

BRUM GROUP NEWS

July
1990

Issue
No. 226

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
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BUMPER MEMBERS' ISSUE
12 PAGES!
Friday 20 July at 7.45pm Admission: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.00
3 MONTHS
PROGRAMME

This month's speaker is

BRIAN W. ALDISS

For those who want more AUTHORS at the Brum Group, a real treat this month: following on David Brin's highly successful visit last month, we have managed to persuade none other than our Co-President **Brian Aldiss** to come out of hiding.

Brian's new book is entitled *Bury My Heart at W.H. Smith's*, and is the memoirs of his career as a writer. Published by Hodder & Stoughton in hardcover at £13.95, it is very funny (as one would expect), in the author's inimitable style. In addition, a Special Edition is being published by Avernus, in slip case and signed, with *six extra chapters*, @£40. Anyone wanting one of these should let Rog know A.S.A.P. (Brian will be signing copies at Andromeda on Saturday 21st at noon.)

The BSGF 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 BSGF, 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. (021 558 0997) (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)



David Brin (Meeting Review by Tony Morton)

David opened by describing his move back to Paris, where he now lives, via Hong Kong/Japan/Far East/Nepal (hiking), all of which took two months. He noted sceptically that industry in those countries would rather *make* the same mistakes themselves than learn from us.

His new book, *Earth*, is based around British, New Zealand and Easter Island viewpoints of life; NZ is portrayed as the metaphor for hope, Easter Island of despair. It is set 50 years in the future because David

feels it to be more realistic to predict 'probabilities' that will happen. He also dispelled a rumour of problems with the publishers of the novel, who he assured us gave marvellous co-operation; they never asked for a 50% reduction in the length of the book!

On his last visit to the Brum Group, David predicted the 'break-up of paranoia' in the world, equating this to a breaking down of frontiers, which most people would agree can be related to the events in the Eastern Bloc. This time he extrapolated the 'machismo propaganda' and its inherent effect, particularly within Islam. Rule by fear – both on and of the population. Here, David proclaims, is where Western-style civilisation wins: we have the first generation with a chance to *consciously* come up with patterns to *control* our environment. WE are standing on the possibilities set up by the generations of the past, and the next generation can choose to dive off or fly.

A question from the floor moved the talk on to the possibility of '*Postman – the Movie*'. David revealed that there is interest from Warner Brothers, but their version reversed every rôle play he'd tried to make in the novel. . . The movie people also wanted a 'straight' plot to follow, while the novel has two love lines and three plots: which could be trimmed without losing the context of the original?

David went on to cover diverse subjects: feminism (a new, fourth wave-is needed to 'equalise' the position of women); SF, fantasy and magic (the concept of magic depends upon the age in which it appears. 'Science gives man what he NEEDS, magic gives man what he wants' – Tom Robins.); his own reading matter (history and science, Connie Willis, Greg Benford and Tim Powers. Cyberpunk writers are 'angry young men', but Gibson's work is that of a genius.) Will his new prophesies turn out to be correct? Wait and see, but meanwhile, thank you David for a very interesting evening full of open thought and ideas, thoroughly enjoyed by a large turnout.

WORD CHAIN PLAY-OFF A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far away. . . Well, last Christmas, to be precise, we had a Word Chain. As announced in the February *BGN*, there was a tie between Chris Morgan, William McCabe and Rog Peyton, so a play-off had to be held. However, the contestants refused our first suggestion of a 'duel' (trial?), so our Chairman had to prepare a written Word Chain. Then first one, then another contestant was away; as a result, the play-off was held last month! For some strange reason Chris refused the chance to win a bottle of scotch, so only William and Rog actually took part. The lucky winner was Rog (who was not best pleased when first told that he had won an Andromeda voucher!)

DONATIONS As discussed at the AGM, the Brum Group is to make a donation to *Critical Wave*, to help it out of its financial difficulties. It has now been agreed that the amount will be £500; £250 to be paid at the end of June and another £250 next January.

We are also donating £100 to Friends of Foundation, to help enable the SF Foundation to continue its valuable work. Both donations fall within the terms of our Constitution: "to further the interests, knowledge . . . and the promotion, encouragement and participation in writing, publishing and producing books, magazines, films and other projects connected with science fiction. . ."

IMPORTANT NOTICE

NEW VENUE The Committee continues in its efforts to find a new venue for the Group, due to the impending closure of the Imperial. Few suggestions have come from the membership, and City Centre hotels are rapidly being exhausted as being too expensive or just lacking the needed facilities. The University and Midland Institute have been declared unfit for various reasons (like lack of a Bar outside very limited times), and the main contender at present is our one-time 'home', the Ivy Bush on the Hagley Road. *If this doesn't meet with your approval, don't complain when it's too late – suggest somewhere better!*

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.

You Write...

The page that contains contributions sent in by members. The more observant among you may have noticed that the May meeting, on dowsing, has caused a certain amount of controversy. This month we devote as much space as is needed for the main protagonists to have their say...

From Wendell Wagner, Jr.: **The Great Dowsing Challenge**

To the Editor:

Since I was the member you characterized as 'W. Agony' in the June issue of the *Brum Group News* (how did you guess? - Ed.), I would like to reply to your editorial comment. First, it was true that I interrupted Mr. Guest at one or two points, and I apologise to him for that.

I don't apologise though for referring to his theories as 'bullshit'. One of the chief characteristics of science, as Mr. Guest and you apparently fail to understand, is falsifiability. (Not at all, but who said that dowsing was a science?) That is, some things can be shown to be bullshit. I don't consider it to be an insult to refer to someone's remarks as bullshit. When I say that it means I respect someone enough that their remarks are worth arguing about. It's only when I'm being patronizing to someone that I don't consider them worth arguing with.

I'm not by any means a total sceptic. I'm willing to admit that there may be phenomena unexplained by present-day science. I'm even willing to accept such phenomena without any theoretical explanation for it. But I've got to see some evidence for it.

Mr. Guest was, after all, expecting us to accept a whole lot. Not only did he claim to be able to detect water and determine its depth; not only did he claim to be able to detect other objects too (and even characteristics of those objects that shouldn't show up in any physical test at all), he was expecting us to accept map dowsing as well. If dowsing is able to do all that, saying that it is caused by the dowser's detecting of some force field, whether gravitational, electromagnetic, or of some unknown sort, is no useful explanation at all. One might as well say that dowsing is caused by invisible pink elephants who tap the dowsing rod to make it turn in the dowser's hand. A force field has a mathematically definable shape and strength and some physical relation to the body that causes it. It also cannot be turned of and on by the dowser's deciding to use or not use it. Calling dowsing the detection of a field is thus just misusing a scientific term.

Mr. Guest was willing to admit that this meant that no physical explanation of dowsing is then possible. If it works as he describes, dowsing would have to be a way in which a dowser uses some sort of a yes/no device to detect his own unconscious clairvoyance. OK, I'm even willing to accept that if I'm given some evidence for it. That's why I was asking to do, not a parlour game, but a simple scientific experiment. I suppose I couldn't have expected him to accept the challenge, but I did think that he'd come up with a better excuse than he did. I was expecting him to say that there were too many people around, or that there were underground streams interfering with his

perceptions, or maybe just that the vibes were wrong. What he did say seemed to be that he wouldn't do any experiment that could be checked without massively expensive drilling, or maybe he was saying that you just had to believe and accept his word for all this. This strikes me as a lot more rude than anything I said to him.

At that point it was clear to me that Mr. Guest was unwilling to accept the principle of falsifiability. Regardless of what evidence he was going to be presented with, he would just keep on believing in dowsing. (Not true: Michael has seen enough evidence that dowsing does work - and so have I - to believe in it.) It was also at that point that I and Rog Peyton (who you referred to as 'P. Take') and most of the audience gave up taking anything he had to say seriously (again, not true: last month many members of the audience took the trouble to say that they supported the views I expressed), since his arguments were no more rational than the Flat-Earthers or the people who believed in the 7-ft Venusians. Is it surprising then that Rog and I got up and went to the Bar, since we could learn a lot more by drinking ourselves to the point where we could see invisible pink elephants?

I still wish to test a dowser though. Therefore I would like to announce the following challenge: I will pay £100 to the first dowser who passes the test I will give. It will consist of five trials, on each of which I will place eight plastic margarine tubs around a room, four of them filled with water and four of them empty. Each of the tubs will be covered with a cloth. The dowser may do as many practice trials as he [she?] wishes, but must declare beforehand whether the trial is for practice or for real. Of the 40 guesses he makes on the five trials, he must make no more than two errors: an error being either a full tub being guessed at as being empty or an empty tub being guessed as full.

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The Meddling Time Traveller

by Tim Groome



"Roger, my boy, forget science fiction - Mills & Boon is where the real money is!"*

*With apologies to Rog Peyton & Andromeda.

You Write

continued...

From Rog Peyton: Uncut & Unedited

The following is submitted for inclusion in the BSFG newsletter – uncut and unchanged (if you wish to edit – please agree changes with me first) and providing that any editorial comments are kept to the end of the letter and not interspersed rudely throughout.¹

So here I am – with trusty typewriting finger pointed ready to do battle and defend my mouth just as Mr Hard-up ‘predicted’ in the last newsletter. Gosh, Dave, but that was damned clever of you – have you ever thought of giving a talk to the group on how you can control the minds of other people?

I must claim to being guilty to the accusation by our trusty editor that I have a closed mind where the subject of dowsing is concerned. Dowsing gets classified by me in the same league as ‘Marilyn Monroe is alive and well and working as a Nanny in Jersey’, ‘Giant cockroaches ate my baby daughter for breakfast’, ‘World war II bombers photographed on the Moon?’ and ‘I was kidnapped and forced to have sex every night with 8ft aliens’. Despite the claim by Mr Hard-up, one shouldn’t go through life with an open mind all the time. Soon you have to make a decision as to your own viewpoint on a given subject. The statement that ‘SF fans, of all people, should be open to all such ideas’² is pathetic. No wonder people outside the SF field categorise us with all the nut cults. At an early age we are told that two plus two equals four. We accept that and get on with the rest of our lives. Hopefully, we go through life with an open mind to NEW ideas. We don’t (unless we want to dither our way through life) keep an open mind to old ideas already proven wrong, or so trivial as to be pointless. Do I *know* that dowsing doesn’t work? Can I prove it?³ One might as well ask whether I *know* Marilyn Monroe is dead. Have I seen the body? Do I know all the Nannies in Jersey?

I’m also accused of rudeness to our speaker. Michael Guest gave an interesting talk (for which I publicly thanked him, you may remember). It is possible to find something interesting but to disagree with it entirely. If I had found it uninteresting, I would have crept downstairs to the bar where several members had already congregated⁴. Walking out on a speaker is rudeness; staying and arguing is not. What I found so completely frustrating was that he refused to participate in any experiment or offer any ‘proof’ other than his claim that he, too, had been a disbeliever but had been converted to the cause (hallelujah!). Was the evening intended to be a lecture? A presentation of irrefutable facts? Was the audience not expected to argue or question? Should we all have sat in awe, marvelling at these wonderful ‘new’ theories opening our minds to the cosmic all? Wow! Come back Shaver Mysteries, Velikovskiy and von Daniken – science fiction needs you! Bullshit was the word I used at the meeting and bullshit is the word I use now.

After the meeting I asked what the talk had to do

with SF. And the answer has to be ‘Nothing!’. By SF I mean the field of imaginative *literature* we profess to be interested in. Not once did the speaker relate his talk to the literature of SF. Saying that dowsing is an aspect of the paranormal and that other aspects of the paranormal – telepathy or telekinesis, to quote two of the more ‘acceptable’ ‘talents’ – are used in science fiction, does not constitute a science fiction talk. Neither, for that matter, would a talk on robotics, biology or space travel – all ‘real’ science fictional subjects by anyone’s standards – unless direct references to the *literature* of SF were made during the talk. They would merely be educational lectures. And *that* is my biggest objection to this type of programme item.

Lastly, I was rather surprised at our editor’s totally insincere ‘thank-you’ to me in the last newsletter. Why claim to make me anonymous, call me Mr P Take and then ‘thank’ me for helping to arrange the next few months talks for the Group? If a thank you was intended wouldn’t it have been more sincere to put it elsewhere in the newsletter and actually use my real name? The anonymity claim was, to use a well-reasoned reply, a load of bollocks⁵.

1. All of the contributions in this Newsletter are published uncut and unedited. I suppose that editorial comments interspersed throughout *could* be considered in the same light as comments made during a lecture – but you obviously don’t find those rude, do you... Actually, it is those comments which brighten up the rather wearisome chore of transcribing hundreds of words of copy! But the alternative to adding them where they are relevant is what I am doing now: I prefer the former, but if other contributors also object I am happy to oblige.
2. You omitted the end of my sentence, I notice.
3. If you don’t know, what is this all about?! Of course you can prove that it does work, if you take the trouble to accompany a dowser.
4. Obviously Wendell has a different memory of the occasion!
5. I quite agree with your verdict on your anonymity! (Sorry I offended you.) This was merely an attempt to lighten the mood, and obviously everyone would see through it. Therefore my ‘thank you’ was *completely* sincere, and I repeat it here on behalf of the Committee.

signing ANDROMEDA SESSIONS

Saturday 21 July: **Brian Aldiss**

Saturday 28 July: **Mike Scott Rohan**

Saturday 4 August: **Simon Green**. Who is Simon Green? Well, he’s been a customer of Andromeda Bookshop for some 12 years, and has been trying to sell novels for 10. Then he sold six in a week!! First to Ace in America, then to Headline here.

Saturday 11 or 18 August (to be confirmed): **Terry Pratchett and illustrator Josh Kirby**, to sign the new Discworld novel, *Eric*.

Also in August: **Mary Gentle**, to sign *Rats and Gargoyles*.

Please check with Andromeda for more details (643 1999).

You Write

continued...

From Michael Guest, B.A., F.R.A.S.: A Response

[Michael Guest has seen a copy of Wendell's letter, but prefers to limit his comments to the behaviour and manners of (some of) the audience at his talk and to the record of dowsing in general.]

Dear David,

In response to your request for a few words on dowsing, I should like to thank you for your remarks in the *BGN* subsequent to my visit. I thought I was coming to talk to people with minds unburdened by the shackles of convention, and I think most of your audience were. On the many occasions I have spoken on dowsing – in universities, clubs, schools, business groups, scientific societies, health groups – I have sometimes encountered people who disagreed with me but not a single one who chose to talk in a loud voice to his neighbour while I was speaking. Again, our little American friend has the right to his opinion, but I have to say that he screwed up the proceedings for the rest of the audience and made it impossible for me to give you what was *intended* to become a light-hearted and hopefully amusing account of my adventures.

In his book *World of Strange Powers*, Arthur C. Clarke and his team investigate dowsing among a number of subjects verging on the paranormal. In passing they mention my own group, West Midland Dowsters, and poke some mild fun at the British Society of Dowsters, which is taken in good part.

They review some of the very large body of anecdotal evidence for dowsing, which is reasonably impressive, and go into some of the scientific aspects. An account is given of some 'tests' in Australia set up by people who are highly sure of their particular paradigm. The dowsters do not emerge very well from these tests, which did not consist of finding water where it was needed to preserve human life when no-one else had succeeded. Instead, it had them trying to discover whether any water was flowing through specially buried pipes and whether there were gold nuggets buried in boxes.

However, after the sceptics had had their laugh the results were analysed properly and in the water test the dowsters had scored twice as high as chance.

In his concluding remarks Clarke says: "every time a scientific demonstration (sic) is arranged, the performance of dowsters . . . is nothing better than chance" (forgetting his own analysis of the Australian results which show the contrary!), but goes on to rate dowsing as "+2 – Possible; worth investigating".

Interestingly Clarke gives Maledictions a score of "+4 – Highly probable", which leads me to postulate the theory that dowsters fail because of the antagonism of people who would like them to – evidence for which I could adduce from my talk to the BSG!

My aim is to suspend the arrogance of my own rational prejudices and seek to understand by what 'laws' this faculty works. I look for signs of pattern and I pay it the compliment and courtesy of not accusing it of lying or deceit when it cannot or will not operate. I do not expect it to conform to any unprovable 'scientific' assertion that everything in the universe must be repeatable, quantifiable, graspable, falsifiable. It is as wayward as the human beings of which it is a part. That is the fascination which I wished to share with you. Those in the audience who have had personal experience of dowsing know that it cannot be taken away by boors.

How 'environmentally conscious' are you? The Committee is thinking of getting a representative of a group such as Friends of the Earth to speak to us; but would this lead to more complaints of "What has all this got to do with science fiction?" – ?

We think it's obvious. The future of our planet is a recurring theme of SF and it is also the concern of environmentalists – as it should be of all of us. David Brin's latest novel, *Earth*, is an ideal example of how all of today's trends can be extrapolated into the not-too-distant future. However, as I said last month, if you have other ideas, speak now or forever hold your . . .

WRITERS OF THE FUTURE CONTEST

Sponsored by L. Ron Hubbard's organisation, this contest is 'an international search for new and amateur writers of new short stories or novelets of science fiction or fantasy'. All awards are adjudicated by professional writers, and prizes of \$1000, \$750 and \$500 are offered every three months, plus an Annual Grand Prize of \$4000.

If you would like more information, write to:

**Writers of the Future Contest,
78 Holmethorpe Avenue,
Redhill, Surrey RH4 2NL**

NEW MEMBERS

June:

We have been joined by Marika Xiaris, who lives in Hall Green (just round the corner from me, I see), is 17, and heard of us from Andromeda when Terry Pratchett was speaking. Marika likes all fantasy, including Tolkien (so Hall Green is a good place to be), Terry Pratchett, Douglas Adams, etc.

From July:

With memberships starting this month we have Druin Burch, who is ageless and lives at Moseley, heard of us via an Andromeda leaflet, and likes Orson Scott Card 'soft' SF, writing SF, and literary criticism of SF and fantasy. Also Mohammed Tariq, who is 22, lives at Sparkhill, also saw us in an Andromeda leaflet, and likes Barrington Bayley, Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov.

Welcome to all of the above, and please do introduce more new members if you can.

At last! In answer to the Teenage
Mutant Ninja Turtles and such, Tim
Groome offers some genuine British
Superhercess . . .

"MINOR CHANGELING MARQUESS OF
QUEENSBERRY RULES TORTOISES"



You Write

continued...

The Long and Short of Brum Group Meetings

by Vernon Brown

Dear Dave,

While I enjoyed the content of David Brin's talk at the last meeting its duration, like most if not all BSFG programme items, was far too long at two hours plus, even including a break.

1. The maximum human attention span for a talk is around 45-50 minutes, which is why university lectures take about 50 minutes and secondary school periods are usually 40 minutes long. Much more than this and reaction sets in, although a short question/answer session will revive interest temporarily.

2. A good speaker should be able to put across the essentials of his talk, in an interesting manner, in no more than 50 minutes. If he (she?) cannot then either he is a bad speaker or the subject matter is not suitable for a standard talk/meeting such as those held by the BSFG in the past. Alternatively, of course, a good speaker has been requested to spread his talk over a longer than usual time and has, against his better judgement, done so.

3. With no 'end-time' to aim for the best of speakers may well tend to extend his talk lest he give less 'measure' than that expected by his audience. On the other hand, the audience, unless absolutely rivetted by the speaker, will tend towards less interest in the talk, less 'how is he going to tie it all together?' and will often start wondering when he will finish.

4. A further disadvantage of no end-time is that the talk will slowly merge into an informal question-and-answer session. Being uncontrolled this will often become a matter of individuals frantically thinking of some question to ask so that the speaker won't feel slighted, or become a series of dialogues between speaker and individuals in the audience, often with chunks of 'sidetracking' thrown in.

Incidentally, the foregoing points are not just my own opinions, as a glance at any relevant communications text will show. The following are more so, being more specifically fandom-inclined, although discussions with other fans show that they agree with them; trouble is that, like me, they have voted with their feet...

The BSFG exists to promote interest in SF – however one defines the genre – by holding regular meetings at which fans can meet and talk. But when can they do this? The break in the talk is not suitable for obvious reasons, and there is little time afterwards when the Bar closes and the last trains and buses depart at 11.00pm, at which time in any case such journeys can be quite dicey. It's OK, if one is a non-drinking, car-owning person or, perhaps, a misanthrope, but frustrating for the rest. And it doesn't help newcomers any – I remember years ago when newcomers left after the talk finished at 9.15pm and we worried about it; now they have no choice!

This point is illustrated by conventions: it's the keen newcomers who attend all the programme items – the older fans choose what they attend and spend the rest of the time circulating (as in 'the whirling pit?'). But the system does allow the neo's to graduate as they 'learn the ropes'; there is little time for this at BSFG meetings. In fact the choice is diminished by the fact that many of the older Group members attend only rarely if at all. So where will the informed new fan blood come from?

My final point concerns the finances of the BSFG as well as the interests of its members. We have a diversity of speakers who are not all of interest to all Group members. If members know that a speaker will finish about 9.15pm then, even if they are not interested in the speaker they may well turn up, *and pay*, in order to meet friends (or would they turn up at 9.15 and expect not to pay as they did not see the speaker – ?). If, on the other hand, they know that this will probably not be possible, they will not attend. I know several in this category. Insofar as Pat and I are concerned the Brum Group is about the only time that we go out but nowadays it has to be something (potentially) good to get us there and we often just don't take the risk of a disappointing evening.

So, in short, let's get back to the old, interesting and informative socialising BSFG that we all loved before it's too late and the Group drifts into oblivion.

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

In April this year, David Langford and John Grant launched an appeal (called 'MJ-Balls') in response to what they saw as "an attempted use of our beloved legal system to suppress dissenting opinion in a purported scientific debate". There is not space here to explain the whole matter, but briefly, MJ-12 or 'Majestic-12' refers to supposedly leaked US government papers on a UFO which crashed in New Mexico in 1947. In October 1989 a leading US promoter of this, Stanton Friedman, was due to give a talk on it in Manchester, and UFO researcher Jenny Randles contacted the *Manchester Evening News*, which publicised this, vigorously disputing the MJ-12 issues.

The only national newspaper to report The Friedman theories was (surprise!) *The Sunday Sport*, which misquoted Jenny's comments. The result was a law suit, brought by Friedman and meeting promoter Harry Harris!

Five-figure sums have been talked about, due to the 'damage to Friedman's scientific reputation'. The appeal, therefore, is to aid Jenny in what could be an expensive as well as highly unfair action, even if settled out of court. A Mail Order Auction is being held, with donated items of artwork, first editions, other books, etc., etc. if you wish to donate or purchase anything to aid this appeal, please write A.S.A.P. to:

MJ-Balls, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU

["What has this to do with SF?" Do you care?]



BRUM GROUP NEWS

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Send your subscription, or £1.50 for a sample copy, to:

Critical Wave Publications, 24A Beech Road, Bowes Park, London N11 2DA

Proxima's Planet is a fine art print by David A. Hardy, published in the USA by Novagraphics at \$75.00 in a signed, limited edition of 750. It shows the dramatic landscape of a hypothetical planet of the nearest star (apart from the Sun – remember that?), and measures 17" x 27", plus a white border.

A few copies are still available at only £15.00 (signed but not numbered), from either **Andromeda Bookshop** or direct from the artist.

And don't forget the book, containing the work of around 70 space artists, in which this first appeared: **Visions of Space** by David A. Hardy (Dragon's World, 176 pages in full colour, £16.95).

!!COMING NEXT MONTH!!

Don't miss next month's mind-boggling exclusive in **The Brum Group News**, entitled:

"Prominent Brum Group Member forced to have sex on Jersey with Marilyn Monroe's Nanny by giant alien cockroaches; gives birth to 8-ft daughter in World War II bomber on Moon."

NEWS FILLER

JOPHAN REPORT #34

The Nebula Award winners for 1989 have just been announced. These prestigious awards are voted on by the Science Fiction Writers of America each year. The winners for 1989 are Best Novel *The Healer's War* by Elizabeth Anne Scarborough (Doubleday/Foundation); Best Novella *"Mountains of Mourning"* by Lois McMaster Bujold (Analog, *Borders of Infinity*); Best Novelette *"At the Rialto"* by Connie Willis (Omni, *The Microverse*) and Best Short Story *"Ripples in the Dirac Sea"* by Geoffrey A Landis (Asimov's).

The 1990 Australian SF (Ditmar) Awards have also just been announced. Best Australian Long Fiction *Lake of the Sun* by Wynne Whiteford; Best Australian Short Fiction *"The Quiet Redemption of Andy the House"* by Terry Dowling; Best Fanzine *"Ethel the Aurdvark"* from Alan Stewart (beating *"Australian SF Review"* by one vote, ASFR is published by 'The Collective', who were most peeved to be beaten so narrowly - especially when they discovered that one of their number had forgotten to vote!); Best Fanwriter was a tie between Bruce Gillespie and Ian Gunn and Best Fanartist was Ian Gunn.

The results of several fan funds have also been announced. The winner of this year's GUFF race is Roman Orszanski who will be travelling up from Australia to ConFiction, the World SF Convention in the Netherlands. The winner of DUFF this year, Greg Turkich, will be travelling from Australia to attend the NASFIC in San Diego, USA. Finally CUFF (the Canadian Unity Fan Fund which aims to encourage communication and cooperation between distant fan communities in Canada) has been won by Ottawa fan Paul Valcour, who will attend Convention 10/Con Version VII in Calgary, Alberta this month.

The penultimate *"The Intermediate Reptile"* reports that the ATom Appeal (which was organised to raise money for the family and widow of fan artist Arthur 'ATom' Thomson) has passed over just under £2800 to Mrs Olive Thomson. The money raised on the ATom Day being supplemented by donations from Eastcon, Michael Moorcock and others as well as an auction at the US convention Corflu in New York. The next issue of *"The Intermediate Reptile"* (#11) will be the last as the

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.

team responsible concentrates on producing the convention newsletter for ConFiction if the success TIR is anything to go by *"The Reptile"* should be well worth reading.

Stephen Gallagher's novel *Chimera* will finally hit British screens in August, after lengthy delays and fears that producers Zenith might cancel due to the success of the BBC serial *First Born*, which touches on broadly similar themes. The tv version will be networked on 17 and 24 August, in one-hour episodes either side of the 10pm ITN news. The clash with this year's world science fiction convention in Holland may cause headaches for fans without access to video recorders.

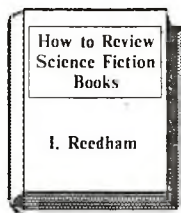
Finally don't forget to support some of the conventions in Birmingham this year. The British Fantasy Society have announced that Fantasycon XV will be held yet again at the Midland Hotel, New Street on the weekend 14-16th of September. US Guest of Honour is Joe R Lansdale, UK GoH is Stephen Gallagher and John M Ford will be Master of Ceremonies. Full attending membership is £14 (or just £12 for British Fantasy Society members). Details from Fantasycon XV, 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DE. A couple of months later you have the 20th anniversary of Birmingham's own sf convention Novacon. On the weekend of 9-11th of November Novacon 20 will be celebrating both its own twentieth anniversary and the sixtieth anniversary of British fandom at the Excelsior Hotel, Coventry Road (near the NEC). Guest of Honour will be Dr Jack Cohen. £15 Attending until the end of September, when postal applications close. Book early as numbers will be limited. Contact Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

AND FINALLY...

We have heard from reliable sources that Walt Willis and Jim White have completed a sequel to *The Enchanted Duplicator*, with the emphasis on the perfect convention rather than fanzine!

As Dave Langford puts it: "It is rather like hearing that John Bunyan has completed a sequel to *Pilgrim's Progress* in which he reveals that Scientology is the one true way..."

The JOPHAN REPORT, of course, 'borrowed' its title from the main character in *The Enchanted Duplicator*. (If all of the above sounds like Greek to newer members, I suggest that you buy a drink for one of the 'older' fans and get initiated into the esoterica of fandom and fanzines...



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.

THE BARSOOM PROJECT by Larry Niven & Stephen Barnes; Pan; 337 pages; £7.99 1ga p/back. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The project of the title is the proposed terraforming of Mars by Cowles Industries and their partners Falling Angel - a zero G habitat. The United Moslem Activist Front, a terrorist organisation, are suspected of being behind attempts to discredit Cowles Industries and so halt the project. The bulk of the novel concerns a "Fat Ripper" game taking place in Dream Park, and centres on Eviana. On her first visit to Dream Park Eviana unwittingly became entangled in one of U.M.A.F.'s ploys, and shot a man with a real gun instead of one of Dream Park's gadgets, killing him. The ploy to bring down Cowles Industries fails, but Eviana is back to agonise her personal nightmare. Dream Park is so plausible it's a shame it doesn't exist in reality, and this story lives up to its predecessor, full of action and fantasy and larger-than-life characters and situations. All-in-all an excellent escapist yarn.

CYBERBOOKS by Ben Bova; Mandarin; 283 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Carl Lewis had an idea. As a software engineer he thought his new invention to replace the printed page was just what the world needed. To Bunker Books it was the lifeline that they needed to stay in business, and when Tarantula Enterprises learnt of Carl Lewis's invention they just had to have it. Ben Bova has taken a satirical look at the possibilities of future publishing, producing a very witty story. Into this tale is woven a series of unexplained murders, and the battle between Tarantula Enterprises and Bunker Books for the control of cyberbooks. The whole idea of the electronic book has been well thought out, and the implications for the publishing industry should be taken seriously. Ben Bova has once again written an award winning book.

DARK VOICES Ed by Stephen Jones & Clarence Paget; Pan; 348 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Dark Voices is a commemorative collection of thirteen (is that significant?) stories from the pages of thirty years of *The Pan Book of Horror Stories*. Considering that they are supposed to be classic tales I found the selection surprisingly disappointing, the only two really good stories being "The Streets of Ashkelon" by Harry Harrison and "The Emissary" by Ray Bradbury - SF writers both. The rest lack that quality of inventiveness and imagination which transform the commonplace into the horrific, and even where a surprise ending has been attempted the final dénouement is so predictable that it loses the capacity to frighten. Two or three stories have a twist which is amusing enough to be briefly interesting, but for the most part reading this collection is an empty and ultimately boring experience. I cannot particularly recommend it.

THE DAY THE MARTIANS CAME by Frederick Pohl; Grafton; 300 pages; £2.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This satirical novel is aimed firmly at us here on Earth. Constructed from a series of short stories dating back as far as 1967, it deals with the discovery of intelligent life on Mars during the last throes of a disaster-struck exploration mission. Misunderstood and marginalised, the Martians become a back-drop against which Humankind plays out its favourite activities, chiefly ripping each other off like crazy. Singled out for attention are the cultists, monomaniacs, UFO frauds, ingénue scientists and, of course, politicians. The satire is gentle and understated rather than pointedly vicious, and the general effect is quietly entertaining rather than uproarious, nevertheless, this is well worth reading.

THE START OF THE END OF IT ALL by Carol Emshwiller; The Women's Press; 163 pp; £4.95 p/b. Rev by Chris Morgan.

For me, one of the highlights of the Liverpool Eastercon was meeting Carol Emshwiller, and including her on a panel I chaired, about Writers' Workshops, on which subject she gave some intelligent and perceptive answers. This book of hers is a collection; eighteen subtle, polished, idiosyncratic stories, mainly reprinted from SF magazines. They range from the familiar but ambiguous "Sex and/or Mr Morrison" from Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* through SF and fantasy and surrealism and horror to the totally unclassifiable. It's interesting that, despite the great diversity here, Emshwiller's gentle humour and succinctness provide the uniformity of style that all good story collections should possess. This is a sparkling collection by a writer's writer.

THE DROUGHT by J G Ballard; Paladin: 220 pages; £3.99 paperback
THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY by J G Ballard; Paladin: 189 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by William A McCabe

I came to this review with a few pre-conceptions based on what I had been told about Ballard by other readers. I had been led to believe that these books would be somehow "unusual" or "difficult". I failed to find any of this in either novel. This is not totally run-of-the-mill, but on the other hand it isn't exactly a totally different approach. Both books have a definite claim on genre SF and (if only because of the *Empire of the Sun* plug on the cover) mainstream lit., and will probably sell to both markets. *The Unlimited Dream Company* seems to me to be the fantasies of a "madman", supposedly from his own point of view, but the style indicates something a little more clinical (I suspect a lot of indirect lifts from Jung or Freud). Many of the ideas and images sound like they came straight from a psychology manual (walking naked through town, flying, etc.) The internal inconsistency of the plot seems to reinforce the insanity idea (although most of the book seems to be flashback from the first chapter, it doesn't really fit toward the end or after). *The Drought* will probably be claimed as some environmentalist object as it deals with a dystopic future resulting from "pollution of the sea", but as the gimmick is ill thought out and most of the book deals with the social implications of a long term (world-wide?) drought, I consider this largely irrelevant. The idea is that some of the pollutants in the sea combine to form a monomolecular layer on the surface of the world's seas and oceans, thereby disrupting the weather, as although water flows into the sea it doesn't evaporate out again. The obvious fault is that this is managed without any apparent change in sea-level (if the drought should also be a flood). Both books are adequately - rather than well-written, the characterisation, where it exists, is mediocre. *The Unlimited Dream Company* contains sexual references which might suggest that an adult should check it before passing it to a five-year old.

THE FACE THAT MUST DIE by Ramsey Campbell; Futura: 202 pages; £2.50 paperback. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Horridge is a strange young man with a chip on his shoulder and a limp to his leg, living in present day Liverpool. He's dangerously paranoid, fervently anti-gay and anti-drugs. It's a surprise that other characters in the novel aren't mad too, through being stuck in dead-end jobs, cooped up in awful, noisy flats and surrounded by Liverpool - dirty, depressing and graffiti-scattered. What Campbell is doing in this non-supernatural shocker is to indict society for its treatment of people. The fictionalised autobiographical elements of the book's setting are bracketed by real autobiography, including an amazingly frank account of Campbell's childhood - a horror story in its own right. This is a startling and terribly depressing book, completely devoid of heroes or winners.

THE SILENT CITY by Elizabeth Vonarburg; The Women's Press: 247 pages; £4.95 p/back. Reviewed by Lynn M Edwards.

Entitled *Le Silence de la Cité* in the original French, *The Silent City* is the English translation. It is also a fascinating, post-holocaust SF story. Elisa is the result of a genetic research program carried out in one of the underground cities. S/he becomes convinced of the evil of the program that originated her, and goes outside to switch off all the cities. Then s/he returns. With none twists than a small shell, the story only starts there. Thoroughly recommended for anyone prepared to read with an open mind. (I wonder if it's ever better in French?).

THE STAND by Stephen King; Hodder & Stoughton: 1007 pages; £14.95 hardback. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

If you are looking for a brand new, or even revised, novel you will be disappointed. The book is essentially the same as the 1979 edition, with parts replaced that King originally cut out at the behest of his editors. This is why it is longer. Otherwise all that has been done is to bring the date of the action forward a decade to 1990. It begins with a plague which wipes out most of the world's population, the first part showing how a group of survivors cope with bereavement and loneliness. These draw together into two camps who seem to be fundamentally opposed. This is a horror novel of King's usual high standards, but the length will not only put off some readers, but tends to become repetitive as many characters have similar experiences - perhaps there are too many of them for sympathy to focus on any of them properly. One word of warning - do NOT begin reading this book if you are suffering from a cold.

DARKNESS COMES by Dean R Koontz; Headline: 351 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Helen Wake.

Hard-nosed cop with a heart of gold battles master of ancient evil - and finds his children's lives are on the line. I enjoyed this, but hit a credibility gap when the main character, who had all the facts available and wasn't cripplingly sceptical, still didn't take the villain seriously enough. I guess it would be like that in real life, but I do hanker for a character who would go "Well, this is obviously a supernatural threat, where do I go from here?", rather than "Well, this seems to be a supernatural threat, but let's try treating it as normal everyday stuff for just a little bit longer...."

ASTOUNDING DAYS by Arthur C Clarke; Gollancz; 224 pages; £4.99 paperback,

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Subtitled *The Science Fictional Autobiography*, Clarke has finally put pen to paper (well, hand to keyboard actually) to provide the insights to his "astounding" career. This is a well documented history of scientific events in the world depicted by Clarke via SF reading/writing at those momentous occasions, with useful notes inserted explaining both the obscure and the jocular. Several of the quotes left me itching for copies of *Astounding* to read the stories mentioned. (Anyone possess any 1934 copies?.....) The reminiscences read like a who's who of SF AND science, Clarke knows (or knew) all the "big" authors and scientists alive in the 20th century (or so it seems!). A well rounded account written with a schoolboyish eager expectation of events enlivening the narrative and providing an insight into Clarke's love of both SF and science/scientific developments, this is VERY enjoyable.

CHASE by Sean R Koontz; Headline; 214 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Helen Wake.

The story of a returned Vietnam veteran having problems adjusting to civilian life should be done to death by now, but Koontz weaves a good psychological thriller. He manages to convey the horror of that particular "police action" with the detachment of a greek mask, and sidesteps the usual "paean to violence" that most Nam films and books indulge at some point or other. Good, I liked it.

FIRST FLIGHT by Chris Claremont; Panl; 243 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Claremont is an established comics writer and his first prose novel is a terrific example of hard SF at its best. The *First Flight* of space pilot Nicole Shea should have been an easy survey mission, and turns out to be anything but. After a graphically exciting encounter with a derelict wreck her ship is shot to pieces by pirates. Nicole and the surviving half of her crew find themselves adrift in space until they encounter an alien starship and have to make "first contact" on behalf of the human race. Then they have to make their way back past the pirates they have already encountered, and who turn out to be more than they seem.... read it and find out for yourself! Fast paced, action packed, complex, thrilling, colourful, moving, technical - how many compliments are there? Don't miss this one!

SKIN OF THE SOUL Edited by Lisa Tuttle; The Women's Press; 228 pages; £5.95 paperback. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

In this selection of horror stories written by women the subject matter details the darker side of women's fears - rape, pregnancy, child abuse etc. All the stories are good, but some are outstanding, namely: "Succa" (Charnock), a young girl reaching menarche discovers she is a werewolf, and realises her revenge on her tormentors; "Anzac Day" (Wilder), a soldier gone mad from killing during the war; "Getting Away From It All" (Walsh), a creepy tale of cats; "Mr Elphinstone's Hands" (Tuttle), deals with the Victorian obsession with ectoplasm; and "Trick or Treat" (Dungate - better known to her fellow Brunzgroup members as Pauline Morgan), a worrying tale of an abandoned kitten becoming totally obsessive about its rescuer. Personally this is one of the more disturbing tales, I have 2 cats! This volume is more proof, if any be needed, that horror doesn't have to be all blood and guts, psychological twists invoke much more fear. It also proves that the horror genre can be written equally well by both sexes.

WALK HARD OF MAGIC by Barbara Hambly; Unwin; 308 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Although the third of a series that began with *The Ladies of Mandrigny* and *The Witches of Venstan*, this book can be read in isolation. Sun Wolf, ex-mercenary and fledgling mage, desperately wants a teacher, but the only wizard he is aware of is trying to kill him. Also his old troops are having phenomenal bad luck in besieging a town and need his help. Accompanied by Starhawk, his old second-in-command and now his companion, he attempts to extricate them - but misfortunes follow them as they return to their winter quarters. This is a fast-paced adventure painting an unglamorous picture of mercenary life. The characters are not necessarily likeable; they are earthy, crude and real. The situations they find themselves in are unpleasant and often fatal. The book is written without sentimentality and even Sun Wolf finds he has outgrown the life he once thought he could not do without.

DOUBLE HELIX FALL by Neil Ferguson; Abacus; 272 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Set in near future America, this novel explores the possibilities surrounding the concept of a person's life, and status therein, being based on readings taken in utero. In this system everyone "dies" at birth, this being the preents of genetic-physics worked out by Sollyheim. The story is of "life" in this society, and in particular events concerning President's daughter Annie Bennier's running away, private detective Rick Stator who was sent to find her, a set of "outlaw" Zappers and in essence other personnel entwined around this base. The idea is an interesting one and well developed, with one or two surprises thrown into the narrative providing a diverse tale. Well told and well explained, this story is definitely worth a read.