

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

A Very Happy Christmas!

There is no programme as such this month. Instead, as mentioned last month, those members who wish will be having a Chinese meal together. The venue is the *New Happy Gathering* (43a Station Road) at 8pm on Wednesday 19 December (PLEASE NOTE DATE). If you haven't already put your name down, please ring our Chairman, Chris Murphy on 552 8912 AT ONCE!

There is however an alternative event: a booze-up at the *Sack of Potatoes* (on Aston University Campus). No need to tell anyone if you are going to that – just turn up on the night, which is Friday, 14th. Whichever you attend (either or both – there's no law against it), have a good time. . .

AND DON'T FORGET: The January meeting is the AGM, at which a new Committee will be elected, plus an Auction. So bring along books and other items, won't you?

*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: Chris Murphy (021 552 8912).

*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 University Challenge

SHOCK! HORROR!! UNIVERSITY WINS DEBATE!!!

The Birmingham University SF and Fantasy Society broke its duck (a white one with a yellow beak) this month. The motion was: 'This House believes that modern SF has become an American literature. Before the debate, the audience's vote was: For - 12. Against - 9. Abstentions - 6 (this included the University team!) The University team consisted of Mike Ibeji and Mark Ridley, against the motion. The Brum Group was represented by Anne Gay and Pauline Morgan - for, of course.

Anne started, saying that the majority of SF authors today seem to be 'Damn Yankees'. She went on to list a number of them including Philip K. Dick, whom she described as "well-known American and corpse", and added that more books are published in the US, per capita.

SF started out being British, she said, with H. G. Wells and others, but it was an American, Hugo Gernsback, who changed the name from 'scientific romance'. Magazines are still mainly American, and are distributed with UK prices on their covers.

British SF, Anne said, seems to be based on cataclysm - the real world where something has gone wrong. American SF is expansionist, full of technological optimism. We believe our own paranoia - that we shall go out "not with a bang but with a Wimpey".

Most publishing houses are based in the USA; awards go to Americans because most voters are American. Discrimination is rife, as the Yanks are downright prejudiced! What America is really trying to do, said Anne, is expand their empire but without much blood loss; they suck the blood from UK publishers etc. SF is supposed to be a universal literature, but soon we'll be an outpost - like Hawaii, but without the earthquakes (hopefully). *End of 10 minutes.*

Mike started what he called his "Fifth Annual Report" by also listing some authors, mainly British, some of whom he said were no longer writing. The same applied to US authors, probably because some were dead - but their books are still on the shelves. British authors are selling; not in mega numbers, but... There aren't many UK editors of SF who are known by name (Kathy Gale is one), but they are buying stories. He named three British magazines which publish (some) SF.

So, said Mike, not only the Americans but the British are selling and publishing SF - and our SF has a definite British flavour (eg. that of Terry Pratchett). If SF has become an American literature, how come there were more Europeans than Americans at the Dutch Worldcon? In the comics field, too, Brits are turning US SF-type comics on their heads; if we can do that *there*, SF can't be an American literature.

End of 10 minutes.

Pauline said that our opponents had made all the points that reinforced our arguments! Why, she asked, do we walk into Andromeda and see nothing but American books? There are very few purely British publishing houses - they are owned by US publishers. She named Gollancz and Penguin, among others. US publishers have offices here. Why?

We can't sell our books in the States, she said. This is because the Yanks won't put up with proper English! If it isn't written in their funny English, it has to be re-set for them. The British magazine *New Worlds* introduced the 'New Wave' in SF, but has now been taken over by the US as cyberpunk. *End of five minutes.*

Mark said that he wrote his speech in 20 minutes that evening, then seemed to get confused with last year's Debate by admitting that comics are not the cutting edge of SF! But US comics, he said, are getting close to rehashing their British counterparts. Japan is a huge market for SF films; perhaps next year we shall say that SF is becoming Japanese?

We have to remember, said Mark, that Britain is only about this big (a small distance between thumb and forefinger), and we are not the only other nation writing SF; he mentioned Stanislaw Lem. Then asked whether SF has in fact become an American form; Wells and Verne may have started it, but it was an American who gave it the name. Does this mean that it has always been American?

After a Beer Break, Chairman Chris Murphy asked for 'Points from the Floor'.

Chris Chivers referred to a parallel with SF films. "The Yanks strip us of our knowledge and expertise, take our technicians and even our films, and make them into American films." There was discussion of this point. >

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CONTINUED

David Wake pointed out that some small British presses, such as Drunken Dragon, sell well in the US. Pauline Morgan countered that this is because it is the American collectors of first editions who are the ones with the money.

Bill McCabe asked whether, if American SF is the cross that everyone says it is, it can be called literature? Pauline pointed out that in US colleges and universities, courses are held in SF, so it must be.

Andrew White said that the Brits and the Spanish tried to dominate long before the Americans, and that spelling is trivial. Pauline disagreed: we don't care about US spelling, but they do, and either we change it or they aren't interested! I asked whether anyone could tell me who, outside the States, with the possible exception of Arthur C. Clarke (who is no longer very British) is writing real, hard science fiction, of the type epitomised by, say, Gregory Benford, Greg Bear, Charles Sheffield (OK, he was born in England), Ben Bova, et al. Someone mentioned Bob Shaw, whom I accept, but the point remains. . .

Anne then summed up for the motion. We need to get the Brits to respect the homegrown product. We should be proud to be British, but also need to write stuff that is more uplifting, and that everybody wants to read – something universal, to counter US imperialism.

Mike summed up against: SF is not entirely being written by Americans. English and other authors

NEW MEMBER: NOVEMBER

Last month we were joined by Colin Mee, who lives in Edgbaston and heard of the Brum Group via the University Society (remember them? – they're the ones who trounced us at the Debate).

Colin says his favourite author is Jack Vance, and that's about all we know about him for now.

Now, how about all members making a New Year Resolution to introduce a new member in 1991? Our numbers at meetings seem to be dropping, so unless you want subscriptions or door charges to increase – help increase our membership!

have to travel to the US to sell, but this doesn't stop them writing very British-style stuff. We should be proud to be British, but we should also be proud not to be American!

A final vote was then taken by the audience, and counted at:

For – 11 Against – 14 Abstentions – 3. (Since the University team now voted Against, the swing is not as great as it may first appear!)

The mathematically-inclined among you will see that the audience consisted of 28 people, of whom many were from the University – not a great turnout by the Brum Group. However, those who didn't attend missed an entertaining and often thought-provoking evening.

I found the point about the insularity of the Americans particularly interesting. It has nothing to do with SF but earlier in the day I caught part of a programme on TV – an American sitcom called *Three's Company*, about a young man sharing a flat (sorry, apartment) with two dolly birds. The situation seemed familiar, and when a mean-looking older flatmate was named as George Roper I realised that it was a watered-down version of our own *Man About the House*, transposed to the States. But why? Have we ever bought an American TV series set in Denver, only to remake it set in Dudley? Surely part of the attraction is to see the way of life in another country? Not to the Yanks, obviously!

COMPETITION WINNER

Obviously all our members (those who bother to attend meetings) are rich enough to buy their own drinks – or is it just that none of you watch sci-fi movies? Surely not. More likely you don't bother to read your Newsletter. Whatever the reason, I received NO entries for last month's competition. However, talking to Tony Morton at the bar, he said that he thought the answer was about 5½ minutes – which is exactly right! So Tony won himself a free drink.

Neither have I received any Top Ten SF book lists from members. So I give you fair warning: unless I receive some contributions, my last Newsletter before I retire will be much reduced in content. . .

The Wedding Time Traveller by Tim Groome



"Why not wear this tonight, Herr Schickelgruber?"

THE CHAIRMAN'S BIT

Well, time has rolled by and here we are at the end of another year. It has seen some interesting meetings for the Group. We've had the controversial dowser, Michael Guest, David Brin's marathon two-hour talk/dialogue, and one of our own Honorary Presidents, Brian Aldiss. Other meetings included a discussion on the future of the group (stand by for more of the same at next month's AGM) and the Debate with Birmingham University SF Society, which they won.

Back in February I said I wanted to carry on Bernie's policy of having some 'home-grown' meetings. In fact the only meeting which actually fell into this category was the discussion. If I were continuing as Chairman I would try to provide more home-grown material in next year's programme. Perhaps you can let the new Committee know how you feel about this idea.

In February I also asked for more contributions to this Newsletter. There was a better response than we expected - mainly because some of you felt very strongly about the meeting on dowsing. However, the level of contributions has now gone back to normal (ie. abysmal). Despite the best efforts of various editors down the years, a Newsletter currently produced to the highest standards ever, and a readership who write for fanzines etc., it seems that this situation is unlikely to change. Perhaps you deserve to be shown what the Newsletter would be like if the Editor didn't bother either. . .

We have had a second enforced move this year, thanks to the closure of the New Imperial Hotel. Birmingham is now supposed to be a 'convention city', which means (to some) a place where hordes of men in suits come to spend other people's money. Cynicism aside, it is a fact that all our potential city centre venues have raised their prices sharply for meeting rooms. It is no coincidence that Novacon has also been pushed out of the city centre. The venue issue is likely to be raised at the AGM, so come along if you have views on this.

This piece seems to have taken on a rather negative tone, but it really hasn't been a bad year. Unfortunately it will be my only one as Chairman, as I am standing down for personal reasons. (No, I don't have to march into Andromeda like Patrick McGoohan in *The Prisoner* and slam a resignation letter down next to Rog's coffee.) I'd like to wish the next Chairman the best of luck, and to thank this year's Committee for all their hard work. Merry Christmas and a Happy New year to all of you!

The Christmas Puzzle

Here is a puzzle, supplied as usual by **Stan Eling**, to keep you occupied over Christmas. There will be a valuable prize (but we haven't yet decided what!) for the person with the best answer, so do have a go. The rules are:

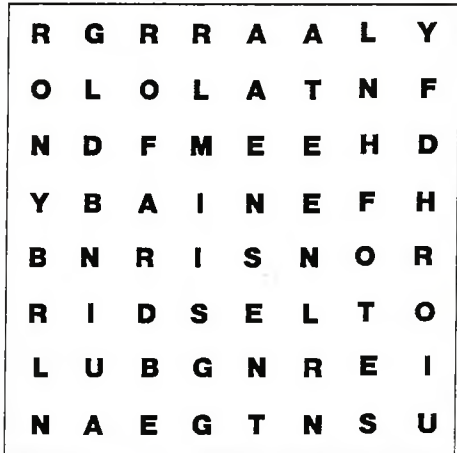
By a series of 'knight's moves', make a tour of the letters, visiting every one once only, and thus discover the surnames of eight SF authors.

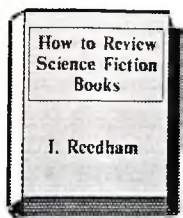
Start at the 'R' (top left-hand corner) and finish at the 'D' (which is a knight's move from it).

For those unfamiliar with Chess, the knight's move is from corner to corner of any rectangle three squares by two (for 'square', read 'letter' in this case), of which its own square is a corner square. Here are a couple of clues (don't read them if you want to make it more difficult!):

The **first name** is the author of *The Wild Shore*.

The **last name** is the author of *The Space Eater*.





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.

DREAMS OF GODS AND MEN by W T Quick; Orbit; 302 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Arius was a God and, as Gods go, he was insane. Arius's artificial intelligence was combined with the anarchic mind of Bill Norton to create the metamatrix. In a world gone mad, with corporate wars, genetically mutated killers and renegade AIs, Cally the ex-wife of Iceberg Berg, and Toshi his Samurai body-guard, once again do battle against the Demon Star. In W T Quick's sequel to *Dreams of Flesh and Sand* the futuristic nightmare of the American Dream is taken to its logical conclusion, with high technology coming to dominate humans in the real time world. The dangers of artificial intelligence are woven into a battle between good and evil with Cally and Toshi holding the key to the destruction of the Demon Star. *Dreams of Gods and Men* is one of the new style of Science Fiction novels that is rapidly gaining ground in the computer age.

THE FIRE WORM by Ian Watson; Grafton; 240 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

These days Watson's fiction is a marvellous blend of SF, fantasy and horror, or an alternation between the three. *The Fire Worm* has a near-future setting in which a psychiatrist hypnotises patients to discover how their past lives have upset their present ones, but he has an alter ego who writes horror novels. There are long digressions into the past, with some nauseating scenes and huge amounts of originality and cleverness, as a complex jigsaw of odd elements is assembled. It's his strongest novel to date.

SADAR'S KEEP by Midori Snyder; Unwin; 362 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

When Zorah the Fire Queen murdered two of her sister Queens and drove the other into exile, she broke up the Old Oran magic. Zorah has ordered that any child showing a trace of the old magic is to be executed, but enough children escape and join the rebel New Moon forces. Jobber the only remaining fire element and Lirral an air element are joined by Shadwyn an earth element. They now only need a water element to be able to form a new Queen's Knot and challenge Zorah for the throne. They find and join the New Moon rebels only to find them under siege by Zorah and her Silean forces. An interesting story from a new author, some parts are not original but they are well worked. Recommended.

MOONHEART by Charles de Lint; Pan; 485 pages; £7.99 lge paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Lots of people (and creatures) get killed in this fantasy - some by guns, some by primitive weapons and some by magic. And one of the heroes is a large house, situated most of the time in Ottawa, Canada. It's a long, complex novel, combining the present day with the remote past - things we know with monsters we'd rather not meet. Amerindian magic plays a big part, though the beginnings of the story are in ancient Wales. *Moonheart* is the first of de Lint's novels to be published in Britain. He's a talented writer who has produced a good read with some cleverness of plot, despite a slow start, some derivative bits and a few scenes badly handled.

SECOND VARIETY by Philip K. Dick; Grafton; 493 pages; £5.99 lge paperback.

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This is volume two of Dick's (almost) complete collected short stories in chronological order, and it's a lot stronger than volume one. This would figure as most of these stories were written around 1953 and he was becoming a stronger writer all the time. His philosophical ideas were already surfacing at this early stage of his career and some of these stories are extremely fresh now. "Imposter", "Human Is", "Small Town" and "Breakfast at Twilight" have stood the test of time very well. Dick's great theme of "What is human?" is in evidence here in "Human Is" and "Imposter", and his notes from 1976 make very interesting reading - "It's not what you look like or what planet you were born on, it's how kind you are, the quality of kindness to me distinguishes us from rocks and sticks and metal, and will forever, whatever shape we take, wherever we go, whatever we become." Another thing that strikes me is that even in this early period Dick used ordinary people with ordinary jobs as the characters to whom all these weird things happen, and you immediately identify with them. It's a fascinating series for the Dick collector, newcomers may be better of seeking out a "best of" to start with. Can't wait for volume three.

CHUNG KUO, Book One: The Middle Kingdom by David Wingrove; NEL; 718 pp; £9.99 p/b. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the start of a mammoth project and attempts to encompass a vast panorama. By the twenty-second century the world has become a Chinese empire. The rulers live with the kind of security and luxury reminiscent of our concepts of the ancient dynasties, but with the trappings of technology. The rest of the population struggles for existence in a vast planet-wide city unable to leave it - the farmlands providing food for the masses are taboo to the ordinary citizen. It is not a pleasant place to be if you are not rich. Every elitist government has its opponents and this is no exception. Some come from within the ruling ranks as part of an inevitable vying for power, others from the remnants of the European business community. These latter want permission to expand into space, to be able to set up their own colonies away from Chinese influence. Their are several complex plot strands interwoven within the whole and though each has been considered in detail, to have them all in one volume makes it unwieldy. Perhaps Wingrove has been a little too ambitious.

THE BLOOD OF ROSES by Tanith Lee; Legend; 678 pages; £14.99 hardback. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

In a remote forest community, Mechall, the heir to the lord, is crippled in a bizarre magical attack. Many years later he is killed, but rises from the dead. He is taken away by the mysterious priest Amelen, who is certainly not the Christian he pretends to be. Various magical beings do (apparently) incomprehensible things. Later sections of the book tell the same tale from the viewpoint of the other characters. Everything is explained eventually, but in some cases it is 500 pages later. The structure of the book makes it very difficult to read and get into the story. Tanith Lee fanatics may find it rewarding.

THE ORBIT SCIENCE FICTION YEAR BOOK 3 ed by David S Garnett; Orbit; 341 pp; £4.99 p/b. Reviewed by Mick Evans.

I found it quite ironic, writing this review the day after the *Brum* Group debate about the Americanisation of modern SF, to find so many American authors featured in a British anthology, but at least we have a foreword by Iain Banks and a brief article at the end by Brian Aldiss. The Orbit anthology has been one of the better ones around for the last couple of years and with a list of contributors like David Brin, Orson Scott Card, Lucius Shepherd, Robert Silverberg and Bruce Sterling this was unlikely to be an exception. I particularly liked "At the Rialto" by Connie Willis (a hotel convention on quantum physics), "Dori Bangs" by Bruce Sterling (a fantasy on two characters from the late sixties, rock & roll writer Lester Bangs a columnist for Rolling Stone when it was worth reading and Dori Seda a cartoonist of the underground variety), "Surrender" by Lucius Shepherd (a vicious attack on American foreign policy) and "The Asension Solution" by Robert Silverberg (a delightful story written with an affectionate nod towards Isaac Asimov). A good collection, with the added attraction (?) of John Clute's review of the science fiction novels of the year, deciphering the convoluted terminology of which will give the reader hours of "fun".

TAKE BACK PLENTY by Colin Greenland; Unwin; 359 pages; £6.99 paperback. Reviewed by Alice Lawson.

In *Take Back Plenty* Colin Greenland gives us a competently written, workmanlike space opera, but little else. His story of an "up from the bottom" everyday kind of spacewoman, (a faint but pointless nod in the direction of feminism) "just doing her job" and getting caught up in plots to free humankind from the control of almost godlike aliens, is nothing new. The motivation of the characters may be a little less selfless and have more up to date cynicism than that of characters in the traditional 50's space opera but the end result is the same. Greenland also interferes with the great strength of the space opera, its narrative flow, in the shape of reminiscences by Tabitha (the heroine) to Alice, her ships "persona". The one area where space opera can be said to succeed (when done well), is in the ability to make you keep turning the page. By disturbing the narrative flow Greenland loses this ability, doing himself and his book no favours.

TOADY by Mark Morris; Corgi; 702 pages; £4.99 paperback. Reviewed by Michael Jones.

It was a bad day for the horror club when they let Toady join. He induced them to hold a seance in an old haunted house, and they unleashed an evil supernatural force which came close to destroying them all. Only they could contain it again and first they had to escape from a netherworld of illusion and despair. I felt a strong Clive Barker influence at work here, but the author's fantastic imagination is all his own and has produced a truly remarkable book, which held my interest until the very last page. A must for horror fans.

THE GATES OF EDEN by Brian Stableford; NEL; 176 pages; £3.50 paperback. Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Xenobiologist Lee Caretta is co-opted on a mission to an Earth-like planet which should be suitable for colonisation, except that the first landing party are all dead under suspicious circumstances. What he finds is a world where evolution has taken a different direction, with very dangerous consequences. This is typical Brian Stableford - long on talk and short on action, but with some very thought-provoking ideas cleverly worked out. It may not be his best work but is nevertheless a workmanlike and interesting novel. well worth a read.

VISIONS OF SPACE by David A Hardy; Paper Tiger; 176 pages; £10.95 1ge paperback

Reviewed by Tony Morton

The expectations of mankind beyond this planet have long featured in our thinking. And now we have a chance to explore the fantastic expressions of artist's interpretations of other worlds and space views via David Hardy's exceptional book *Visions of Space*. In exploring artists' views and work with reflective dialogue, Dave has presented a coherent and visually stunning book of artists' ideas and background data. Well documented and researched, the book explores the space artist's creativity and vision while presenting personal profiles on the artists responsible for such breathtaking imaginative works. All the artists represented are well biographed (in the Artists' Profiles) and have examples of their work in full colour to stand as statement. Wonderful pictures alone make this an excellent book, the profiles present a bonus. Congratulations to Dave Hardy on his rationale and choice of material. A must for all (SF) bookshelves.

TIGANA by Guy Gavriel Kay; Penguin; 638 pages; £7.99 1ge paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones

From the author of the superb *Fionavar Tapestry* comes a fantasy with a totally different perspective. Instead of a great battle between good and evil, it is about freedom and the price that needs to be paid for it. The squabbling nations of the Palm are conquered one by one, as two wizards divide the Palm between them. The son of the wizard Brandin is killed in the invasion of the country of Tigana, and in revenge Brandin magically erases the name of Tigana from the minds of humanity. Love of country is an important theme in this book, but all the nations of the Palm must learn to settle their differences in order to expel their mutual enemies. The guerilla war is nasty and not at all heroic. This book starts slowly, but picks up well. Highly recommended.

THE DRIVE-IN 2 by Joe R Lansdale; NEL; 173 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston

This black comedy/horror tale takes up where *The Drive In* left off, and reprises enough to stand up on its own - just. Enjoyable in a dark, brooding sort of way this is lightweight stuff, with a snappy style and some interesting invention. The book is structured very much like its B-movie world, as the second half of the double feature unwinds; with real changes, flashbacks, intermissions et al. Behind all this the plot is fairly basic, as two ex-crucifees and their rescuer flee the Drive-In and meet up with Grace. They return to rescue her sister from the clutches of Popalong Cassidy, a one-time serial killer who now has a TV for a head. Along the way they encounter dinosaurs, leeches and a town waiting in line to hang itself. Cheery it ain't.

THE WILL OF THE WANDERER by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; Santa; 444 pp; £3.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Steve Jones

This is volume one of the *Rose of the Prophet* trilogy, by the authors of the *Dragonlance* saga. The twenty Gods constantly strive to increase their own power, and mostly just serve to maintain the Balance. Quan, the God of Reality, Greed and Law has found a way to trap the other Gods' servants, the immortals, and by this he hopes to make himself supreme. Akhran the Wanderer opposes him. Sond, Fedj, Pukah and Usti are djinn in the service of Akhran. They are dismayed at his order to bring all his people to fight together, as the desert tribes who worship Akhran have always raided and feuded with each other. The heirs to two of the clans, Khardan and Zahra, are ordered to marry, while the cowardly wizard Matthew finds himself with a burden which could settle the conflict once and for all. The greatest flaw of this book is that, what with all the Gods, immortals and mortals, there are so many major characters in the book that none become interesting. The setting and story are reminiscent of the Arabian Nights, so fans of that sort of tale might be interested.

HEATSEEKER by John Shirley; Grafton; 364 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton

I feel short stories reveal more of a writer than novels - don't ask me why, maybe several short stories show a persona where as a novel only a snapshot of a writer's psyche. *Heatseeker* presents John Shirley to enhance this viewpoint, a writer contributing so many differing styles and idiosyncratic points as to seek of heterogeneity. One man can produce such diverse (good) stories? If you want a book to out-punk Cyberpunk, to outshine BOF science fiction READ THIS. Shirley has a way with stories I have not come across in a long time - take Russell's socio-awareness mixed with raw Cyberpunk (before chic acceptance) and rock music background and you get John Shirley beginnings; add crazy nights at unlicensed dives and straitjacket and things begin to melt.... How can one describe Shirley's stories other than to read them and slide into the groove he conjours up? Hell, if all collections were as diverse and as good as this readers would have a field day. Note I don't talk about individual stories - they're too good and can stand up by themselves. Classic - Highly recommended.

THE UNSETTLED DUST by Robert Aickman; Mandarin; 302 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Aickman, who died in 1991, was a good writer of ghost and horror stories. His only flaw was one of over-subtlety, so that his pieces do not explain themselves, and the reader is left unsatisfied. The eight tales collected here are typical of his work, being unusual, atmospheric, threatening and even (in the case of "The Stains", the best and longest) terrifying. But I found, as usual, that when I reached the end of each one I was left wondering what had happened and what it all meant.

THE CITY, NOT LONG AFTER by Pat Murphy; Pan; 320 pages; £12.95 Hardback.

Reviewed by Peter Day.

In a post-plague world, San Francisco stands abandoned, inhabited only by a handful of artists and other eccentrics. There is Danny-boy, with his belief that art can change the world and his scheme to paint the Golden Gate Bridge blue; the man who believes his father built him, and so calls himself the Machine; Ms Migsdale, who prints the New City News every Wednesday; an artist of the skin; the nameless young woman who came to the city in search of her mother who was taken there by an angel when she died; and many more. And now a neighbouring military dictator threatens the city with invasion. How can it defend itself? The inhabitants have their own unorthodox ideas, and the city itself turns out to have a definite personality of its own. This is a hauntingly imaginative work in which eerie fantasy alternates with reality, and it is often hard to tell which is which. An enchanted, enchanting book, superbly written, although, despite my undoubted enjoyment, I found it a little too gossamer-light to be, for me, truly memorable. But don't let my personal reaction put you off! This is excellent stuff.

A HIDDEN PLACE by Robert Charles Wilson; Orbit; 212 pages; £3.50 paperback.

MEMORY WIRE by Robert Charles Wilson; Orbit; 219 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Close behind *Gypsies* (reviewed in the August *Brun Group News*) comes the UK publication of Wilson's first two novels, very different yet with the same emphasis on characters. *A Hidden Place* is an historical fantasy, set in a small US town in about 1932, to which some very strange people (or perhaps even non-people) are attracted. It's a story of poverty and pettiness, vividly told. *Memory Wire* is high-tech, near future SF, involving an illegal attempt to acquire an oneirolith (dreamstone to you) from its only source, a mine in Brazil. These stones might be alien artifacts; they allow people to relive memories they may have forgotten, or may never even have had. There are glimpses of a startling future (c. 2050) where Western nations are poor, the Third World poorer, despite lots of available technology. I enjoyed both novels, despite my feeling that Wilson tends to push his characters into performing the plot action, with the result that the events are sometimes a little stagey. Also both novels are a little short for their content. Wilson's a major new talent - worth trying.

FLY BY NIGHT by Jenny Jones; Headline; 340 pages; £7.99 lge paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Eleanor is a spoilt wilfull product of her time, with no thought of commitment either to one person or one cause. But when a people of another world in dire need send out a call for help, Eleanor is their reply. The Cavers of the land of Peraldonia are victims of a stasis produced by the High Priest Lefevre. The stasis is a type of force field that causes the passing of time to stop but its power lessens as you travel further from its site. The Cavers live close enough to the stasis for time to move slowly but the people are barren. Eleanor is their hope to break this stasis and return the passage of time to normal. Eleanor wants none of this until she is visited by the Moon Goddess. Eleanor is also chosen by Ash, a midnight hawk, one of a species that carry the Cavers on their forays to defeat Lefevre. The premis of this novel is not a new one, but it is handled well. This is a debut novel but it is written as though by a seasoned author. The narrative in particular is superb, with dark images of people's despair. Recommended.

REPLAY by Ken Grimwood; Grafton; 366 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

At the age of 42 Jeff Winston died. When he awoke it was 1963 and Jeff had to relive the next 25 years all over again. The possibilities were endless, a new wife, a new career, more money than he could dream of, also the chance to change history. The only drawback was that life ended at 42. Jeff Winston had become a REPLAYER. On the second time round Jeff discovered that he was not the only person to be caught up in the cycle of death and rebirth. A remarkable lady called Pamela Phillips was also locked into the same merry-go-round. On the third time around Jeff and Pamela found that the time span of their replayed lives was decreasing. Replay is an unusual fantasy story that does not follow the usual round of Witches, Warlocks and Magic. Ken Grimwood has written an excellent tale of ordinary characters allowed to live their lives over again, and of the frailties of human nature.

LABYRINTH OF WORLDS: STAR REQUIEM 4 by Adrian Cole; Unwin; 341 pp; £6.99 lge p/back. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This, the final volume in this fantasy series, provokes mixed reactions. It ties together several strands that have run throughout the four volumes and which at the time gave the impression of being time wasters. The climax is quite well handled and provides some of the best action in the whole series. Unfortunately, there is an interminable wait for this to happen. The native Innismorians have been marching to the gates of the Sculpted City, where the incoming humans dwell, for the last volume and a half; the Csendook are about to travel from their world to join in the carnage; and the evil powers of the world are waking up. And all of these need to happen at the same point in time. Various characters from different backgrounds scurry around trying to salvage something from the mess. Probably the series would have worked better if the convoluted tale had been told in a more compact form. This is a pity because the ideas and framework within which the story is set, and is finally revealed, is highly original.