQ tests?), and his total lack of any supporting hard evidence.

[OK, Mike — now that you're a member again you're welcome to answer that last point. . . Also, in fairness, Michael did explain that he was dragged into the IQ thing as a joke, but it happened to work! He also said that he wouldn't want to repeat it.]

James White has asked us to scotch a rumour that *he* has heard going around, that he is seriously ill. It appears that he has had eye trouble due to diabetes, and was advised to take six month's rest before having laser surgery. This he has now had, and everything is fine. We're all pleased to hear that, Jim!



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.

SIGNING SESSIONS

Our spies at ANDROMEDA tell us there are no less than THREE signing sessions in June. Don't say you weren't told, and don't miss 'em!!.

DAVID BRIN	Sat June 16th	11.00 a.m.
COLIN GREENLAND	Sat June 30th	Noon
GEOFF RYMAN	As yet not known,	ring 643 1999 for more info.

In fact, ring 643 1999 to order signed copies if you REALLY can't be there, although they'd much rather see you there in person, just ask Rog!

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One more item before we get to the reviews, we've been asked by Martin Tudor to apologise for the lack of JOPHAN REPORTS recently. This month it's because he's in the thick of CRITICAL WAVE, (have you subscribed yet?), normal service will be resumed next month.

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OK, on with the reviews, starting with the FIRST EVER NOVEL PUBLISHED BY A BRUM GROUP MEMBER. Congratulations ANNE GAY, and good luck in your writing career.

MINDSAIL by Anne Gay; Orbit; 303 pages; £13.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Peter Day.

A first novel by one of this group's own members - and a brilliantly successful first novel it is too. The story is set on an alien planet, Rosaria, where, generations ago, a colony ship has crashed. The survivor's descendants have fragmented into various mutually hostile communities - the Greens, an agrarian culture striving, against the odds, to maintain an Earthlike environment; the Reds, tribes of hunter-gatherer warriors who have successfully adapted to this world's alien ecology; and others. Tohalla, a woman of the Green, doomed to marry a drooling idiot, befriends two Red prisoners, Edrach and Ain Tsui of the Battle Axe, and escapes with them. Together they set out on a quest to discover the legendary Ship, with the intention of trying to re-establish contact with their long-lost star-kin. This is a work of superb imaginative power, full of strangeness, and with a lyrical dreamlike quality that sweeps the reader effortlessly onward. Yet at the same time it still manages to be very down-to-earth, with plenty of action, and gratifyingly rich in exotic detail. I do have one or two little niggles however, I could have done with being shown a little of the culture of the Iron Men, mentioned only in passing, and I must confess that I found the awkward speech patterns of the Red slightly irritating. But these are very minor quibbles. This is a book I recommend wholeheartedly, and I look forward eagerly to further works from the same source.

NOT FOR GLORY by Joel Rosenberg; Grafton; 253 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The refugee people of Israel have settled on a distant planet and make good their existence by selling their services as mercenary soldiers; hence they and their planet are Metzada (after the rock fortress in Palestine and final stand of zealots against Rome, choosing to kill themselves rather than surrender). A pretty flimsy scenario - why CHOOSE a "barren world" on which to settle? Surely the survey ships could find better real estate. I cannot imagine the Jewish peoples getting it wrong in space! Also with the commandments in mind (Exodus 20?) "Thou shalt not kill" would have some influence over the choice of profession? The whole book is full of the racism the Jews claim confronts them - yet author Rosenberg (?) chooses to stereotype several "tribes" (Irish/Dutch/Germans etc) acrimoniously. It doesn't make for good SF or even a good story. Seemingly bitter narrative.

(Phillip José Farmer's *THE DUNGEON*, Book 1)

THE BLACK TOWER by Richard A Lupoff; Bantam; 353 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Wendell Wagner Jr.

It's hard to know who to blame for this book. Apparently editor Byron Preiss suggested the idea for this series, that of having several authors do one book each in the story of *The Dungeon*, which is inspired somehow by Phillip José Farmer's works, although no actual characters from his books appear. Farmer contributes only a foreword to the book. The opening seems to be, if anything, in the tradition of H Rider Haggard, with Major Clive Folliot going to Africa in search of his lost brother. Soon he finds himself lost in *The Dungeon*, a mysterious cross-time nexus (which is a cliché really), where he meets user Annie, who speaks an absurd futuristic English, though she comes only from the year 1999. The hell with it - I'm bored with this mess.

TATIA GRIMM'S WORLD by Vernor Vinge; Pan; 277 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Tatja Grimm wanders out of the vast desolate interior of the world's single continent. She does not know where she comes from, why she is stronger physically and mentally than everyone else, or where she can go on a world where technology is limited by lack of metals. She joins "Tarulle", a massive ship which sails round and round the continent, printing a variety of magazines including the famous *Fantasia*, an SF & F zine. She finds their non-metal based technology interesting at first, but quickly gets bored. She turns to a more important question: - why is humanity on a world with such a limited supply of metals when spectrography reveals most stars have metal-rich planets? This book is a fix-up from a series of novellas, but is an interesting read for all that. The slow development of the non-metal based technology on this world is particularly fascinating.

TALES OF THE WITCH WORLD II Edited by André Norton; Pan; 376 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the second shared world anthology of stories set in André Norton's *Witch World*. It works better than other shared world efforts such as *Thieves' World*, because all the writers grew up on Norton's books and have a genuine love of her world. The *Witch World* is a parallel Earth, where only the Old Race possess the last remnants of the psionic Power that once dominated the world. They are persecuted by less talented humans, while old standing stones still retain dangerous Power, and the *Sages* lead to other worlds where foul creatures wait for a chance to invade again. High points of the anthology are "Futures Yet Unseen" by Melinda M Snodgrass, about the abortive rise of science in this world of magic, and "The Salt Garden" by Sandra Miesel, in which a lonely goddess builds a beautiful but sterile garden. A recommended anthology.

THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT by Storm Constantine; Orbit; 344 pages; £5.99 lge paperback;

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Feminists and their male supporters fled persecution on Earth and settled on the planet Artemis. Now 300 years later, while relationships between men and women are not exactly illegal, they are frowned upon, and society has become even more extreme than that of Earth's, with men tolerated only for procreation. A man, Elvon L'Belder, is the leader of a revolutionary movement that wants to bring back equality by removing extremists from government. Corrina, a young idealist, briefly becomes L'Belder's lover before being sent to the city of Silver Crescent under the 'patronage' of General Carmenya Oralien. Initially Corrina wants no part of L'Belder's revolution, but gradually as she observes the brutality and inequality dished out to men she becomes a central figure in the revolution. Constantine's *Wraeththu Trilogy* was a splendid debut and this is equally as good. The story is excellent, but the characterisation of Corrina is wonderful, showing her development from dreaming girl to bitter and disillusioned woman. Truly excellent, highly recommended.

MIDNIGHT BLUE by Pauline Fisk; Lion; 217 pages; £7.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Bonnie, a young girl brought up by her cruel unloving Grandmother (Grandbag), goes to live with her mother Maybelle. Bonnie happily sets about exploring her new environs, and discovers a neighbour - Michael - is trying to fill a Midnight Blue balloon with smoke so he can travel to "the world beyond the sky". The arrival of Grandbag causes Bonnie to flee in the balloon aided by the Shadowboy, a mystical figure who appears whenever the balloon is filled. She crashes in a place with many parallels to her own life and is accepted into a happy family. All goes well until the arrival of a carnival with the evil Grandmother Marvell and her soul-stealing mirrors. An interesting story excellently told by the adolescent Bonnie, the characters, especially that of the creepy Grandmother Marvell, finely drawn. Probably more for younger readers, but a good story none-the-less.

THE ETERNAL CHAMPION by Michael Moorcock; Grafton; 203 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Lynn M Edwards.

An orgy of bloodletting and violence, thinly disguised as fantasy, *The Eternal Champion* is not one of Michael Moorcock's better books. It is the first of a series about John Daker, an immortal warrior, who is snatched through time and space to be the Champion of humanity on a pre-Atlantean (or is it post-holocaust?) Earth. As this is its eighth reprint I wonder if everyone else classifies it as I do, as train-literature - something to be scanned on a long, boring journey and left behind after use!

MORNING OF CREATION by Mike Shupp; Headline; 304 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This is the second book of the *Destiny Makers* series, and also Shupp's second novel. Whether he will (or can) produce anything outside this framework remains to be seen; the signs within it are not hopeful. The theme involves an embattled city-state of the future attempting to use time travel to stave off inevitable defeat by the rest of the world. The background is one of 12,000 year "Eternal" wars between "normal" humans and Telepaths. After two novels my sympathies are with the peace movement. *Morning of Creation* is a decent enough story as it stands; Tim Harper, Shupp's protagonist, sets off into history with Kylere, a barbarian "keep" he rescued in book one for reasons unknown. Adventure and revelation follow; they split, reunite and head off once more. Ultimately however they signally fail to advance the plot to any perceptible degree. Harper's ostensible mission is to assassinate his own side's most famous general, whose prolonged survival has been shown to make things worse. Needless to say the general remains unharmed with nothing more than a few paragraphs of pensive agitation hurled in his direction. He is blissfully unaware of this. You should be too.

CROWN OF STARS by James Tiptree Jr.; Orbit; 340 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a collection of ten extremely powerful stories that were originally published in magazines between 1970 and 1988. The author makes no concessions to the sensibilities of the reader and many of these excellently written stories are unpleasant. How do you dispose of unwanted babies when abortion is illegal? "Morality Meat" shows us the inside of an adoption agency - but is that all it is? If you use drugs to ensure that your young soldiers can cope with the traumas of battle, what happens when they are due to go home? "Yanqui Doodle" provides a dire warning. What will happen to Heaven when its creator, God, dies? In "Our Resident Djinn" Satan makes a few suggestions. These are no-holds-barred stories; read them, but read with caution.

THE SHADOW DANCERS by Jack L Chalver; NEL; 284 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the second in the *G.O.D. Inc* series, and is told from the viewpoint of Brandy, Sam Horowitz's black wife. G.O.D. Inc comes to them with a problem. Someone is introducing into the Labyrinth what must be the ultimate in drugs, once taken and you are hooked, the drug then takes over your brain parasitically, but keeps you so fit and healthy you are happy to keep on taking it. The only drawback is that humans need a new fix every thirty hours or so, otherwise the drug kills them in the effort to keep itself alive, and there doesn't seem to be a cure. G.O.D. Inc want Brandy and Sam to stop the drug reaching their home world, and to do this Brandy has to "go down the pipeline", eventually becoming hooked herself. An interesting series of what are good detective stories, told with the style and wit we have come to expect from Chalver. Recommended.

THE TOYNBEE CONVECTOR by Ray Bradbury; Grafton; 277 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A new collection of short stories by Ray Bradbury covering a wide variety of topics, from SF, Fantasy and Horror through to "observations on life". Overall not a particularly outstanding set of tales, leaving the reader somewhat disinterested in the outcome. There are twenty-three stories in the volume, ranging from the mediocre (the title story refers to a time travel machine with a twist at the end which was guessed after only a few paragraphs), to readable ("Banshee", obvious from the title what it's about, and "The Love Affair" alien falls for Earth settler). One for Bradbury lovers only.

THE WARLORD'S DOMAIN by Peter Morwood; Legend; 283 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

I first read this when it was issued in hardback. Regrettably time, and a paperback issue, have not given me reason to alter my initial opinion. Basically, this stinks. It's unoriginal hack'n'slay fantasy, and not even a terribly well-written example of the genre. The action lurches from set-piece to set-piece, and the whole thing seems more than averagely riddled with inconsistency and improbability as Aldric and Kyrin work their way through their latest adventure, to steal a jewel from the eponymous Warlord. If you read and enjoyed the others, ignore me and buy it, but if you are looking for something different, something literary, then I'm sorry, this isn't it. You will have been here before - many times!

A WIND IN CAIRO by Judith Tarr; Bantam; 258 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This magical historical fantasy has a lot of charm. It is a fairy story bearing a warning. Hasan is a thoroughly unpleasant young man - a gambler, a drunkard and a fornicator. When he goes too far and offends a powerful magician he is turned into a horse. As a stallion he is just as arrogant as when he was a man but slowly he is tamed by his new owner, Zamaniyah. Although Muslim women are invariably confined her father has the Sultan of Egypt, Salah al-Din, grant her status as an honorary man since he has no other heir. Thus she is permitted to ride, bare her face, hunt and go to battle like any male. The novel explores the changing relationship between Hasan the horse and his mistress, and her problems of being a young woman in boys' clothing. Set against a sound historical background, this is a good, light read.

RITNYM'S DAUGHTER by Sheila Gilluly; Headline; 314 pages; £6.95 lge paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the third and final volume in the *Greenbriar Queen* series, and is set 13 years after the end of *The Crystal Keep*. This point provides the only grumble I have about the books, there is no link between the last two volumes. At the end of book two we have the Queen, Ariadne, disappearing and at the start of book three she is back at her court with no explanation of how she returned - frustrating. But having said that, the trilogy has been a good one, with this last volume dealing with how Kursh is reinstated at court, the final battle with the Dark Lord and his servants, and how finally Peewit finds his people. Recommended.

ENDANGERED SPECIES by Gene Wolfe; Orbit; 506 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Mauraen Porter.

Gene Wolfe is one of the busiest contributors to anthologies, almost as if he didn't know how to refuse a request. This large volume is a selection culled from his output over the last fifteen years or so, few, if any, previously collected. They vary in content from the straightforward narrative such as "The Map" to dense, elliptical writing which occasionally leaves the reader wondering whether it is him or the author who has failed to connect, "Procreation" being a particular example, and in quality from the utter brilliance of "The HORRARS of War" to the downright pedestrianism of "Silhouette". I enjoyed it from the point of view of being a comparative newcomer to Wolfe's writing, in that it provided a useful survey of the development of his work over the last fifteen years, but at the same time, I had a strong sense that this was not Wolfe's own selection, and that the collection is something of a rag-bag selection, bundled together without benefit of themes or a linking commentary on his work. It's worth reading, but as something to dip into from time to time, rather than being devoured at a sitting, and it's definitely one for the completist.

THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED by Anne Rice; Futura; 573 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The Vampire Chronicles began with *Interview With The Vampire*. It was followed by *The Vampire Lestat*. In the wake of the publication of his book and an immensely popular album of rock music, Lestat plans a concert to fulfil his desire for adoration by mortals. Many of the younger vampires resent his declaration and attention seeking, and intend to kill him openly as a warning. Akasha, the mother of the vampire race, has roused from a death-like stillness lasting thousands of years. The most powerful of them all, she too heads for the concert. And, mortal and immortal alike are plagued with dreams of red-headed twins. Anne Rice has done a reasonable job of blending the various elements of this novel together, and of eliciting sympathy for the blood-drinking killers, but it is a little too long. Some sections are overloaded with introspection and philosophising, though equally there are passages filled with excitement and vivid writing.

THE LAND OF FIRE by T P Newark; Muller; 226 pages; £11.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton

This novel tells of a young Greek, Orestes, enslaved by the Huns, and a young Hun Warlord, Edaco, as they set out across 5th century AD Eastern Europe in search of eternal fire. The fire, built into a form of flamethrower was used to defeat the Huns in a battle. The Huns of course want it for themselves, or failing that, to destroy the secret. While the period has no doubt been well researched, I find the idea of 5th century napalm-like flamethrowers a little hard to swallow. No way can this mediocre historical novel be said to be SF. Avoid.

OUTPASSAGE by Janet and Chris Morris; NEL; 368 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Interspace Tasking Corporation controls the outworld colonies for the USA and to put down a serious revolt they call on the US Rangers. The mission goes badly wrong, and Sergeant Det Cox is lucky to escape. After returning to Earth Det meets Paige Barnett, a senior official of the Corporation, and then they are both kidnapped. Janet and Chris Morris have put together an unusual story of revolt and intrigue that causes corporations and governments to destroy entire planets to contain the secret of the revolution. The two characters Cox and Barnett are moved through a maze of duplicity and deception by forces they don't fully comprehend. The Morrises have interwoven a blend of intrigue, religion and tyranny into a fast-paced story for the SF aficionado.

JASON COSMO by Dan McGirt; Pan; 220 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Right from the Josh Kirby cover this has the look of a me-too Pratchett fantasy spoof, and inevitably suffers by comparison. However, after a slow beginning this first novel manages to establish its own identity and humourous style, with good usage of modern phenomena translated into a medieval fantasy setting. The plot is a fairly standard Sword and Sorcery yarn; Jason Cosmo is disturbed from his peaceful woodcutting life by the inexplicable arrival of a bounty hunter, henceforth unwelcome in his village he sets out to discover what's going on, and so is launched on his mission to destroy the evil of the Black Magic Society and prevent a recurrence of the thousand-year age of despair. All told this is entertaining stuff and worth reading. Highlights include flying carpets shot down in flames, Water Nymphs gone bad, "pick a card" as the ultimate in magic and the Standard Heroic Aptitude Test (multiple choice!).