

# BRUM GROUP

## NEWS

March  
1991

Issue  
No. 234

### The monthly Newsletter of the **BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP**

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1991 Committee:      Group Chairman – Chris Chivers      Secretary – Helena Bowles  
Treasurer – Richard Standage      Newsletter Editor – Martin Tudor      Reviews Editor –  
Mick Evans      Publicity Officer – Al Johnston      Novacon 21 Chairman – Nick Mills

## THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

*Friday 15th March at 7.45pm*

### *DOES THE TEAM THINK ?*

A panel game where members of the audience can ask a panel of "experts" (or, in this case, members of the BSFG committee) questions about science fiction. Your questions can be as serious, or silly, as you like. Answers will, without doubt, contain the usual mixture of blind prejudice, appalling ignorance, bombastic bigotry and sheer stupidity you have come to expect from Helena Bowles, Chris Chivers, Mick Evans and Martin Tudor. At last your chance to expose the ignorance of your committee in matters related to sf...

The meeting will finish with a typical Peyton style auction -- if Rog is still talking to us... So if you have anything you wish to donate please bring it along.

*SPECIAL MEETING AT THE MIDLAND HOTEL*

*Wednesday 20th March*

*ANNE McCAFFREY*

*See inside for details.*

*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, **Richard Standage**, at meetings, or by post c/o **Mick Evans** (address below).*

*Book Reviews to **Mick Evans** at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley B66 4SH (021 558 0997)*

***All other contributions and enquiries to: **Martin Tudor**, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2AG (021 328 2161)***



Report by Martin Tudor.

Last month's speaker, Richard Evans (the Publishing Director & Senior Editor at Gollancz), attracted a far larger audience than many expected. The audience of 45+ listened with interest as Richard regaled them with horror stories of the current recession in the British publishing industry. Describing how many publishers

are seriously talking about large-scale redundancies. The situation was perfectly summed up by the story Richard told us about one of his acquaintances, an editor at a "well-known British publisher" who recently informed him, over a liquid lunch, that "We don't have editorial meetings anymore -- we have cancellation meetings!" Richard added that in 1983 average print-runs were 10,000 or so, these days 4,000-5,000 are far more common -- despite the fact that such print-runs are barely economic they really don't make enough profit to keep publishers afloat.

Richard went on to say that obviously all is not "doom and gloom". During the last recession a lot of publishers got out of sf and have since come back in... But unlike companies such as Orbit, who kept publishing sf, they don't have the advantage of a large backlist to help them through difficult times.

It wasn't long before Richard started talking about a couple of Rog Peyton's "favourite" topics -- the covers of sf books and the pros & cons of fantasy. Richard said that he doesn't believe a good cover is enough to sell a book -- especially not in the paperback market. He then went on to announce that Gollancz are moving into the fantasy market. (Peyton: "And I always thought you had taste!") Richard pointed out that inevitably the books published by a company will reflect the tastes of the editor(s) involved, and that he *likes* fantasy and horror. (Peyton: further expressions of disgust and much grimacing, Evans: "But Rog, you know they sell!" Peyton: grudgingly admits that Andromeda sells far more fantasy than sf...) Richard added that it is fortunate in this case that his own personal preferences will be economically advantageous to Gollancz. Richard finally moved Rog to apoplexy by revealing that Gollancz will also be moving into graphic novels in September, when they will publish something by Alan Moore.

After talking briefly about the Gollancz writing competition (see the Jophan Report last issue for details), Richard talked about his philosophy regarding publishing new writers. He thinks that it is vital both for the industry and the future of the genre to publish new writers, Gollancz have two or three first novels lined up over the next year or so. He pointed out that it is easier for a company such as Gollancz to launch new writers than it is for the large conglomerates, who frequently have to satisfy far too many accountants. One major, London based, publisher has apparently got about 36 people in their accounts department -- which is more than the entire Gollancz staff at Henrietta Street! He finished by saying that it is true that a publisher needs to publish writers such as Terry Pratchett (who sells "an awful lot of copies") to underwrite a new writer who will sell only about 800 copies in hardback.

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All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise. This publication was printed on the *CRITICAL WAVE* photocopier (as was last issue). Thanks to all who have contributed, especially Dave Hardy (for the headings and the cartoon) on page 12, and the other artists this issue, who are: John Dell (page 3), Kevin Cullen (page 4) and someone I know of only as "Roy" (also on page 4). As ever, any and all contributions and letters are greatly appreciated -- WRITE NOW!

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

CHANGE OF VENUE  
ANNE McCAFFREY



Spend an evening in the company of  
the author of the "Dragon" books --

ANNE McCAFFREY

Wednesday 20th March 1991

7-30 for 8-00pm *SA*



in the ROYAL SUITE of the  
MIDLAND HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham

One of the world's leading science fantasy writers, Anne McCaffrey has won the Hugo and Nebula awards. Brought up in the US and now living in Ireland, she is the creator and bestselling author of the unique Dragon series based on Pern. Due to the fact that Anne McCaffrey has always been a very popular speaker at the Brum Group, the committee have decided that it made more sense to pay the extra cost of a larger room in the city centre than to risk turning people away at the Ivy Bush. On April 19th the writers of the *RED DWARF* tv series, Rob Brant and Doug Naylor, will be talking to the Group. As this meeting is also expected to draw a larger than usual audience and it will again be held in the Royal Suite of the Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Other than on these two occasions our meetings will as usual be held at the Ivy Bush.



# You Write...

*[ It is interesting that the only BSFG member who has bothered to comment in detail on the BRUM GROUP NEWS in the last few months now lives a couple of thousand miles away, come on the rest of you get your fingers out! ]*

WENDELL WAGNER, Jr.,  
9146 Edmonston Road, Apt. 201,  
Greenbelt, MD 20770, USA.

I found the report of the debate at the November meeting interesting, but I thought there were some things to be said about the relative British and American influence on science fiction that weren't mentioned in the report.

I had always assumed that British science fiction was fairly well represented on American book store shelves, contrary to the assumption of some of the debaters. I decided to actually do a survey to find out. I counted the proportion of science fiction and fantasy books by British authors in an average American book store, the proportion on a list of available books from the (American) Science Fiction Book Club, and the proportion of stories by British authors in several American-edited science fiction anthologies. I found, pretty consistently, that about 8% had British authors.

The next question was what a fair proportion would be. This takes some arbitrary assumptions. Suppose that about 5% of the science fiction sold in the US or the UK is translated from a non-English-language source. Suppose that the remaining 95% was equally divided among authors of all the major English-speaking countries (the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland) according to the population of these countries. Then the expected number of science fiction books with British authors would be 16%. So yes, the proportion of British science fiction sold in the US isn't as much as could be fairly expected, but it isn't insignificant either. The people who really ought of



complain are the non-English-language science fiction authors. How many of you have any translated science fiction on your shelves other than Verne, Lem, and the Strugatsky Brothers?

It could be argued that science fiction was originally an American invention anyway, that it started with Hugo Gernsback and that HG Wells and Jules Verne were just precursors. Even if one were to argue that HG Wells (or, to follow Brian Aldiss's claim, Mary Shelley) was the originator of science fiction, it wouldn't follow that Americans have stolen it from the British. Culture isn't a physical object that can be stolen. Yes, a painting or a manuscript may get shipped from one country to another, but once the image of the picture or the words of the book become generally known, they belong to the whole world.

There's something distinctly bizarre about the British attitude to American culture. When Britons are interested in American culture, it's supposedly because we're cultural imperialists intent on destroying your society. But when Americans are interested in British culture, we're treated as barbarians who have no business polluting your country. To name a couple of examples that particularly interest me, I have heard some Britons who were terribly bothered by the facts that JRR Tolkien first became popular in the United States and that CS Lewis is noticeably more popular in the US. They have actually said things like, "Well, you can't be seriously interested in Tolkien. You're a mere cultist, while I, being British, am a scholar," and "I guess if CS Lewis is so popular among Americans, that shows he isn't really so important after all." Come on, guys, give us a break!

If Americans seem a little too willing to push their culture on other countries at the moment, there's a couple of good reasons for that. First, up until fifty or sixty years ago, most of the cult-



ural influence was going the other way across the Atlantic. Even today most of the standard texts studied in American high school and university literature courses are British works. There's still a significant minority of Americans who think that anything spoken in a British accent must be more refined. In reaction to that, there's another group of Americans who over-react to that by an excessive defence of American culture. The other reason is that American culture is all we've got to sell the rest of the world these days. We haven't really done that well recently in selling our cars or our steel or our electronics to the world. All we can sell is our books, our films, and our music.

The whole idea of there being any culturally pure art forms is a little screwy in any case. Is rock and roll a particularly American musical genre? It arose in the '50's from the joining of rhythm and blues, which derived from African music, with country and western, which came out the traditions of Scotch-Irish folk music. It was further transformed in the sixties by the contributions of various English groups. Is the story of King Arthur a particularly British piece of culture? It arose largely from the attempts of Anglo-Norman poets to fit Welsh mythology and bits of British history into French chivalric literary forms. Later contributions came from German, English, and American writers.

I'm not saying that it's not important to support the work of local authors. Hey, when I was living in England I made sure to buy copies of *OTHER EDENS* and *ZENITH* as they came out, and I collected old copies of *NEW WORLDS* and *NEW WRITINGS IN SF*. And I'm proud to say I apparently bought the first copy of Anne Gay's novel that came off the presses. But one is being provincial if one thinks one should only read the works of one's own nation's writers. If you're a reader, be happy that you can sample all the world's literature. If you're a writer, be proud that not only have you been influenced by writers from all over the world, but that in turn you will be influencing future writers all over the world.

Incidentally, to correct a couple of minor points in the report of the discussion, most American publishers do Americanize the spelling of British books, but then most British publishers also change the spelling of American books. This

strikes me as pretty trivial. Surely any half-way literate Briton can understand American spelling and any half-way literate American can understand British spelling. Also, American tv networks did produce Americanized versions of the British programs *TILL DEATH DO US PART*, *STEPTOE AND SON* and *MAN ABOUT THE HOUSE* (retitled as *ALL IN THE FAMILY*, *SANFORD AND SON*, and *THREE'S COMPANY*, respectively), and *ALL IN THE FAMILY* even turned out to be a slightly better show than *TILL DEATH DO US PART*, but the vast majority of the British series shown on American tv were the original versions.

[ Surely there must be a few comments even you apathetic lot want to make on that letter? *ALL IN THE FAMILY* better than *TILL DEATH US DO PART*! I must say I can't see it myself Wendell... ]

The image shows a stylized title for 'The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor'. The word 'The' is small and positioned above 'Jophan'. 'Jophan' is written in a large, bold, serif font. 'Report' is written below 'Jophan' in a similar large, bold, serif font. To the right of 'Jophan' and 'Report', the words 'by Martin Tudor' are written in a smaller, sans-serif font. The entire title is set against a dark, textured background.

The 39th *Jophan Report* by Martin Tudor.

The shortlist for this year's Arthur C Clarke Award has just been announced: *USE OF WEAPONS* by Iain Banks, *RATS AND GARGOYLES* by Mary Gentle, *TAKE BACK PLENTY* by Colin Greenland, *RED SPIDER*, *WHITE WEB* by Misha, *FAREWELL HORIZONTAL* by KW JETER and *THE CITY, NOT LONG AFTER* by Pat Murphy. The winner will be announced on 20 March at a reception in the Groucho Club, London.

The Arthur C Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction of the year consists of a trophy and a cheque for £1,000 donated by Arthur C Clarke. Previous winners have been: *THE CHILD GARDEN* by Geoff Ryman (1990), *UNQUENCHABLE FIRE* by Rachel Pollack (1989), *THE SEA AND SUMMER* by George Turner (1988) and *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* by Margaret Atwood (1987).

Robert Holdstock's new novel *THE FETCH* will be published as an Orbit hardback in December, reports director John

Jarrold. Other authors on Orbit's 1991 list include Iain M Banks, Paul J McAuley, Bob Shaw, Angus Wells, Storm Constantine, Allan Scott, Tom Holt and John Brosnan.

The second edition of Anne Gay's first novel *MINDSAIL* will be released in hardback anytime now, with the paperback being released on the 13 September. The hardback of her second novel *THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT* will also be released in September, rather than May as reported last issue. Currently she is still working on her third sf novel *DANCING ON THE VOLCANO*.

Harlan Ellison's long-delayed anthology *THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS* has lost its second story to the British sf magazine *INTERZONE*. John Christopher's "A Journey South", which appeared in the February issue (#44), follows Bob Shaw's "Dark Night in Toyland" (*INTERZONE* #26), which also provided the title story for Bob's recent Gollancz collection.

Robert Heinlein's acclaimed novel *STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND* will be issued in its original draft by New English Library in March. This edition, initially available in hardback, restores several passages cut by Heinlein at the insistence of his original US publishers in the late 1950s.

The third volume in David Wingrove's "Chung Kuo" sequence, *THE WHITE MOUNTAIN*, will be published simultaneously in hardback and trade softback by New English Library in August.

New English Library is reissuing several of James Herbert's horror novels during 1991: *THE RATS*, *LAIR* and *DOMAIN* (March), *THE DARK* and *THE SPEAR* (June). NEL will also be reissuing Stephen King's novel *CHRISTINE* and his collection *NIGHT SHIFT*, in May and September respectively.

On the magazine scene the British small press magazine *FANTASY TALES* now has sufficient material to take it into 1993, reports co-editor David Sutton. The title's editorial team of Sutton and Stephen Jones are also collaborating on *DARK VOICES*, the retitled *PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES*; submissions should be under 20,000 words and payments are around £25-£30 per thousand words.

*INTERZONE* is having a clearance sale and offering several of its early issues at £1.00 each (including postage). The back-numbers available are: #2-3, #12, #14-15, #25-27. Orders should be sent to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton, BN1 6LU.

The long-awaited third issue of the sf magazine *THE GATE* has appeared. Cover dated December 1990 it started dropping through letter boxes in February 1991! It features cover art by Eddie Jones, fiction by Storm Constantine, David Redd and Ian Watson, as well as a feature on The Women's Press by Sarah Lefanu. Issue #4 is promised for March, with "an amazing improvement because (they) are going 'up market' in the quality of paper". For further details try sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to publisher Richard Newcombe, 67 Hall Lane, Werrington, Peterborough, PE4 6RA -- but don't hold your breath, eh?

Editor and publisher Arthur Straker tells me that the first issue of *R.E.M* (his new sf and fantasy magazine) is finally at the printers... He promises to send me a review copy asap -- watch this space.

Chucky the homicidal puppet returns to wreak revenge in *CHILD'S PLAY 2*, written by Don Mancini and directed by John Lafia. "People seem to have an inherent reaction to dolls," Lafia told *FLICKS*. "Maybe there is just something about a doll being a likeness of a human being. I think we play upon the very frightening notion of something seemingly passive really being a maniacal killer. It's as if your pillow suddenly attacked you in the middle of the night."

*The Guardian's* weekly "Lingua Franca" column on slang and buzz-words turned its attention to fannish phraseology in the 5 January edition, Liz Holliday distinguishing between sf and sci-fi ("bad media science fiction").

Barclays Financial Services has enlisted a science fiction comic character, "Captain Nigel", for its film press and cinema campaign to promote personal pensions. The company aims to sell 70,000 policies before 5 April and chose the sf theme after research showed sf movies are popular with people in their twenties.

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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20 MARCH - ANNE McCAFFREY will be signing copies of the 'A' format *RENEGADES OF PERN*, the 'C' format edition of *THE ROWAN*, and the hardcover editions of *PEGASUS IN FLIGHT*



and **SASSINAK** at Andromeda from 4.30pm.

**20 MARCH** - ANNE McCAFFREY, author of the Pern books, talks to the BSGF in this Special Meeting, in the Royal Suite of THE MIDLAND HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham, from 7.45pm, arrive early to guarantee a seat!

**26 MARCH** - MICHAEL JACKSON, the well-known beer expert, will host a beer tasting event (with buffet) at Waterstones, High Street, Birmingham, from 7pm. Tickets are £2.00 - £1.00 of which will be redeemable against the purchase of MICHAEL JACKSON'S POCKET BEER BOOK (£6.99). Call (021) 633 4353 to reserve tickets.

**19 APRIL** - The writers of the RED DWARF tv series, Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, will be appearing at the April BSGF meeting at THE MIDLAND HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham.

**3-6 MAY** - UFP'91, the 31st British STAR TREK con, Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Attending membership is £25.00. Details from Kim Farey, 135 Greenstead Rd., Loughton, Essex, IG10 3DJ.

**4 MAY** - Birmingham Comic Mart, new ground floor venue at the Carrs Lane Church Centre, just off High Street near Marks & Spencers in the city centre. "A huge selection of comics, film/tv magazines, books, posters, models, games and sf/fantasy material." Opens midday. Details: Golden Orbit, 18 Nelson Street, York, YO3 7NJ.

**10 MAY** - A horror evening at the Readers and Writers Festival, Midlands Art Centre. Panel discussion featuring Ramsey Campbell, Lisa Tuttle and Peter James, chaired by Chris Morgan. Further details will appear here as they become available.

**21 JUNE** - PAUL McAULEY, author of the award winning FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS will be talking to the BSGF at the Ivy Bush, Hagley Road, Birmingham.

**19-21 JULY** - TWENTYCON, the 20th anniversary party of the BSGF at the Holiday Inn, Birmingham. We hope both of our Honorary Presidents, Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss, will attend as Guests of Honour, although this will depend on their prior commitments. £12.00 until Easter, (£15.00 from 2 April). Cheques and postal orders made payable to "Twentycon", should be sent (or handed to) CAROL MORTON, 14 Park St., Lye, Stourbridge, W.Mids, DY9 8SS.

**23-26 AUGUST 1991** - MASQUERADE '91, the first major BEAUTY AND THE BEAST con, Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Attending membership is £25.00. For details send a SAE to: Jacqui Clarke, 12 Jessop Close, Lessingham, Sleaford, Lincs., NG34 8LJ.

**1-3 NOVEMBER** - NOVACON 21, the annual convention organized by the BSGF at the Excelsior Hotel, Coventry Road (by the Cargo Airport). Guest of Honour Colin Greenland. Attending membership is currently £15.00, although membership is FREE to anyone who has attended ALL of the first 20 Novacons. Cheques or postal orders made payable to "Novacon 21" should be sent to: BERNIE EVANS, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

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### OTHER LOCAL GROUPS

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**Aston SF Society** - Contact D. Durant, Secretary Aston SF, Floor 8, Room 2, Lawrence Tower, Aston St., B4 7EA. (Mar'91)  
**Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society** - Contact the Students Union or try David Wake at 160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 1NY. (Oct'89)

**Genesis II** - STAR TREK Club. Regular meetings in member's homes, various outings throughout the year, three newsletters per year. Subs £3, contact Kathy Yates, 167 Kingshurst Road, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2LL. (Aug.'89)

**Midlands Space Society** - Call Andy Salmon after 7pm on 021 565 4845. (Sept'90)

**The Leicester Science Fiction Group** - meets on the first Friday of each month at 8pm in the Rainbow & Dove, 155 Charles Street. Past guests include Ramsey Campbell, Bob Shaw, Freda Warrington, Colin Greenland and Barry Bayley. Call Steph Mortimer on 0533 833133. (Dec'90)

**SRS** - The Stourbridge Local Group, is an independent DR WHO group which holds monthly meetings in the town centre. Quizzes, discussions and debates, as well as three episodes of DR WHO each month. Meet at 7pm. Admittance 75p (+ 50p for magazine). Contact via 18 Lychgate Ave., Stourbridge, W. Mids., DY9 0TS. (Oct'89)

**Arcadia** - The alternative television society of the DR WHO fan group The Who-

natics. They meet quarterly in the Montmorency Suite of the Crest Hotel in Walsall, where they show a variety of programmes spanning 50 years of television. Contact Ian Riley, 36 Bude Road, Park Hall, Walsall, WS5 3EX (0922 38047). (Aug'90)

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## BRITISH NATIONAL SOCIETIES

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**BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY:** membership costs £10 per year. Quarterly newsletter, occasional London meetings and annual convention. Cheques etc (payable to "British Fantasy Society") should be sent to the Society's secretary, Di Wathen at 15 Stanley Road, Morden, SM4 5DE. (Jan'91)

**BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION:** membership of the BSFA costs £12 p.a. in the UK & EEC. Bimonthly mailing of *VECTOR* (critical review journal), *MATRIX* (newsletter), *PAPERBACK INFERNO* (reviews of paperbacks & magazines), alternate mailings also contain *FOCUS*, the guide for aspiring sf writers. Full details from Joanne Raine, BSFA Membership Secretary, 29 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland, TS26 8EW. (Jan'91)

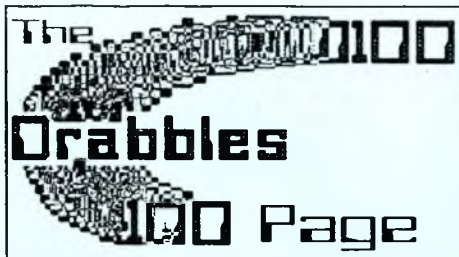
**HORIZON**, the Blake's Seven Appreciation Society: membership includes four newsletters (usually 70pp+ each), membership card and colour photo of your favourite Blakes Seven character. Cost in the UK is £5 (plus four 12"x9" self addressed envelopes, each with sufficient postage to cover 350 grams). Contact Kevin or Fliss Davies, 53 Vaughan Road, Birkdale, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 4BX. (Jan'91)

**OCTARINE**, SF & Fantasy Humour Appreciation Society: membership £4 (UK), including a badge, membership card and quarterly fanzine. Contact via 46 Arnside Road, Bestwood Est., Nottingham, NG5 5HE. (Jan'91)

**THE UNIVERSITY SF GROUP NETWORK:** contact David Wake, 160 Beaumont Road, Birmingham, B30 1NY, (021 451 2287). (Jan'91)

**ZZ9 PLURAL Z ALPHA**, the Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy Appreciation Society: meetings for members around the country, a quarterly newsletter, range of merchandise. Contact: Noel Collyer, 17 Guildford Street, Brighton, BN1 3LA. (Jan'91)

[ Please note that the date in brackets at the end of each entry above indicates the last time I heard from the group or society concerned. ]



## ERROR IN TRANSCRIPTON

by V. Brown.

They came for him shortly after dusk, their Lord in one litter and his new concubine tightly bound in another.

Terrified, the dealer remonstrated "But Magister, she was bought for you, I could not test her skills and relied solely on the documents supplied with her. You saw them too, Magnus, you took them !"

The Lord nodded. "Those were only abridged sale documents, where are her original records ?"

From his desk the dealer took a folder and began to read it carefully. Abruptly his face went rigid with shock. "Martial Arts" he whispered, "They should read Expert in Martial Arts."

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## NIGHT SHIFT

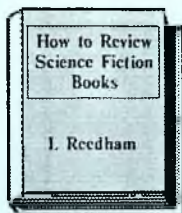
by Stan Eling.

The Wonder washing powder certainly got the clothes clean but it also introduced a strong static charge into the garments, and people suffered mightily; men could not get into their shirts without assistance, girls' underskirts clung to their legs, and generally all things, once washed, behaved in the most alarming manner, like they had wills of their own. Then Professor Hamsting came to the rescue with a Leiden Jar, which being attached to the great toe at night did drain away the charge created by movement between clean sheets, and thus provided an unlimited source of energy, silencing all complaints.

*As mentioned last time we had a Drabbles page, these are the last two drabbles that were awaiting publication in the BGN. And they will really be the last unless YOU come up with some more.*

*Do have a go. it doesn't take long, and you could enjoy it. All you have to do is write a short story of exactly 100 words, excluding the title. If you want inspiration, get the two excellent Drabbles books edited by David Wake and Rob Meades.*





# 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 ROWAN by Anne McCaffrey  
Bantam, 335 pages, £7.99 lge p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The Primes are a very rare and select group of people with extremely strong mental powers, they are capable of teleporting passengers and cargo across vast reaches of space. So when a young child is caught up in a freak mudslide on the planet Altair and transmits her distress planet-wide, the authorities realise that there is a potential Prime in danger. The Rowan, as she becomes known, is rescued and her training as a Prime is started. This novel documents the development of the Rowan from frightened orphan to talented but lonely young woman. However when aliens attack the planet Deneb and an unknown male Prime contacts the Rowan for help there arises the possibility of a partner for Rowan. This novel, based around the short story 'Lady in the Tower', is a welcome extension of that tale. One of the joys of reading a McCaffrey is that the characters are so easily identifiable and this novel is no exception. The plot never falters and the whole story is so excellently written that one feels disappointed on reaching the end. I see possibilities for further Rowan tales - I hope they appear. Highly recommended.

DESOLATION ROAD by Ian McDonald  
Drunken Dragon, 373 pages, £14.95 h/b,  
£42.50 de luxe ed. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Ahh, leather-sniffers of the world unite! Smell the aroma, feel the quality of the binding, examine the beautifully marbled endpapers, stroke the bound-in silk book-mark. Unfortunately, Rog Peyton has only sent out a standard edition for review, so I've just got to remember the leather, the marbling and the silk from a quick glimpse at Novacon. This means that I wasn't distracted by the peripherals and could get down to the wonders of the text itself.

*Desolation Road* is a strong, highly original and astonishingly well sustained novel; it's SF, though towards the fantasy side. This a story of a township (*Desolation Road*) which is founded and grows up in the middle of nowhere, though beside a railway line. Although there are aliens and advanced technology, this is a setting divorced from time and space. (Okay, so it's set on Mars, but a fantasy Mars, not a realistic one.) What is important is the people who come to live in *Desolation Road* (or merely pass through). They are fascinating, strange, larger than life, with peculiar names and even more peculiar stories to tell. The ways in which they live together and react to each other and to the growth of the township around them are described over decades, through peace and war. But *Desolation Road* is much more than this, because of the writing style. Ian McDonald writes in a clever and beautiful style that does not always make for easy reading yet is, for the painstaking reader, the best part of the book. (McDonald was born in Belfast and was born as outrageously recently as 1960.) Amazingly *Desolation Road* is a first novel. This edition has been completely reset to expunge the annoying errors in the original Bantam paperback. If you are capable of appreciating good writing and originality, do try reading this -- you won't regret it.

THE PALADIN OF THE NIGHT by Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman, Bantam, 371 pp, £3.99 p/b,

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is volume two of the *Rose of the Prophet*. The Gods are in disarray, except for Quar, whose followers are sweeping the world. All are given the choice "Worship Quar or die!" The minions of Zhakrin, the God of Evil, Intolerance and Reality, have sworn to avenge the death of their God. This produces the unusual situation where Good and Evil are allied against neutrality. The djinn

found out where all the disappearing immortals are going the hard way, while Khardan and Zohra are kidnapped by the Paladin of the Night. Weis and Hickman seem to be producing plots which are beyond their writing abilities, maybe they should get back to *Dragonlance*.

THE MAGEFIRE by Alexander Biali

Headline, 436 pages, £14.95, h/b.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Leighor is a healer from a rural backwater who has set up shop in the town of Sonsterness, but with little success. So when a summons comes for him to attend on the Archbaron, Leighor thinks this could be his chance. When the Archbaron mysteriously dies after Leighor's visit and he is accused of murder, Leighor is forced to flee. He meets up with a group of travellers on their way to collect the late Archbaron's will and so thwart plans to put Misan on the throne of Varroain. On their way the travellers are attacked by someone wielding an amulet made from harrunor, a magical metal that produces the powerful magefire. This is very much a formulaic novel, nothing particularly original in its plotline, travellers beset by numerous troubles on their way to prevent national disaster. Not really recommended unless you have little better to read.

THE FORTRESS OF THE PEARL

by Michael Moorcock, Grafton, 269 pages, £3.50, p/b.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Another Elric story, this time set in a fantasy world of dreams. In this, Elric sets out to find said pearl of the title as a quest for Lord Glo to enable his survival from a deadly elixir and Glo's election to the Council in the desert city of Quarzhasaat. However not all is as it seems (surprise) and Elric finds himself changing sides to help the nomadic tribes (the Bauradim) and to release the Holy Girl from the trance placed by others seeking the pearl - with the help of the dreamthief, Oone. The dreamworld they enter is well thought out and, as would be expected, equally fantastic, with unexplainable phenomena to overcome before they reach the fortress. As usual Moorcock captivates his readers with wizardry and panache to deliver a novel of sombre elegance in the Elric tradition. The expectation from such a book, the twists and turns

in plot/sub plot and the familiarity of Elric's character make this a good read. Recommended.

ANGEL FIRE by Andrew M Greeley

Legend, 301 pages, £3.99, p/b.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

An Irish-American academic, Professor Sean Seamus Desmond, is on his way to receive the Nobel Prize for his biological research. He acquires both a guardian angel (an extremely beautiful and competent young woman named Gabriella Light) and a stream of would-be assassins. The plot (assassination attempts being foiled at regular intervals) is very silly and not at all believable. On the other hand, the padding in between (Desmond and Gabriella chatting wittily and developing their relationship) is the best part of the book. It's a smooth and entertaining read, but very lightweight.

MAZEWAY by Jack Williamson

Mandarin, 240 pages, £3.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Mazeway is the twin planetary system of Blade and Stone out in the Oort Cloud Halo of extrasolar space. Having long since been mined out by their inhabitants, these worlds are now used as a setting for the Game, by which means the Eldren races of the Halo test other species for admission. The Earth itself is in ruins; the Skyweb orbital cities of the Sun Tycoons having been torn down almost inadvertently by a young spacedwelling alien. Feuding remnants of humanity scratch a living in the wasteland. A few others, Speakers of the Earth, live in the Halo, trying to learn the Eldren way so that mankind can evolve beyond its "planetic" origins. This forms the background to Benn Dain's playing of the Game of Blade and Stone, while trying to alert the Halo to an invasion by some mysterious force that disables and commandeers computers and robots, looking set to conquer the complacent Eldren. A pretty good adventure story with an interesting background and setting.

THE EYE OF THE WORLD by Robert Jordan

Orbit, 670 pages, £13.95 h/b.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Rand al Thor and his father are returning to their farm when they are attacked by Trollocs, Rand manages to carry his father back to the village where he finds that only

three homes were attacked, his own and those of his two friends, Mat and Perrin. Morraine, a visitor to the village, tells the boys that the Trollocs were after them and to safeguard the village she will take them to Tar Valon the city of the Aes Sedai. The Aes Sedai are now an all female group after the madness and death of all male Aes Sedai caused the breaking of the world. Any male that shows the Aes Sedai powers is "gentled" - by having his powers removed. So just what do the Trollocs - servants of Ba'alzamon the Dark One, and Morraine - an Aes Sedai - want with the boys? This is an excellent if complex beginning to a series and a beautifully produced volume. It is unusual these days to find a fantasy story with an original plot, although characters could be developed a little further, maybe that will come later in the saga. Recommended.

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ by Walter M Miller Jr., Orbit, 356 pages, £12.95, h/b.  
Reviewed by Al Johnston.

A sobering post-apocalypse novel, the future history develops around the life of a religious community, from the renewed Dark Ages to the second Flame Deluge. The story opens with the Order seeking canonization of its founder, Leibowitz, a survivor who died preserving written knowledge. A fasting novice discovers a fallout shelter containing vital information. Later a scholar visits from a neighbouring petty empire and is impressed by the monk's rediscovery of electric light. The narrative ends with a Mission to the stars as the world goes mad once more. This Canticle makes an interesting read and maintains its grip despite making leaps of several hundred years between major episodes. Indeed the following up of featured characters illustrates the myth-generation forces at work; while some deductions from surviving documents highlight the perils historians face today. Unusual in sf for its strong religious and mystical tendencies. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is well worth reading.

SHATTERED by Dean R Koontz  
Headline, 245 pages, £13.95, h/b.  
Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

For Alex Doyle the drive across America from Philadelphia to San Francisco was to turn into a nightmare. Accompanied by his new stepson Colin, Alex was on his way to

join his newly married wife Courtney. Within four blocks of Alex's old apartment Colin has spotted the panel truck tailing them. The paranoia that Alex succumbs to as the story unfolds is built up in a convincing fashion, with the gory finale coming as he reaches the love of his life in San Francisco.

*Shattered*, originally written in 1972 under the pen name of K R Dwyer, is the archetypal chase story. How much of the film *Duel* is ascribed to this novel is in dispute, but the basic plot line is all too familiar. As Dean R Koontz says in his foreward, "any complaints to be directed to K R Dwyer".

OUT ON BLUE SIX by Ian McDonald  
Bantam, 335 pages, £4.99, p/b.  
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The Compassionate Society: choosing a person's career for maximum personal happiness and satisfaction; patrolled by the Love Police who check for "pain crimes" such as privacy infringement. Totally perfect lives for all, or in reality total control over all lives. No chance for individualism because of upsetting others; no choice but that decided by government; dropouts living in a nether world limbo outside the law - and its controls. One unfulfilled persona is Courtney Hall, a cartoonist, continually aggrieved until finally she tumbles into the outlaw side of society and joins a renegade group who aim to change the Compassionate Society into something more HUMAN. A reverse 1984 type story, of total government control and fighting it. However, as in most of today's fiction, the minority renegades overcome the odds and actually win, with all renewed and better (overnight?) Interesting initial concept falls foul of Disneyesque ending.

THE GATE OF IVORY by Doris Egan  
Mandarin, 319 pages, £3.99 p/b.  
Reviewed by Carol Morton.

When Pyrene-born Theodora is left stranded on the planet Ivory after being robbed, she sets herself up as a fortune teller (using tarot cards) in the market place of the Imperial City. She is a fake, has no talent with her own tarot cards, but when Ran Cormallon (a sorcerer whose powers have been cursed away) hires her to be his card reader - using a special set of cards - she discovers that she does have talent and becomes an indispensable ally to Ran.



There is only one thing wrong with this arrangement, Ran has enemies who resort to magical means to destroy not only him but Theodora as well. This is an excellent story, the pace never falters, the plot is entertaining and the characters well moulded. Another thing in its favour is that it is a one-off, becoming rare these days. Excellent, highly recommended.

SONG OF KALI by Dan Simmons  
Headline, 311 pages, £3.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Poet Robert Luczak is sent to Calcutta to obtain new manuscripts by a celebrated Indian poet who disappeared seven years ago and was thought to have died. From the moment of his arrival he is caught in a web of deception and intrigue. He becomes enmeshed with worshippers of the goddess Kali and finds that the missing poet is deeply involved with them - perhaps his corpse has been re-animated by the goddess's power, or perhaps he never died at all.

Author Simmons paints with words a squalid, teeming poverty-ridden city where people live lives by such different rules that they might almost be on an alien planet where anything could be possible. Luczak obtains a manuscript, but in reading it he is touched by the song of Kali and his life will never again be the same, as the goddess and the city become one and nearly destroy him. He survives, but he will never be free of the song, and the reader will never be free of the images in this superb book.

THE LAND BEYOND by Gill Alderman  
Unwin Hyman, 306 pages, £13.95 h/b.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is an unusual and thought provoking novel. Examining the progress of a "saved" people, the Folk, in their habitat of the frozen north, the story follows their return to nature and the ways of their fore-fathers. The "civilised" occupants and "leaders" of the experiment attempt to teach new ideas overthrowing some of the custom of the Folk and its ideology. Initially this is a success but at the loss of natural living. Events take several mystic turns and the Folk become again one with their environment. The interplay of the characters and the scientists' behaviour towards the Folk (and vice versa) provide an interesting background to the main theme

of the Folk "finding" themselves. The addition of the "Democratic Travelling Circus" adds an extra dimension - and an unusual one, not only because of their means of travel. An emotive story expressed in colourful narrative and environmental critique which creates a well balanced novel. Worth a read.

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