

# BRUM GROUP

## NEWS

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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 21 September at 7.45pm Admission: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.00



This month's guest speaker is:

**BOB SHAW**

HERE can be few members who have not heard Bob Shaw speak, either at the Brum Group or at a con. Anyone who *has* heard Bob Shaw talk knows that it is an experience not to be missed, and one to be repeated whenever possible. . .

Bob's newest publication is *Orbitsville Judgement* (the third in that series), published by Gollancz in hardcover. There will be a signing session for this and other books at Andromeda on Saturday 22nd at noon.

Incidentally, Bob celebrates fifteen years as a full-time author this year, so congratulations are in order. Here's to the next 15, Bob!

The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at **THE IVY BUSH**, Hagley Road/Monument Road, 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: All calls via 021 777 1802, please.

Book Reviews (only) to **Mick Evans** at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley B66 4SH, which is also the Novacon Chairman's address. (021 558 0997)

**All other contributions and enquiries** to **Dave Hardy**, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AB (Telephone 021 777 1802, fax 021 777 2792)



The 'OPEN FORUM': plus:

# THE CHAIRMAN'S BIT

The August meeting saw an Auction, conducted in inimitable style by Rog Peyton, followed by a lively debate about the nature of the Group and the way we run meetings.

Our Constitution states that 'The aims of the Group will be to further the interests, knowledge and social activities of readers of science fiction, and the promotion, encouragement and participation in writing, publishing and producing books, magazines, films and any other projects connected with science fiction. . . .'

A bias towards literature is implied by the phrase 'readers of science fiction', and this Committee has invited writers to speak at meetings whenever possible. However, it is easier to define 'readers' than 'science fiction'. It was evident from the debate that members' views on what SF is, or should be, vary a great deal. My own opinion is that the BSFG ought to be a broad church, with room for all interests. Anyone who wants it to have less scope is welcome to try having the Constitution amended at the next AGM.

The AGM is also the event at which a new Committee is elected (and from the answers of the current Committee to the question 'will you be standing for re-election?', it really *will* be a new Committee). If you feel strongly about the way the Group is going, why not stand yourself?

There was greater agreement about the running of meetings. After hearing comments made during the debate and elsewhere, the Committee has decided to tighten up the agenda. In future, speakers will be asked to restrict themselves to a 40-50-minute talk. There will then be a beer-break of no more than 15 minutes, followed by a formal question-and-answer session of about the same length. This pattern is intended to leave more time for casual discussion after the meeting.

It was asked if we could provide more details of forthcoming meetings. This is often not possible as we do not know ourselves (due to authors' travel arrangements, etc.) more than a week or two ahead! But below you will find a list taking us into the New Year.

A short article such as this cannot do justice to the many points raised during the debate, so I have drawn conclusions rather than repeat arguments. It was clear that those present care about the Group, are generally satisfied with the way it is run, and want it to continue. And with your support, it will.

[When the Constitution was written, literature was a much more important part of the field. There were, for instance, far fewer SF films, and *no videos* available! It was a pity that the person who started the debate on the length of meetings could not attend, but we hope he will be pleased by the result. I did suggest that the Constitution could be amended to read 'science fiction *and allied subjects*'. Our legal eagle says that is not necessary, but it is still a possible subject for an AGM. -Ed.]

## THE BRUM GROUP PROGRAMME

September: Bob Shaw

October: Tad Williams (whose latest fantasy books are *The Dragonbone Chair* (p/b) and *Stone of Farewell* (h/c).

November: *The Annual Debate with Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society.*

December: *Christmas Party.*

January 1991: *AGM plus Auction.*

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 gives you a chance to say anything you like (well, almost)  
Do you agree, or disagree, with anything that has been said in the Newsletter recently? Or have any comments on meetings? Or wish to raise a new subject? Just drop me a line.

Only one letter this month, but it's from none other than our co-President, Brian Aldiss! Wishing to set the record straight on the review of the July meeting, Brian writes:

Dear David,

Might I add a word to Peter Weston's kind and thoughtful commentary on my recent chat with the Brum Group?

Peter surely exaggerates my importance in the scheme of things out of the goodness of his heart. But one thing is true, that I do feel a tremendously lucky man. For that reason, I am rarely envious of the success of others, and don't feel 'a little hurt and rejected' (in Peter's words) because I don't get paid as much as the authors he mentions, the McCaffreys, Pratchetts, and Herberts of this world.

Those writers' well-earned successes come from cleaving to one line of business, dragons, disc-worlds, or desert planets. I've never been able to think of anything else beginning with 'd', and as a result have always gone my own way, writing whatever basically interested me. There was always the chance that if it interested me, it would interest a few other people. This is my secret prescription, not for financial success, but for happiness in writing.

Of course I'm delighted if I've managed to interest Peter Weston and the kind-hearted Brum Group over the years. More to come, I hope.

Yours,

Brian



## The Meddling Time Traveller

by Tim Groome



"Frankly Gene, the script stinks!"



Are you interested in WRITING? Do you want to meet other hopeful writers? If so, why not join us.

### **CANNON HILL WRITERS' GROUP**

meets every Thursday (but you don't have to turn up every week) in the Hexagon Room at Cannon Hill Arts Centre, at 8pm. We offer help with each other's work, encouragement and constructive criticism. We write fiction (of all kinds, including SF fantasy and horror), poetry, plays, articles. We range from people who are just beginning to write to those who have had some success. We share with each other information about markets, competitions and courses.

All newcomers are welcome. For more details see Pauline Morgan (021 777 2777) or Lynn Edwards (021 784 5645)

### **WANTED:**

**Rupert Annuals, 1936 - 1975**

**see Dave Hardy, or ring 021 777 1802**

(not science fiction? Have you ever looked at a Rupert book - ?)



**ConFiction: the 48th World SF Convention, The Hague, Holland; 23-27 August.**

**or: WHAT DID YOU DO DURING THE SUPERPRIX, MISS?**

Imagine a large, echoing, marble railway station. Take away the trains and you have some idea what the convention centre in The Hague is like. Lure inside 706 British travellers, 556 Americans and about a thousand assorted other nationalities and you have ConFiction.

In one corner of the huge complex of varied-size halls and rooms is a small bar equipped with comfortable seats. Within it the atmosphere is very reminiscent of a British Eastercon transported to a foreign land. As most of the programme items are in English it is only once you venture beyond the Centre that you realise this is not Liverpool, or Brighton, or Birmingham. Cars travel the wrong way round corners, trams charge along pre-destined tracks and there is an imminent danger of being run down by a swarm of bicycles.

Bored? Hungry? The beach is only a tram-ride away. Relatively cheap eating places line the sand (which is combed nightly), and for your entertainment an extravaganza of glittering explosions light the air. The Convention coincides with the International Firework Competition and spectacular displays illuminate the skies of Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

A must for a foodie is a Rijsttafel at one of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants – but don't eat for 24 hours beforehand. More dishes than even the most ardent trencherman could imagine (or finish) appear on the table accompanied by two-foot long prawn crackers, all for 30 Dfl. (about £10) per head.

But what about the Convention, the programme items? you ask. Forget them. Most of the participants did. Barely anything appeared as in the Programme Guide. Panel moderators uttered heart-rending pleas for volunteers from the audience and at least two items were taken over by ordinary fans when the advertised speakers failed to show up.

I missed most of the items I intended to see, being distracted en route by interesting people, though I did catch most of the wonderful *Science Fiction Blues*, a splendid performance by Brian Aldiss, Ken Campbell and Petronella Whitfield. And please, will someone get Geoff Ryman to repeat his talk about 'The Roots of Evil in Childhood', and Dave Langford his 'Fun with Senseless Violence', and Bob Shaw his 'Serious Scientific Talk' (an investigation into corn circles, I believe). I missed them all. I also missed the Hugo Award Ceremony, but who cares?

I renewed old acquaintances, made a few new friends and enjoyed my weekend. I wonder where I can flee to during the next SuperPrix?

*Pauline also writes: How many people went to the Guy Gavriel Kay signing session at W.H.Smith on Wednesday 29 August? How many people even knew it was on? So much for Penguin's publicity for an author they are supposed to be promoting! Not even a notice on the door...*

## The Orbit Party

by Bernie Evans

Imagine it: August 23rd; a hot, sultry summer evening in London; you enter the cool, dark depths of the crypt below St. Martin in the Fields. The coolness envelopes you. Such bliss! Such self-delusion! It was dark (well, dimly-lit), but it was hotter down there than in the street, and getting hotter by the minute. The reason? Orbit's 'Not the Worldcon but meet the authors anyway' party. Free booze, free food, most of Orbit's authors, lots of professional critics, a sprinkling of 'those who matter' from other publishers, and the occasional familiar fannish face made this a great way for a fan to spend an evening.

John Jarrold looked uncomfortably hot in a smart suit; several other smart suits had unfamiliar faces. Were these the target audience? I wondered. This party was held to impress someone, I'm sure, and it wasn't the bulk of SF fandom, or the book-buying public, because they weren't there, but who cared? I didn't. I was just there to enjoy myself, as were most of the others in attendance.

We were met at the door with a free pen, badge and T-shirt, and had to 'sign-in'. This, and the number of friendly familiar faces just beyond, gave the occasion a convention atmosphere. The crowded room, and the fight to get to the bar (it was so hot that beer was *really* welcome), served to add to that impression. The closest I can come to describing it would be to liken it to the Andromeda parties we all know and enjoy from Friday nights at Novacon. Anne Gay, Chris Morgan, Iain Banks and Storm Constantine were just some of the familiar faces. No talks, no signing sessions, just roam around, mingle and chat, and drink and eat. These publishers know how to give a party.

I was told that Gamma crowned the evening by taking the leftover food and giving it to the inhabitants of 'Cardboard City'. I wish we'd stayed around and seen that; it seems a fitting end, somehow, to an evening of pure self-indulgence and enjoyment.

### **Not Another Party!**

Collins Publishers, in association with Starburst Magazine, are holding a party on Saturday 10 November, starting at 1pm, at the Café Munchen, St. Giles High Street, London WC2 (which they say is open to all), to mark the climax of Clive Barker's promotional tour for the paperback of his latest bestseller, *The Great and Secret Show* and the UK release of *Nightbreed*. Details: 081 902 1818.

# The Jophan Report

by Martin Tudor

News and Gossip from the world of Science Fiction, this month consisting exclusively of Martin Tudor's famed **Jophan Report**, including the Hugo Winners as announced at the recent Worldcon in Holland.

## THE HUGO AWARD WINNERS

Kathy Gale, senior fiction editor for Pan books, has been promoted to Editorial Director. She will be responsible for hard & soft cover sf, fantasy, horror and other areas of fiction.

The results of the 1990 Hugo Awards as announced at the world sf convention in Holland are as follows:

### Best Novel:

- 1 *HYPERION* by Dan Simmons (Doubleday/Foundation, Bantam Spectra)
- 2 *A FIRE IN THE SUN* by George Alec Effinger (Doubleday / Foundation)
- 3 *PRENTICE ALVIN* by Orson Scott Card (Tor)
- 4 *THE BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS* by Poul Anderson (Tor)
- 5 *GRASS* by Sheri S Tepper (Doubleday / Foundation)

### Best Novelette:

- 1 "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another" by Robert Silverberg (*IASFM*, June 89 & *TIME GATE*, Baen)
- 2 "For I have Touched the Sky" by Mike Resnick (*F&SF*, Dec 89)
- 3 "Everything But Honour" by George Alec Effinger (*IASFM*, Feb 89 & *WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN*, Vol. 1, Bantam Spectra)
- 4 "At the Rialto" by Connie Willis (*Omni*, Oct 89 & *THE MICROVERSE*, Bantam Spectra)
- 5 "The Price of Oranges" by Nancy Kress (*IASFM*, Apr 89)
- 6 "Dogwalker" - Orson Scott Card (*IASFM*, Nov 89)

### Best Short Story:

- 1 "Boobs" by Suzy McKee Charnas (*IASFM*, Jul 89)
- 2 "Lost Boys" by Orson Scott Card (*F&SF*, Oct 89)
- 3 "Computer Friendly" by Eileen Gunn (*IASFM*, June 89)
- 4 "The Return of William Proxmire" by Larry Niven (*WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN*, Vol. 1, Bantam Spectra)

- 5 "The Edge of the World" by Michael Swanwick (*FULL SPECTRUM II*, Doubleday/Foundation)
- 6 "Dori Bangs" by Bruce Sterling (*IASFM*, Sep 89)

### Best Novella:

1. "The Mountains of Mourning" by Lois McMaster Bujold (*Analog*, May 89 & *BORDERS OF INFINITY*, Baen)
- 2 "The Father of Stones" by Lucius Shepard (*IASFM*, Sep 89 & *THE FATHER OF STONES*, WSFA Press)
- 3 "A Touch of Lavender" by Megan Lindholm (*IASFM*, Nov 89)
- 4 "Time-Out" - Connie Willis (*IASFM*, July 1989)
- 5 "Tiny Tango" by Judith Moffett (*IASFM*, Feb 89)

### Best Dramatic Presentation:

- 1 *INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE*
- 2 *THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN*
- 3 *BATMAN*
- 4 *FIELD OF DREAMS*
- 5 *THE ABYSS*

### Best Non-Fiction Books:

- 1 *THE WORLD BEYOND THE HILL* by Alexei & Cory Panshin (Tarcher)
- 2 *GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE* by Robert A Heinlein, edited by Virginia Heinlein (Del Ray)
- 3 *DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD* by Ursula K Le Guin (Grove)
- 4 *ASTOUNDING DAYS* by Arthur C. Clarke (Ballantine, Bantam Spectra)
- 5 *HARLAN ELLISON'S WATCHING* by Harlan Ellison (Underwood Miller)
- 6 *NOREASCON 3 SOUVENIR BOOK* edited by Greg Thokar (MCFI Press)

### Best Professional Editor:

- 1 Gardner Dozois
- 2 Ellen Datlow
- 3 David G Hartwell
- 4 Beth Meacham
- 5 Edward L. Ferman,
- 6 Stanley Schmidt
- 7 Charles C Ryan

Best Professional Artist:

- 1 Don Maitz
- 2 Thomas Canty
- 3 Michael Whelan
- 4 Jim Burns
- 5 David Cherry
- 6 Tom Kidd
- 7 James Gurney

Best Semiprozine:

- 1 *LOCUS* ed. Charlie Brown
- 2 *SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE* ed. Andrew I Porter
- 3 *INTERZONE* ed. David Pringle
- 4 *THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION* ed. Kathryn Cramer, David G Hartwell and Gordon Van Gelder
- 5 *THRUST* ed. D Douglas Fratz

Best Fan Writer:

- 1 Dave Langford
- 2 Mike Glycer
- 3 Leslie Turek
- 4 Arthur D Hlavaty
- 5 Evelyn Leeper

Best Fan Artist:

- 1 Stu Shiffman
- 2 Teddy Harvia
- 3 Taral Wayne
- 4 Merle Insinga
- 5 Joe Mayhew
- 6 Steve Fox

Best Fanzine:

- 1 *THE MAD 3 PARTY* ed. Leslie Turek.
- 2 *FILE 770* ed Mike Glycer
- 3 *LAN'S LANTERN* ed. George "Lan" Laskowski
- 4 *PIRATE JENNY* ed. Pat Mueller
- 5 *FOSFAX* ed. Timothy Lane

John W Campbell Award (not a Hugo):

- 1 Kristine Kathryn Rusch (2)
  - 2 Allen Steele (2)
  - 3 Nancy Collins (1)
  - 4 John Cramer (1)
  - 5 Katherine Neville (1)
- (1) first year of eligibility, (2) second & final year of eligibility

Best Original Artwork (not a Hugo):

- 1 *RIMRUNNERS* cover by Don Maitz (Warner/Questar)
- 2 *HYPERION* cover by Gary Ruddell (Doubleday/Foundation, Bantam Spectra)
- 3 *PARADISE* cover by Michael Whelan
- 4 *THE RENEGADES OF PERN* cover by Michael Whelan (Del Rey).

- 5 *QUOZL* cover by James Gurney (Ace)
- 6 *THE STRESS OF HER REGARD* cover by James Gurney (Ace)

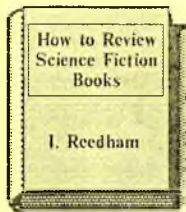
'No Award' came in last in each category.

*CONFACTS & ConFictions*, the convention newsletter at the 48th World SF Convention in the Netherlands, reported that when the ConFiction registration desk closed on Sunday 26 August, the total membership in all categories had reached 3,029. The con had 2,339 full attending members. Britain had the largest national contingent with 709, followed by the USA with 556 (almost half of the 993 attending members from the US failed to show), the Netherlands were represented by 360 full attending members. A further 652 day members came from the Netherlands with an additional 400 coming to see the Perry Rhodan event. The convention was delighted to welcome 105 Eastern European members, which included 41 from Poland and 33 from East Germany, the small contingent from the USSR (and their Siberian vodka) were also made most welcome by other attendees.

ConFrancisco will be the 51st World SF Convention and will be held in San Francisco in 1993. Although San Francisco was favourite there were surprisingly strong showings from both Hawaii and Zagreb. Many pundits felt that if Hawaii had appeared on the ballot (instead of being a write-in bid) they would almost certainly have won, but the strength of support at the convention for the Zagreb bid caught most experts by surprise.

Because of this support Zagreb have decided that despite losing out to San Francisco in the Site Selection ballot they will still hold a convention in 1993. After hearing that the European bid had come third in the ballot Barbara, a gopher from Scotland, suggested to Krsto Mazuranić that the Yugoslavians should go ahead with their plans for a truly international con in 1993.

After canvassing opinion throughout the con Krsto announced plans for a European equivalent of the US Nasfic to be held over the first weekend in July and most likely to be called 'Tulum' (which is student slang in Zagreb for party). Krsto told *CRITICAL WAVE* that offers of active help has come in from all over Europe as well as from North America. He added that, in the tradition of winning worldcon bids, they will honour pre-supporters and site selection voters. Further details should be available shortly from: Zagreb in 1993, c/o SFera, Ivanicgradska 41 A, 41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia.



# 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.

SPOCK'S WORLD by Diane Duane; Pan; 310 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by David Wake.

Vulcan wants to leave the Federation, or at least some Vulcans want to leave, and a vote on secession from the United Federation of Planets is organised. And, guess what, the Enterprise and her crew is called upon to transport various dignitaries (including Spock's daddy, which will make my two year old daughter very happy once she learns to read) and to give testimony themselves. What raises this story from simply being a tie-in novel is the interspersed history of Spock's world which starts from pre-history and works up to today (23rd century today). The modern day sections include enough references to old episodes to keep the Star Trek continuity book writers happy; it was written before 'The Final Frontier' though. This is very much an SF novel in the world building tradition and very well done too (although Vulcan is very like Herbert's Anakis - well beyond the need to take sunscreen and pack a bucket and spade). The Vulcans seem to have suffered a character shift, but all those sour grapes aside I couldn't put it down.

RUSALKA by C J Cherryh; Methuen; 374 pages; £14.99 Hardback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book is a little disappointing but it is difficult to pinpoint why. It begins promisingly enough, introducing Pyetr, a young rascal who gets into trouble through yet another prank, and Sasha, the unlucky nephew of an innkeeper. Together they flee the town of Vojvoda into desolate woods haunted by the rusalka, the spirit of a drowned girl. They begin as totally incompatible companions, Pyetr a complete sceptic, regarding himself as a worldly man, Sasha fearful of offending the supernatural creatures he knows lurk behind every bush. With the wizard Ulanets, the rusalka's father, they face a number of manifestations from Russian folklore, Pyetr gradually coming to accept that his convictions were wrong, Sasha gaining in confidence as he discovers that wizards are people whose wishes come true. Perhaps the book is too long for its material, perhaps the economy of characters slows it down but once Pyetr and Sasha meet Ulanets the pace begins to wane. Interesting, but not one of Cherryh's best.

SILVERHAIR THE WANDERER by Diana Paxton; NEL; 310 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

As a sequel to *Lady of Light, Lady of Darkness* this suffers from middle-book syndrome. Grief stricken after the disappearance of his twin sister, Farin takes to the road with vague ideas of searching for her in a post-catastrophe, future fantasy world. His purpose soon fades and we are left with a series of episodes in the life of Farin, now called Silverhair, spanning eighteen years. The story-telling is good but continuity is lacking, and as a novel it becomes aimless. Perhaps Silverhair learns something in his travels though what it is unclear. What the book does do is to pass the time before the next big event scheduled in the *Chronicles of Vestria*. A disappointing volume for someone of Paxton's skill.

MAD MOON OF DREAMS by Brian Lumley; Headline; 248 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the third adventure of David Hero and Eldin the Wanderer in Lovecraft's Dreamlands. The moon is drawing close to the Dreamlands and where its cold light shines people mysteriously disappear. It falls to Hero and Eldin to discover that the imprisoned Great Old Ones, Dorn and Mmogquah, are stirring in their sleep, and plan to free themselves by smashing earth and moon together. Hero and Eldin must warn the world and gather an unlikely alliance of all the heroes and villains of the Dreamlands, in order to defeat this menace that threatens them all. This is the best of the series so far, especially the part about the invasion of the moon.

RING AROUND THE SUN by Clifford D Simak; Mandarin; 205 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

A welcome reissue of this 1952 novel, this is a good example of the speculative SF of that era; the story and characterisations easily overcoming the few anachronisms inevitable with its 1977 setting. The title refers to the existence of alternate Earths, separated from one another by time. From one of these the next stage in human evolution, mutants, are trying to save humanity from self-destruction. In its early stages the plan appears to be total economic warfare waged on Mankind by agents unknown, and powerful interest groups prepare to fight back... Told around the life of writer Jay Vickers, a powerful suspense story evolves. Very "Cold War" in its conception and attitudes, but none the worse for that.

THE MOTION OF LIGHT IN WATER by Samuel R Delany; Paladin; 581 pages; £6.99 1ge p/back. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

I'm not suprised that this won a Hugo award for the best non-fiction book. It's a volume of memoirs concerning, in particular his marriage to Marilyn Hacker (a poet) in New York in the early 1960s. Much more importantly, it's a beautiful and highly perceptive self-analysis of Delany's formative years (his teens and early twenties) that made him into the person and the writer he is. He had to come to terms with being black, gay, a writer, dyslexic, mentally disturbed. Described in great poetic detail are his meetings with Albert Einstein, W H Auden, Bob Dylan and a host of gay lovers, his struggles against poverty, and his early successes as a writer of SF. Throughout it all, Delany's naivety (he was only nineteen he married) goes hand in hand with his mega-intelligence. It's an entertaining and moving book - a far easier read than its size and the author's reputation might suggest.

ANGEL STATION by Walter Jon Williams; Orbit; 393 pages; £12.95 Hardback. Reviewed by Carol Morton.

A lovely space opera yarn about trading families that trade between human planets and space stations. Ubu and Maria, genetically engineered "children" of Pasco, try their hand at trading using Maria's ability to interface with most types of software. This ability causes trouble for them, they have to flee local human space, and once in deep space find a race of aliens that enter into trade agreements with them, much to the chagrin of the other families. An excellent "fun" story, larger than life characters and an exaggerated plotline that making entertaining reading. Not to be taken seriously, even the Barbie-doll bimbo on the cover adds to the whole.

THERE ARE DOORS by Gene Wolf; Orbit; 313 pages; £4.50 paperback. Reviewed by Peter Day.

Mr Green, a man from our world, falls in love with Lara. She disappears, leaving a somewhat cryptic note, and he sets off to find her. His search involves him in a fast-moving series of bizarre adventures - in and out of various mental institutions, into conflict with a schizophrenic gunman, pursued by the police, back and forth between alternate universes. None of this seems to lead him to the elusive Lara, despite his keeping on having tantalising glimpses, in various guises, of someone who might be her. But he clings tenaciously to his dream, until he finally succeeds, after a fashion, in his quest. I don't know quite what to make of this book. After the first few pages I thought that I wasn't going to like it, but it grew on me in an insidious fashion until by the end I was almost hooked. Never a dull or superficial author, Gene Wolf always puts his own unique twist on everything he tackles, but this book has a much lighter feel to it than usual. Full of action, yet unashamedly romantic, it resolutely refuses to fit into any particular genre, and leaves the reader with a strange impression that there might be hidden depths to it that he has somehow failed to grasp. Very readable, though, and entertaining in its own way.

THE LAST COIN by James P Blaylock; Grafton; 399 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is a highly entertaining story based on the collecting of a certain thirty pieces of silver - the only time they were together previously evil events culminated in Judas Iscariot's betrayal. The collector, Pennyman, does so through vicious means, killing off the "Caretakers" (those responsible for keeping a coin safe - and apart) until he has over twenty of the coins. His search for the rest leads him to Seal Beach in California, and Andrew, a dreamer who, with his relatives is attempting to set up a restaurant. Suspicious of Pennyman, Andrew and close friend Pickett try to find out what is going on and become too involved in the mysteries, which take an unexpected turn. A wonderful, complex, roller-coaster of a book climaxing in an intriguing confrontation and outcome. Buy this.

THE CHILD GARDEN by Geoff Ryman; Unwin; 388 pages; £3.99 paperback. Reviewed by Al Johnston.

A deserved winner of the Arthur C Clarke award, this excellent novel is a kind of 1994 for the AIDS generation. At some indeterminate time in the future cancer is cured. This is a mistake, as without sub-malignant clusters human longevity is halved. Revolution follows and a society evolves where education and memory rely on viruses; childhood is all but abolished as people are "Read" at ten; their mind-set becoming part of the governing "Consensus". All this forms the background to the life of Milena Shibush, orphan actress, director astronaut and orchestrator of the Divine Comedy, produced for the revolution centennial. Fiercely resistant to the viruses, Milena has to live the hard way and is doomed to be manipulated by the Consensus and return Cancer to the world. Often hard work to read, this book is well worth the effort with its evocations of a greenhouse world and its purple, photosynthesising inhabitants.

FEDERATION WORLD by James White; Orbit; 283 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by David T Cooper.

Beth and Martin work for the Federation of Galactic Sentients as First Contact Specialists. They contact alien races and offer them citizenship. This allows those chosen to move to Federation World, which is a modified Orbitville, to grow together in peace and harmony. The idea of a galactic rest-home for everybody seems a bit silly, however the tales of first contact are handled in White's usual style. As in his *Sector General* stories, the snats are the weird and wonderful aliens. One for *Sector General* fans.