

BRUM GROUP NEWS

July
1991

Issue
No. 238

The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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

1991 Committee: Group Chairman - Chris Chivers Secretary & Twentycon Chair - Helena Bowles
Treasurer - Richard Standage Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor Reviews Editor - Mick Evans
Ordinary Committee Member - Bernie Evans Publicity Officer - Al Johnston
Novacon 21 Chairman - Nick Mills

incorporating the
twentycon pocket programme

ATTENTION BSGF MEMBERS: You will notice that your *BRUM GROUP NEWS* is larger than usual this month, this is due to the fact that this month's "meeting" is slightly different, the meeting is in the form of Twentycon, our 20th anniversary party. If you haven't joined yet it is not too late - you can pay £20 on the door for the whole weekend. If, however, you are unable to attend the whole of Twentycon, day rates are available on Saturday or Sunday at £10 each, and even if you are unable to attend on either of these days you are welcome to come along on the Friday night to the Henley-in-Arden suite of the Holiday Inn. Where you can attend a showing of the film *SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES* at 5pm, a panel discussion *THEN AND NOW* at 7pm and Andromeda Bookshop's 20th Anniversary Party and Multi-Author Signing Session at 9pm. All FREE of charge! We look forward to seeing you there.

ATTENTION TWENTYCON ATTENDEES: Those of you who are familiar with convention publications will have noticed that this *POCKET PROGRAMME* is a bit different from normal. This is because we decided to incorporate this month's *BRUM GROUP NEWS* with our Pocket Programme to give you some idea of what the BSGF's newsletter looks like these days. We're sure you'll agree it shows some improvement on the single sheet of A4 paper of 20 years ago. If you wish to join the BSGF, and thus receive this magnificent publication every month, you can do so either at the Twentycon registration desk, or by post - details below. Welcome to Twentycon!

The BSGF meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at *THE AUSTRALIAN BAR*, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham city centre at 7.45pm. Subscription rates: £6.00 per person, or £9.00 for two members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to the BSGF, 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, W. Mids., B66 4SH (021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries to **MARTIN TUDOR**, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG (021 327 3023).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

16 AUGUST - The first BSFG meeting at the Australian Bar, Hurst St./Bromsgrove St., Birmingham city centre's "China Town" area. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the function room upstairs, speaker to be announced.

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

7 SEPTEMBER - NASS '91, the first ever National Astronomy & Spaceflight Show, in the Paradise Circus Complex, off Chamberlain Square, Birmingham city centre. Lecture tickets £5 (club discount on group bookings) include admission to all lectures plus the Exhibition. Exhibition only £2 (pay on the day to see the Exhibition only), LECTURE TICKETS by advance booking only - call Stuart Williams on (0922) 406411 after 7pm to reserve your Lecture ticket.

7 SEPTEMBER - Birmingham Comic Mart at the Carrs Lane Church Centre, just off High Street near Marks & Spencers in the city centre. Opens midday. Details: Golden Orbit, 18 Nelson Street, York, YO3 7NJ.

20 SEPTEMBER - ANNE GAY, author of *MINDSAIL*, talks to the BSFG in the month that her second novel, *THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT* is published (Macdonald, £12.95). Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre's "China Town" area.

18 OCTOBER - KEN CAMPBELL, renowned theatrical director, will talk to the BSFG. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre's "China Town" area.

1-3 NOVEMBER - NOVACON 21, the annual convention organized by the BSFG at the Excelsior Hotel, Coventry Road (by the Cargo Airport). GoH COLIN GREENLAND. Attending £15.00, although membership is FREE to anyone who has attended ALL of the first 20 Novacon. Cheques made payable to "Novacon 21" should be sent to: BERNIE EVANS, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Mids., B66 4SH.

15 NOVEMBER - The BSFG's annual debate with a team from the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre's "China Town" area.

20 DECEMBER - No "formal" BSFG meeting this month, although there will be a Christmas meal at the Wagon & Horses in Oldbury. Space is limited so you will need to book early. Watch this space for further details.

STOP PRESS

Nominations have opened for the next GUFF (Get Under Fan Fund) race, which will send a British or Continental European fan to the Australian Eastercon in Sydney in 1992.

Candidates for this race should have three European and two Australian nominators, and should in addition have vouched to travel to Syncon'92 if elected.

Nominations should have reached the GUFF administrators by 15 August 1991, the final GUFF ballot will be available from the end of August onwards, and will have a voting deadline of 31 December 1991.

If you can think of someone you feel deserves this honour please contact ROELOF GOUDRIAAN, Caan van Necklaan 63, 2281 BB Rijswijk, The Netherlands.

THANKS

Both I and the rest of the Twentycon committee would like to thank everyone who has helped before, during and after the convention. Special thanks to Andromeda Bookshop for the party, Dave Holmes, Bernie Evans and Tony Berry for advice and help, *FLAGSHIP* and *PROTOSTELLAR* magazines for supplying the bags.

Thank-you to all contributors to this issue of the newsletter, especially Dave Hardy for the DIP headings and page numbers and Dave Mooring for the cartoons on pages 3, 4, 7 & 11.

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The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

[The 43rd Jophan Report by Martin Tudor. News, as usual, courtesy of CRITICAL WAVE unless otherwise indicated.]

Kathy Gale, editorial director at Pan Books, surprised many observers last month by leaving Pan to take over the editorial reins at the Women's Press.

The vacancy at the Women's Press arose earlier this year when all but one of the editorial staff resigned, amidst rumours of a move towards "a more mainstream brand of feminism" (LOCUS, June 1991). Amongst those who left was long-time sf editor Sarah Lefanu.

Gale was responsible for Pan's "New Force" campaign which succeeded in raising the genre profile of Pan Books, both through the "trade fanzine" PANGALACTIC GARGLEBLASTER and carefully targeted advertising campaigns. She tells me that she is enjoying the new challenge at the Women's Press.

Bill Scott-Kerr initially replaced Gale in a "caretaking" role, until Martin Fletcher took over on 15 July.

THERE'S NOT MUSH ROOM
! AROUND HERE

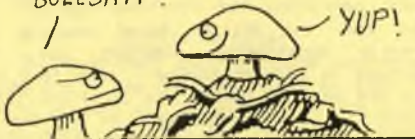


Both *A SMALL KILLING* by Alan Moore and Oscar Zarate and *THE LUCK IN MY HEAD* by M John Harrison and Ian Miller have been put back. Victor Gollancz will now be jointly releasing them on 17 October. Following hot on the heels of Gollancz's move into the graphic novel field comes word that Macdonald also intend to publish graphic novels - but not until 1992.

John Jarrold, Editorial Director of Orbit, informs me that a series of three graphic novels will be published by Macdonald late in 1992. Dave McKean will be illustrating a graphic novel by Jonathon Carroll, Lorenzo Mettotti will illustrate Brian Aldiss' and a third will be by Doris Lessing, but no artist has been announced as yet for that project.

Also appearing from Macdonald in 1992 will be the long-awaited revised and updated *ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF SF*, which should appear in hardback in October, priced around £30. *AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND* by Iain Banks will be published as an Orbit hardback in September 1992.

WHAT A LOAD OF
BULLSHIT!



At Mexican 4 Friends of Foundation used a couple of tables in the dealers' room to sell off some of the duplicate copies of books which have been donated to help the SF Foundation. They raised £261 in this way, in addition to which £58 was taken in memberships of FoF (both new and renewals), £51 of subscriptions to the journal *FOUNDATION* were sold and £59 was "fed" to their award winning collection box "Robert".

In addition to the customary donations of books and money FoF is also interested in photos. So, if you have any photographs that you wish to donate please contact the FoF at the address below. They are interested in photos of "authors, publishers, critics or prominent fans" they can be "new or old, of figures long dead or others just emerging", colour or black and white photos are acceptable. Any pictures should be accompanied by the following information: the subject of the photograph (or identification of all the people in a group); the date and place of the photograph; and the name of the photographer.

Currently membership of FoF (including a subscription to the critical journal *FOUNDATION*) is £14 pa (UK & Eire) or £19 (overseas) - deduct £1 if you're a student. If you already subscribe to *FOUNDATION* membership of FoF is just £4, or if you do not want to subscribe to *FOUNDATION* membership of FoF is just £5. Further details are available from Rob Meades, 75 Hecham Close, Walthamstow, London, E17 5QT.

Sheffield based fans (and Novacon 21 committee members), Steve and Alice Lawson, recently won a Rover car, worth approximately £11,500, in a Makro free prize draw. Congratulations to them both, and I'll have a pint of Guinness, please...

Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett have confirmed that negotiations are under way for a movie of their bestselling novel *GOOD OMENS*. "We have finished the first draft of the first draft of the screenplay for some people in Hollywood," Gaiman told me in June, adding that at this stage he was not sure he could say anymore. Pratchett was less reticent, however, about the proposed *MORT* movie, which he told me "is now in the thing known as development hell. The script has been written, and indeed, rewritten and rewritten again." He added that the British based company are currently considering shooting the film somewhere in Eastern Europe - they feel that there are several appropriate locations there, although the mind does boggle at the thought there is a place in Eastern Europe that even vaguely resembles Ankh-Morpork.

Gaiman and Pratchett were signing books at Andromeda in June. Later the same day they had to speed off to a hastily arranged signing at Athena in Stoke-on-Trent, apparently customers there had presented the publishers with an eight hundred signature petition to ensure they received a visit from the popular duo - unfortunately the signing session was only scheduled for ONE hour...

On a personal note, I made my first professional sale last month. The first instalment of my monthly book review column appeared in *GAMESMAN* magazine. Steve Green began reviewing books for its sister magazine *FANTAZIA* at the same time.

Penguin Books intend to mark the launch of their new sf and fantasy imprint, ROC Books, with the publication of four titles in Britain: *SHADOWRUN - CHOOSE YOUR ENEMIES CAREFULLY* by Robert N Charette (based on FASA Corporation's role playing games) ; *ECHOES OF THE FOURTH MAGIC* by Robert Salvatore ; *WALKER OF WORLDS* by Tom de Haven and *TEMPS* the first book from Midnight Rose.

Headed by Neil Gaiman, Alex Stewart, Roz Kaveney and Mary Gentle, Midnight Rose books intend to publish regularly a number of shared world anthology series. Devised by Gaiman and Stewart *TEMPS*, the first of these to appear, is a series of short stories by a number of authors concerning a group of British superheroes operating from a small department at the back of the Home Office. Although *TEMPS* won't officially be launched until 5 August copies of it, and other ROC books will be on sale at Twentycon, where they can be signed on the Friday night by such people as Alex Stewart, Mary Gentle, Roz Kaveney, Graham Higgins and Storm Constantine.

THE BAR

Twentycon's 'Main Convention Bar' will be Prinny's Lounge Bar, which is situated on the 'SF' floor. We will have exclusive use of this bar for the entire period of the convention.

Prinny's Lounge Bar will remain open to Twentycon members (who are resident at the Holiday Inn) as long as sufficient demand exists to warrant the bar remaining open. The MINIMUM hours that Prinny's Lounge Bar will be open to such Twentycon members are as follows:

Friday - 11am until at least 4am Saturday.
 - 11am until 11pm for non-residents.
 Saturday - 11am until at least 4am Sunday.
 - 11am until 11pm for non-residents.
 Sunday - 11am until at least 3am Monday.
 - 12pm until 3pm, and 7pm until 10.30pm for non-residents.

We have arranged with the Holiday Inn for supplies of Draught Guinness and cans of Bass bitter to be sold to Twentycon members, we would appreciate it if you would drink them dry of, at least, both of these.



FIRST BRUM FAN IN SPACE ---

GENERAL INFORMATION

THE COMMITTEE

Chair: Helena Bowles, Registrations: Carol Morton, Treasurer: Richard Standage, Programme: Andy Wright, Programme Book & Hotel Liaison: Martin Tudor.

RNIB AUCTION & RAFFLE

If you have any material you wish to donate to the auction (or as raffle prizes) and you are unable to attend Twentycon please call Carol Morton on (0384) 897206 before 8pm.

If you have brought material you wish to donate to the Auction or the Raffle please hand it over at the registration desk on Friday evening.

All proceeds from both the Auction and the Raffle will be donated to the RNIB. We will not be auctioning material, or running raffles, on behalf of private individuals or other fan funds.

CAR PARKING

Twentycon attendees who are resident in the hotel will have use of the Free Car Parking Facilities. Report to the hotel's reception on arrival.

LEISURE

Twentycon attendees resident in the hotel are welcome to use the Leisure Facilities, including the gym, indoor swimming pool and sauna.

BOOK ROOM

The Book Room and Twentieth Anniversary display are in the Ladywood Suite on floor '0'. Also on display will be artwork by Tim Groome (whose work appear in the Twentycon Souvenir Book) - if you are interested in buying any of Tim's work please contact his agent Dave Cox. The Book Room will be open from 5pm to 6pm on Friday, 10am to 6pm on Saturday and 10am to 5pm on Sunday.

CRECHE

If there is sufficient demand we will be operating a creche in one of the syndicate rooms on floor '0'. If you are interested please speak to Carol Morton on the registration desk.

"My God, it's full of stars!"



The year we make contact

Special one-off Cinemascope showing of the top Science Fiction film **2010** [PG] at the CANNON CINEMA, John Bright Street, Birmingham in celebration of the

National Astronomy & Spaceflight Show 1991

Saturday 7th September 1991

Doors Open 10.30pm, film starts 11pm.

Adults £3.10, Under 15's £2.10

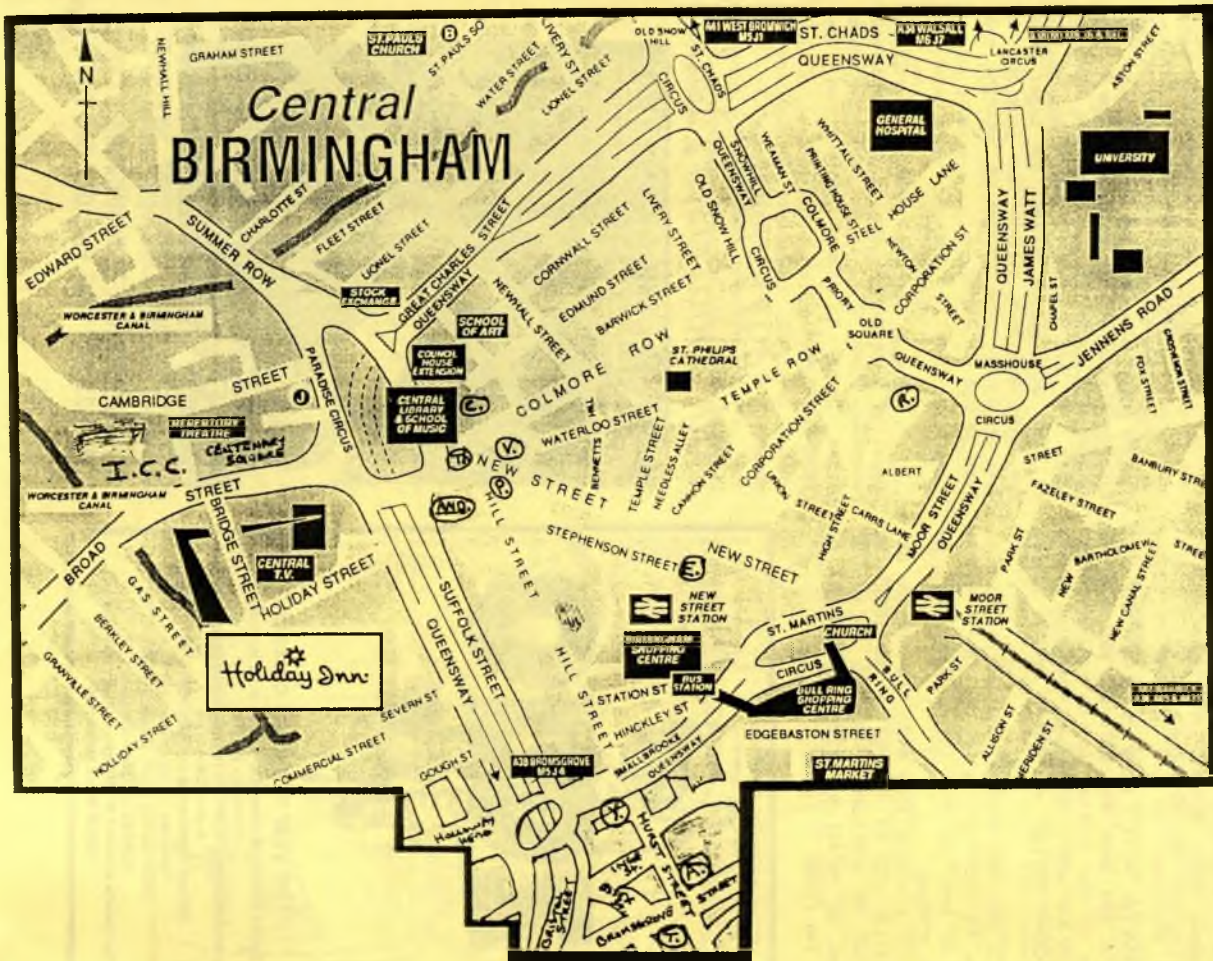
For Details of NASS '91 Telephone *Stuart Williams* on (0922) 406411 after 7pm

1971-1991 20th Anniversary Year



SCIENCE FICTION · FANTASY · HORROR

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Tel: 021-643 1999 Fax: 021-643 2001



KEY

- AND. *ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP*
- A. *AUSTRALIAN BAR*
- V. *Victoria Square*
- C. *Chamberlain Square*
- B. *HENRY'S Cantonese Restaurant, Tel: 200 1136/1190*
- J. *Fletcher's Walk to Paradise Forum and Chamberlain/Victoria Squares*
- T. *TONG LEE Cantonese Restaurant, Tel: 622 1989*
- Th *Town Hall*
- P. *POST OFFICE, Victoria Square*
- R. *DAYS OF THE RAJ Indian Restaurant, Tel: 236 0445*
- Y. *THE CHUNG YIN GARDEN, Cantonese, 17 Thorpe St., Tel: 622 1668*
- E. *THE EXCHANGE, Berni steak house Tel: 643 2969*

FOOD

'Full-English breakfast' will be served to Twentycon members who are resident in the Holiday Inn between the hours of 7am and 10.30am each day of the convention in the Conservatory Restaurant.

Coffee, tea, sandwiches and rolls will be available for sale over the bar in Prinny's Lounge from 1pm-1am on Friday and from 11am-1am on Saturday & Sunday.

A selection of 'Cheap Hot Meals' priced at £2, £3, £3.50 and £3.95 will be on sale at the far end of Prinny's Lounge at the following times: Friday 6pm-7pm, and 11pm until midnight. Saturday 1pm - 2.30pm, 6pm-7.30pm, and 11pm until midnight. Sunday 1pm-2.30pm & 6pm-7pm.

□□□□□

A Brief Food Guide

by Helena Bowles and Richard Standage

Walk out the front door of the Holiday Inn, turn left, walk up the steps at the end of the plaza and cross Broad Street to Centenary Square. Turn right at the square and walk towards the Central Library and the Copthorne Hotel, you will find yourself in a covered area called: **PARADISE FORUM** Which is between Central Library and Centenary Square, and is a new, small arcade of assorted Italian theme eating places. Aimed at ICC delegates and therefore quite expensive.

NEW STREET

From Paradise Forum walk down the steps to your right, into Chamberlain Square, keeping the Town Hall on your right, walk across Victoria Square towards the pedestrian crossing lights. When you cross over you will find yourself at the top end of New Street (which runs to your left) and facing you will be Hill Street.

Pizza Hut (631 4855), Pizzaland (643 0547), Deep Pan Pizza Company (643 5911), are all generic pizza restaurants situated on New Street, (check out the interesting toppings and impressive salad bar at Deep Pan, same side as the Rotunda, near the Odeon). Spud-U-Like, baked potatoes, various fillings, cheap, near Victoria Square. Macdonalds, on 'the Ramp' by Midland Hotel/Stephenson Street. If you don't know what this is - which planet are you from? The Exchange (643 2969) - Berni Steak House, good but expensive. Enter via Stephenson Street entrance under the Ramp. Kentucky Fried Chicken (632 6581) far end of New St., bottom of the Rotunda. Comment

as for Macdonalds (can we live there too?).

CORPORATION STREET

Down New Street, towards the Rotunda, until the Midland Hotel is on your right, facing the Midland, on your left will be Corporation St. Wimpy (643 6039) - speaks for itself. Pizza Express - standard pizzas, but live jazz on Saturday. Hawkins (236 2001) - yuppie café bar, good food, high prices. Royal City (236 8664) - basic but tasty curry, very cheap.

JOHN BRIGHT STREET

Walk down Hill Street and John Bright Street is diagonally to your right at the traffic lights. House of Mr Chan - one of the best Cantonese restaurants in city centre (situated above the Navigation Fish Bar). Navigation Fish Bar, self-explanatory, could be useful for those who over-spend at the auction. Open most days until midnight, usual fare, eat in or take-out (632 6699).

STATION STREET

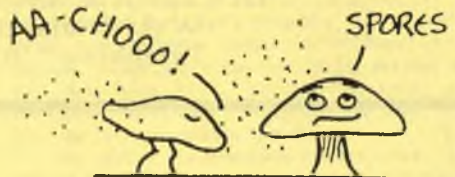
Walk down Hill Street past the Station's NCP multi-storey car parks and Station Street will be on your left. Bambos (643 5621) - large range of Greek dishes. Watch out for dancing on the tables. (Anyone planning on going there alone should be aware that it is next to a sleazy cinema club.) New Happy Gathering (643 1851) - standard Chinese restaurant.

HURST STREET AREA

Walk down Hill Street to the end (the Albany Hotel will be on your right) and Hurst Street is opposite you, through the large underpass. This is Birmingham's "China Town", there are too many restaurants to list in full. Follow your nose and pick one, it will probably be good. The New Chung Ying Garden is excellent, although it is advisable to book. Also worth trying (although the choice is not as varied as the Chung Ying) is the Tong Lee (opposite the Australian Bar) - superb Yuk Shung.

HIGH STREET

At the Rotunda end of New Street is the Pavilions Shopping Centre - top floor features assorted kiosks surrounding a large eating area. Fairly high standard, if a little institutionalised. Open during shop hours, but can be very busy on Saturdays. At Dale End (opposite Toys-R-Us is the Days of the Rai (236 0445) classy but expensive Indian.



Novacon 21

1st - 3rd November 1991
Excelsior Hotel, Birmingham

Guest of Honour

Colin Greenland

Winner of the *Arthur C. Clarke* Award.

Winner of the *B.S.F.A.* Award for best Novel.



A celebration of 21 years of Novacon,
featuring a fancy-dress birthday party,
films, panels, games and all the usual
Novacon entertainments.



Attending membership £15 until 19th October.

All enquiries to Bernie Evans
121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley,
West Midlands, B66 4SH.
Telephone - 021 558 0997



taken control of the world's armies (in some unexplained way) and is trying to destroy civilisation by cutting the world up into small self-sufficient communities, or failing that, by simply wiping out humanity. The book opens with Arslan's forces rolling into an idyllic small Illinois town (as though Ray Bradbury were rewriting the movie *RED DAWN*). The character of Arslan is such a monster that I can't even find him to be human, let alone sympathize with him. I can only wonder if there's some level of irony in this book I'm missing somehow.

THE OUTLAWS OF SHERWOOD by Robin McKinley

Orbit, 298 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is another version of the Robin Hood story but with a difference. The story starts before Robin - a yeoman and not an Earl's heir - becomes an outlaw because of his inadvertent killing of a bully, Robin, contrary to legend, is an inept bowman and now has to flee to Sherwood Forest where, with the help of his friends Marian and Much the Miller's son, he survives and gradually other dispossessed join him. The story has none of the Errol Flynn or Richard Green glamour about it, but describes in graphic detail the hardships and privations the outlaws suffer in Sherwood. Whilst this is not an sf or fantasy novel, McKinley is such an accomplished storyteller that this does not matter, and it provides new insight into what is one of England's favourite legends. Read the afterword, it will surprise you with some of the facts she has uncovered about the 'true' Robin Hood and his Merry Men.

THE LAST STAND OF THE DNA COWBOYS by Mick Farren

Orbit, 283 pp, £3.50, p/b

Reviewed by Peter Day.

The far future, at a time when the world has fragmented into a scattered multitude of stasis points surrounded by the nightmarish, lethal no-man's-land of the nothings, huge bands of raiders march from stasis point to stasis point on mindless campaigns of conquest, slaughter and destruction. Violence and anarchy are on the increase everywhere, and the world of mankind seems to be winding down to an ignoble end. Amidst all this, Reave Mekonta, the Minstrel Boy and Billy Oblivion - The DNA Cowboys, a legendary trio of cosmic hellraisers - come together once more for one last, cataclysmic adventure. A thoroughly entertaining read, this is a satisfying full-blooded thud-and-blunder in the good old widescreen baroque tradition, revelling in its grotesque scenarios. Written with a slightly tongue-in-cheek approach, as witness the occasional jokey "arcane cultural references", this is very much a fun book.

POST MORTEM ed Paul F Olson & David B Silva
Corgi, 349 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

"I looked out of my window this mornin' and saw the woods full of damn ghosts, blowin' in the breeze like damn newspapers" says a character in Robert McCammon's story in this anthology of ghostly tales. But ghosts aren't necessarily as harmless as old newspapers. In McCammon's story they are so plentiful as to disrupt ordinary life. In Charles de Lint's story they can trap you in their own time period. In "The Guide" by Ramsey Campbell are the landscapes of M R James (the greatest ghost story writer of them all), populated by something very nasty. William F Nolan's ghost traps people, too, and so do the ghosts in stories by Thomas F Monteleone, Charles L Grant and others. In fact, what this all-original anthology shows is that modern ghost stories aren't just about ghostly presences gliding serenely along panelled corridors in old houses. These are horror stories concerning ghosts, most worth reading and a few very frightening indeed.

THE PROPHECY OF AKHRAN by Margaret Weiss

& Tracy Hickman

Bantam, 390 pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the rather disappointing climax to the "Rose of the Prophet" trilogy. The forces of the unpleasant (but not evil) God Quar are conquering the world and the other Gods are getting weaker. All the immortals must learn to co-operate to defeat the invincible efreet Kaug. In the mortal world, Khardan and companions must cross the desert of the Sun's Anvil to return to his beleaguered tribe. The problem with the book (and with the trilogy as a whole) is that the action takes place on the planes of the gods, the immortals and the mortals, so the story has too many major characters and ends with three small climaxes instead of one big one. The "Dragonlance" books had an unbelievably cliched plot, but interesting characters we could sympathize with. I hope Weiss and Hickman remember this important rule of writing in future.

MORE TALES OF PIRX THE PILOT by Stanislaw Lem

Mandarin, 220 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This book, another delightful collection of the adventures of Pirx, Lem's pragmatic hero, covers a range from whimsical humour to rigorous logical puzzles. Older and wiser than in his Academy days Pirx has Man's first, abortive, encounter with outsiders. He is unable to do anything about it as his crew is incapacitated by mumps.

The rest of his adventures concern robots; from chasing a cybernetic Chris Bonnington to diagnosing

an obsessive-compulsive autopilot; by way of a droid hunt across the Sea of Tranquility, Pirx must pit his cynical test-pilot's mind against electronic folly and madness. Very enjoyable.

BLACK SMITH'S TELLING by Fay Sampson
Headline, 275pp, £3/50, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Another episode in the story of Morgan, Arthur's half-sister, this time told by Teilo, a blacksmith and wise man of the old religion. Teilo sees Morgan on her way to her wedding to King Urien of Rheged, and is captivated by her. In trying to prove his mastery of the old religion to Morgan, Teilo kills one of her waiting-women. In revenge Morgan curses him, kills his wife, drains his powers and makes him an outcast before finally making him play the part of a woman, and for a powerful and proud man that is the cruellest punishment. Morgan uses Teilo to spy on Merlin and Nimue as they train Arthur and his followers in the art of war.

This story's timespan is from Morgan's wedding to the eve of Modred's presentation at Arthur's court. Now I always thought Modred was Morgan's son by Arthur, but in this novel he's Margawse's (by Arthur), Morgan's sister (and also Arthur's half-sister).

An excellently written novel, there are a few vague references to the powers associated with the old religion, but this is not sufficient to recommend the novel to an sf group. Historically interesting, though.

ROYAL CHAOS by Dan McGirt

Pan, 246 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Michael Jones.

In this sequel to the author's first novel, *JASON COSMOS*, the happy ending to the previous book is first overturned and then righted again, with various adventures in between. It is meant to be comic but it doesn't really work for me - I found the humour rather heavy-handed. The plot is too complicated, and the writer seems to rely heavily on a technique of piling up as many difficulties as his imagination can devise and then bringing on a literal *deus ex machina* to get the hero out of trouble. If he were witty enough this might work, but he isn't and it doesn't. To be fair, there are some quite funny moments, but not enough to overcome the tedium in between. Stick to Terry Pratchett.

HEAVEN CENT by Piers Anthony

NEL, 322 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Carol Morton.

What more can one say (or should one say) about Anthony's "Xanth" stories? This latest offering concerns the nine year old Prince Dolph and his quest to recover the missing good magician Humphrey. The puns (as such) get worse, the plot thinner, and

the stories more contrived. Anthony really should call time on this series. Only for completists.

THE THIRD EAGLE by R A MacAvoy
Bantam, 260 pp, £3.50, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Wanbli is a Wacaan, a culture descended from American Indians, who hire out as joint bodyguard/assassins to the rulers of the planet Neunacht. Bored with that life, he heads out into space to New Benares to become a "shinner" (3D film) star. This does not work out, and he wanders through a series of minor adventures. The last section of the book is the longest, and has a darker feel to the others. It is about the salvage of slower-than-light sleeper ships where, for economic reasons, only a few of the crew are revived, and the rest are killed. The loose ends in the plot are tied up rather too neatly. This is MacAvoy's first sf novel. It reads more like a series of collected novellas than a novel, and somehow it fails to enthrall.

THE BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS by Poul Anderson

Orbit, 604 pp, £3.99 p/b Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The history of man told from the perspective of "special" people. Every so often a human is born who is different, special because they don't age, they are forced to adapt to humanity's reactions, Anderson takes this premise and delivers examples from history where these "immortals" interacted with the rest of humanity, usually by hiding themselves or retreating from danger. Time goes on until they decide the world is ready to receive - and understand - them. After the revelation humanity, now knowing it can be done, defeats death and everyone becomes immortal. But the "originals" begin to speculate about life, as humanity becomes listless - are the answers out in space?

They decide to leave Earth, to explore - what are the distances involved to an immortal? Can they answer the questions of other sentient races? Here is an excellent book tracing the development of mankind from barbarous beginnings to technological saviour, showing the lives of ordinary people and immortals having to adapt to survive. The overall plot is well presented, the characters very believable and the story excellently told. A book in a million. Very highly recommended.

SEERESS OF KELL by David Eddings

Bantam, 430 pp, £14.99, h/bReviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the final tale in the saga of Belgariad and company. What started out as an excellent story in "The Belgariad" has degenerated into a weak wishy-washy copy. Eddings can't be blamed for trying to cash in on his success, but it has tarnished the



original. This volume has Belgarion and company travelling to Kell, and then on to Perivor before finally reaching "the place that is no more" and - I don't think I'll surprise anyone by saying this - defeating Zandrakas and regaining Geran. What has really irritated me during this series has been the way the characters keep saying "I think this has happened before", it's almost as if Eddings is trying to apologise to the readers for serving up the same story yet again. One way he could have redeemed himself would have been to have taken the radical step of killing off one of the main characters. But no, the least 'important' characters snuff it and the rest all live happily ever after. There were occasional glimpses of the brilliance of "The Belgariad", but not often and not enough. Sorry Mr Eddings, but you shouldn't have bothered!

SHADOW MAGIC by Patricia C Wrede
Orbit, 279 pages, £3.50, p/b Reviewed by Steve Jones

The divided country of Alkyra is threatened by the aggressive realm of Lithra. When Alethis, daughter of Lord Bracor, is kidnapped it is thought to be merely an attempt by the Lithern to stir up trouble. But as Alethis meets the secret races of Alkyra; the magician Shee, the foxlike Wyrd and the aquatic Neira, she discovers that the evil Shadowborn have taken over Lithra. They can only be stopped by the lost Gifts of Alkyra, which disappeared alone with the crown many years ago. And the only person who can use them is Alethis herself.

This book suffers from a telegraphed plot. It is quite obvious that the Gifts are not going to stay lost, and Alethis is going to end up as Queen after destroying the Shadowborn. This is exactly what happens, and the book offers too few surprises.

A CHILD ACROSS THE SKY by Jonathon Carroll
Legend, 268 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Carroll is a compelling writer, his words insist on being read. This is a small part of the magic that infuses the worlds that he creates and leaks from the page. Weber Gregston, the film maker from *THE BONES OF THE MOON*, hears of the suicide of his best friend, Phillip Strayhorn. From that moment strange things begin to happen. Weber receives three video tapes from Phil, two of which are blank, the other an impossible film of the death of Weber's mother in a plane crash. Then a strange, pregnant child appears calling herself Painsleepe and claiming to be an angel and Phil's imaginary, childhood friend, telling Weber that if he doesn't finish the film Phil was working on, in the right way, a lot of people are going to die.

A CHILD ACROSS THE SKY raises questions about the morality of horror films, but subtly. There is

no time that you feel that the author is preaching, he merely introduces an element of disquiet that hovers in the background, refusing to go away. This is a mark of Carroll's extraordinary talent.

CIRUELO by Ciruelo Cabral
Paper Tiger, 128 pp, £9.95, large p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Ciruelo Cabral was born in Buenos Aires and began his career as an artist there before moving to Spain in 1987 to seek greater scope to exercise his talents. This collection features some 120 of his pictures, ranging from early work to a few of his latest productions, and demonstrates that his talents are considerable. He is seen working in a variety of styles for a variety of markets, but all his work combines creative flair with, where required, a meticulous attention to detail. To be sure some of his work is quite derivative, but as he progresses to a style of his own he will surely become a noteworthy name in the fantasy art world. Meanwhile, this is a most enjoyable volume to keep on the art bookshelf.

THE LETTERS OF J.R.R. TOLKIN Ed. Humphrey Carpenter & Christopher Tolkien
Unwin, 463 pp, £6.99, trade p/b
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a collection of Tolkein's letters from 1914 to 1973. They are selected mostly from his writings on *THE HOBBIT*, *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* and *THE SILMARILLION*. They include famous last words, such as "I cannot think of anything more to write about Hobbits", just after the publication of *THE HOBBIT*.

Tolkein was a master of the icy putdown: as to the German publisher in 1938 who wanted proof of his non-Jewish ancestry, to Forrest Ackerman about a proposed film of *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* (it would have been much worse than the one that was made), and to a fan who proposed writing his own sequel to *LORD OF THE RINGS*. Then there was the translator who turned "orcs" into "awks", and gave them feathers.

Overall, Tolkein was a lively and interesting letter writer. This is a book for dipping into, rather than reading straight through.

DRAGON PRINCE by Melanie Rawn

Pan, 574pp, £4.50, p/b

STAR SCROLL by Melanie Rawn

Pan, 588 pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Prince Rohan's father is killed by a dragon. In order to avoid marriage to one of High Prince Rolestra's predatory daughters he makes out he that he is a simpleton, while secretly contracting marriage to Sioned, a Sunrunner. The Sunrunners are a group who are able to communicate by word and deed over sunlight, moonlight and, in Sioned's case,

starlight. This marriage causes friction in the kingdom, which results in Rohan's being captured by Ianthe (one of Roelstra's daughters), raping her and fathering a child on her. Sioned is not able to carry a child to term, so when Ianthe's child is born Sioned kidnaps him, names him Pol, and passes him off as her own. Ianthe dies in the process.

In *STAR SCROLL* the Sunrunners discover that their age old enemy the Diarnadh'im are resurfacing, vowing to overthrow the Sunrunners and their supporters, primarily Rohan (now High Prince) and Pol. The Diarnadh'im are foremost a race of sorcerers who have the power to communicate over starlight.

These are excellent books, the storylines are original and well written and the characters aren't stereotyped, they have their flaws but are more believable for it. Rawn is obviously a talent for fantasy lovers to watch out for.

QUEST FOR LOST HEROES by David Gemmell

Legend, 316 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The latest in Gemmell's "Drenai", novels set some thirty years after the battle of Belazar and concerning the heroes thereof. A young villager, Kiall, promises revenge and to rescue Ravenna after a Nadir raid. He gains the aid of, first Charoes the swordmaster and later the remaining heroes, Beltzer, Finn and Maggrig. The five travel into Nadir lands on the quest only to discover Ravenna has been sold to Jungir Kahn, leader of the Nadir, and as he has taken her as his wife she is well protected. Another twist finds Asta Kahn (shaman to the late Tanaka) aiding the questors, along with an ambassador from the Kiatze Empire seeking revenge for the killing of the Emperor's daughter by Jungir Kahn. A seemingly straightforward saga typically (for Gemmell) expands into a myriad of sub-plots to entertain and delight. The wonderful characterisation and some poignant moments make this another "hit" for Gemmell keeping him at the top of the fantasy writing league.

THE SEA STAR by Diana Paxson

NEL, 372 pp, £4.50, p/b Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the fourth book of the "Chronicles of Vestria" but only the previous one, *THE EARTHSTONE*, has real relevance to the events depicted here. To be acknowledged king of Vestria, Julian has to find and master four magical crystals. The second, the Sea Star of the title is found by accident by Rana when she is a captive of pirates. This is really her story as Prince Julian doesn't enter the scene until a third of the way through. The main problem with this book is the leisurely way it progresses. There does not seem to be enough urgency, either to gather these crystals or even in the action itself. Episodes of storm and battle lack tension and more sensitive passages lack intensity. Since Diana

Paxson is capable of very powerful writing, such as in *WHITE RAVEN*, I found the overall effect disappointing.

AT WINTER'S END by Robert Silverberg

Legend, 419 pp, £3.50 p/b Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Every 26 million years death stars fall on the Earth, throwing up so much dust and debris that the Earth is plunged into a generations-long winter. With this in mind the six races that live on the Earth prepare for the cataclysm. The Humans place enclaves of a monkey-like species far underground in sheltered cocoons where they evolve sentence. One such group ventures out of its cocoon after 700,000 years, into the first springtime in many generations. They travel across a vastly changed world to the ruins of Vengiboneeza, the ancient capital of sapphire-eyed folk (another race that existed pre-cataclysm), where they make the shattering discovery that they are not the humans they thought they were, but just the result of an experiment by Humans. They also discover that the only race to survive the winter are the insectivorous Hjjks who are bent on conquest. So Hresh the young chronicler of the tribe must search Vengiboneeza to find some way of preventing the destruction of his tribe.

An interesting concept this, and written with the magnificent style we associate with Silverberg. A list of characters would have been a boon as their names are not easy to identify with. That apart this is a wonderful tale of a new race discovering its new world and being a little puzzled as to what it finds.

THE MAGICAL WORLD OF THE INKLINGS by Gareth Knight

Element, 254 pp, £9.99 Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A fairly comprehensive study of four famous "sons" within the writers group known as the Inklings. These being CS Lewis, JRR Tolkien, Charles Williams and Owen Barfield. The work sets out to explore the backgrounds of, and interconnections between, these four writers, noting the influences wrought on each and its effects. As the book states "here we have four very different men ... to outward view they were but two Oxford dons, a solicitor and a publisher's editor with minor literary aspirations". And yet the influence they have had on modern writing has become itself almost myth. Lewis's sf novels and "childrens" novels (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), Tolkien's imagery in *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* and *THE SILMARILLION* stand unchallenged in mythopoetic writing, Williams' fiction and poetry and Barfield's intellectual dynamism add to a powerhouse of imaginative discourse that surrounds them.

Knight has produced a well-written book explaining the man and his work for each author, mingling the narrative work with influence evoked by

the others - without Barfield's impact and Lewis's prompting perhaps Tolkien's work would have stayed a hobby. All were deeply religious Christians, and this is acknowledged and expanded upon, perhaps to the detriment of the finished article. Admittedly this had a major influence on them and their work but I felt the allegory overplayed, particularly in view of Tolkien's love of the Norse myths.

HOMELAND by R A Salvatore

Penguin, 314 pp, £4.50, p/b Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is book one in "The Dark Elf" trilogy, and is of course an "Advanced Dungeons and Dragons" book. Drizzt Do'Urden is born a drow elf, one of an evil race that live far beneath the ground, in the city of Menzoberranzan. He narrowly escapes being sacrificed to Lloth, the spider goddess, but is relieved when one of his brothers treacherously kills the other. He suffers all the horrors of growing up in this decadent society, but is saved from corruption by his father Zak. Zak is convinced that their must be a better way to live, but has never dared leave Menzoberranzan to seek it out. Events may force them to choose between evil or exile, as many factions plan the destruction of House Do'Urden. Not a bad example of its type.

STRANOS OF STARLIGHT by Gael Baudino

Orbit, 370 pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Mirriam a plain, dark-haired, young woman has the power to heal. Because of her power she has been branded a witch and tortured by the inquisition that flourishes in fourteenth century Europe. Mirriam escapes, and is nursed back to health by Mika, a wise woman. Mika tells Mirriam of the Free Towns that are as yet untroubled by the inquisition, and where Mirriam would be welcomed. Once fit again Mirriam travels there, only to be brutally raped by a man whose severed arm she has just re-attached and healed. She is found by an Elf who heals her and in the process something of the Elven nature passes to Mirriam but she still vows to avenge herself on her violator. Mirriam has been changed so much by the Elven magic that she finds herself transformed into a red-haired green-eyed Elf, the perfect disguise for revenge?

This is a prodigious tale of an alternate medieval Europe where Elves and magic existed.

ONE HUMAN MINUTE by Stanislaw Lem

Mandarin, 102 pp, £4.99, p/b

A PERFECT VACUUM by Stanislaw Lem

Mandarin, 229 pp, £4.99, p/bReviewed by Al Johnston.

These are collections of hypothetical reviews, reviews for books not yet written (*ONE HUMAN MINUTE*) or books that never have been and probably never

will be (*A PERFECT VACUUM*). While it sounds far from promising, the idea has led to two collections of fascinating essays.

It has to be said that *ONE HUMAN MINUTE* is a bit on the thin side; not dramatically thicker in fact, than the fiver you have to shell out for it. That said, the three items within provoke enough thought to provide good value. The title review is of the titanic eruption of computer publishing, in several editions, culminating in a continuously updated on-line version. Tapping the vein first explored by *THE GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS*, this time distills all human activity down to per-minute statistics. The review reflects upon the picture this paints. "The Upside-down Evolution" charts the future of war, and the lack of same for Man, while "The World as Cataclysm" explains cosmology and why SETI has been unsuccessful.

A PERFECT VACUUM is, by contrast, a good deal more substantial; a paradoxical statement which summarises much of the humour within. With variety however comes inconsistency, some of the satirical reviews take on a pretentiousness of their own, but on the whole this is good thought-provoking stuff.

GOOD OMENS by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman

Corgi, 383 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This novel loosely follows the exploits of Aziraphale (Angel) and Crowley (Demon) and their intervention with (or, officially, overseeing of) man on Earth. It is more concerned with Armageddon, the bringing about of, and events connected to it.

Borrowing from the *ONEW* movies and (of course) the Bible, the manner in which the narrative is delivered leaves no qualms as to the ability of the authors. Aziraphale and Crowley are sort of pals, who "help each other out" in small ways, and have to combat their respective "bosses" and concoct cover-ups to keep their lives running smoothly. Things-don't-go-as-planned (of course) and our "heroes" have to adjust plans and solve problems for their respective higher-ups (or lower-downs?). Largely this is due to losing the Anti-Christ, which is obviously a problem if you are planning Armageddon.

Other characters flit through the novel, my particular favourites being the Bikers of the Apocalypse and the section concerning Agnes Nutter. A thoroughly enjoyable read, it had me sniling and giggling in parts. It's wonderfully written, though I'd like confirmation of who wrote what! Winners of Eastercon's award for Best Long Text, an excellent and brilliantly told story, with superb dialogue.

AS ON A DARKLING PLAIN by Ben Bova

Mandarin, 189 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

First issued in 1975, this is a tale of a man's discovery of machines on the "planet" Titan. These



machines are thought to have been built by "The Others", an ancient race supposedly responsible for the destruction of Earth's first great civilisation, Dr Sydney Lee, one of the team on Titan, is convinced they are meant to be used to destroy any subsequent civilisations on our planet. Dr Lee becomes obsessed with the machines, which leads to a complete mental breakdown. When he recovers he is sent on a deep space mission. What they discover is a planet inhabited by a remnant of a civilisation that was also destroyed by "The Others", but these are Neanderthals! The fact that Titan is a moon of Saturn says it all, the story has dated badly, the plotline seems cut and dried and the characters stereotyped. All I can say is Bova's style has improved a great deal in the 15 years since this was first published. Interesting only for curiosity value. Not recommended.

CHERNEVOG by C J Cherryh
Methuen, 328 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan,

I am a great admirer of Cherryh's writing and a sucker for fairy tales, but somehow this didn't work as well as it should. *CHERNEVOG* is the sequel to *RUSHALKA*. The young wizard, Sasha, is becoming increasingly concerned about the consequences of his making wishes, especially when things happen that he doesn't remember wishing for. Eveshka, also a wizard and the wife of his friend, begins to dream of Chernevog, the wizard who drowned her so that she became a rushalka. Chernevog is held captive by the Leshys, magical tree-creatures similar to J R R Tolkien's Ents (but originating in Russian folklore), but their power seems to be fading. Chernevog must be prevented from waking, somehow.

The ideas in the book are original, the writing is excellent. Perhaps it is too similar to *RUSHALKA*. Sasha and Pyetr spend a lot of time wandering through the woods; perhaps it is too insular. Much of Cherryh's other work involves plots in which the consequences of the characters' actions are far-reaching. In *CHERNEVOG* there is no sense of impending doom for the rest of the world if things go wrong. While it could be argued that this makes it more realistic the real world is not allowed to penetrate into the forest either.

THE DOOR INTO FIRE by Diane Duane
Corgi, 332 pp, £3.99, p/b

THE DOOR INTO SHADOW by Diane Duane
Corgi, 327 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Carol Morton,

Herewiss, Prince of the Brightwood, possesses the power of the flame, but exhaustive attempts to channel it have failed. Whilst rescuing his friend Freelorn, exiled Prince of Arlen, Herewiss meets Sunspark - a fire elemental - who tells him of a castle which contains doors into other worlds. One

of these may lead to a world where He can learn to control his powers. Herewiss, torn between aiding his friend in regaining his throne and controlling his powers, journeys to the castle where, after a battle with creatures of the Shadow, hralcins, the block on his powers is finally released.

THE DOOR INTO SHADOW sees Herewiss and Freelorn battling, not only to regain Freelorn's kingdom, but also fighting against the forces of the Shadow, and attempting to perform the rites of royal magic (which lapsed as a usurper sat on Arlen's throne) and heal the land of the influences of the Shadow or see the world destroyed.

I particularly liked the characterisation of Sunspark, but the forces of the Shadow seemed just that little too shadowy - nothing to get your teeth into. It is not a particularly original storyline, but it is told with such style that the novels are raised above the mundane.

ARMAGEDDON THE MUSICAL by Robert Rankin
Corgi, 331pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Michael Jones.

I bet you didn't know that all life on Earth, from cavemen to the present day, has been nothing more than episodes in "*THE EARTHERS*", the most popular TV series in the history of the universe. Well, neither do humans in the world of 2050, fifty years after the nuclear holocaust which nearly ended life on Earth, but did achieve the best ever viewing figures on the planet Phnaargos. This is the scenario for a novel in which unlikely events follow one another at a hectic pace as a small green vegetable, specially cultivated to possess the ability to travel through time (hence the expression "a Time Sprout"), is ordered back to bring Elvis Presley to the future in the hope of changing the past.

Unfortunately, the story switches to-and-fro between several simultaneous lines of development, which makes it confusing to follow, where a more relaxed style would have left one with more time to appreciate the humour. Instead, I felt that the humour was rather forced, instead of flowing naturally from the story in the way the best comic writers manage, with the appearance of so little effort. I tried hard to like it and to find it funny, but I am sorry to say I was disappointed.

THE QUEEN OF SPRINGTIME by Robert Silverberg
Legend, 519 pp, £5.99, p/b Reviewed by Carol Morton,

Twenty years have passed since the events of *AT WINTER'S END* and the tribes have built a city in the lush south. Even though they are far from the Hjjks' northern territories, people (mainly children) are being kidnapped by the Hjjks, and if they return they are greatly changed. One such person is Nialli Apuilana, daughter of Hresh and Taniane, so when the Queen of Queens of the Hjjks sends an "ex-kidnappee" as emissary with proposals for a peace



treaty, Niall is given the task of teaching him the tribes ways and speech. There are factions within the city that advocate for war, and others peace. Niall is torn between loyalty to her parents, her burgeoning love for Husathin Muers the emissary and the memory of her time in the Hjjks' nest.

Not an easy story to get into, but if you persevere you will find it's worth it. It's a grand tale of a non-human race inheriting our Earth after a cataclysmic natural disaster. The gradual sophistication of the tribes and their tentative amalgamations are well described. All in all a good series so far, another example of Silverberg at his best.

THE REVENGE OF THE ROSE by Michael Moorcock

Grafton, 233 pp, £13.95, h/b Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A new Elric tale placed between *THE VANISHING TOWER* and *THE BANE OF THE BLACK SWORD*, during his years of wandering. This provides further tragedy for Elric as he is summoned by his father, Sadric, to retrieve his soul, hidden from Lord Arioch. The quest takes him to weird lands in the multiverse where he befriends Wheldrake, a poet who is lost within the timeslips, the family Phatt, mystics and psychics, and the Rose, a warrior-maiden who is seeking to avenge her people. His main adversary, Gaynor, also seeks something, but for him it is power over others. A well told tale, swinging surprisingly around two or three subplots, keeps the reader entertained. The spheres within the multiverse are well thought out and described - I particularly liked the Gypsy Nation. The characters provide realistic reactions and are correctly proactive to events, and the whole climaxes well to give a good read. A must for Elric and Moorcock fans, but don't miss out, a thoroughly enjoyable extravaganza.

THE TOWER OF FEAR by Glen Cook

Grafton, 375 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Very little seems to happen in this overlong epic. Six years previously, Qushmarrah was captured by the Herodians. For many of the populace, this state of affairs is better than the previous rule of Nakar the Abomination, a power-hungry wizard. The story centres on the Witch's attempt to bring Nakar back from the dead, but fails to focus on it. The plot follows a mish-mash of characters and becomes confusing in the maze of city streets. Cook would have done far better to concentrate on one group of participants, and develop their needs and desires.

PRINCE OF THE BLOOD by Raymond E Feist

Grafton, 396 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This volume is set 20 years after the Riftwar Saga and concerns Boric and Erland, Arutha's twin sons. In an effort to make them face their responsibility,

Arutha sends the twins to Kesh as representatives of The Kingdom at the celebrations of the Empress's 75th birthday. On the journey to Kesh they discover a plot to overthrow the Empress, cause civil war in Kesh and ultimately war with the Kingdom. When Boric is kidnapped, presumed dead, Erland has to continue on to Kesh to try to thwart the plans.

While this is an eminently readable book, it does not measure up to the Riftwar Saga, it does not have the same substance to the plotline and the characters of Boric and Erland are superficial, but it was good to see the more mature Simmy and Locklear. If you enjoyed the Riftwar Saga give this a try.

ORION IN THE DYING TIME by Ben Bova

Methuen, 356 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Orion is the creation of beings of the far future, who may in fact be the ultimate descendants of humanity. For some reason they cannot fight their own battles, but need him to oppose their enemies across the ages of the past. It is here he faces his greatest challenge yet - a reptilian super-being from the planet of a nearby star who wants the Earth for his own purposes, and is bent on destroying all earthly life. The story of Orion's efforts to save the Earth for mankind is a good science fiction yarn in the old tradition, not the fantasy I half expected. Incidentally, the "dying time" in the title is the time of the end of the dinosaurs on Earth, a real event neatly woven into the story. I cannot honestly describe this as a great book, but it is good enough to have made me seek out the others in the series, which is a recommendation in itself. It is certainly worth reading.

DEMON BLUES by Esther Friesner

Orbit, 280 pp, £3.99, p/b Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Lysi, a succubus, is determined to release her father, Murakh the Demon Prince, from his task - to collect a human soul to replace the one which five of his underlings let go. The underlings then assumed mortal and angelic forms and fled. Lysi picks on Noel Cardiff, mortal son of one of the fleeing succubi, and tries to suborn him by teaching him black magic. The only problem being, he is a klutz, and the evil deeds he does tend to backfire and promote only good, he destroys an ancient volume only to find it contained a hidden, and priceless lost manuscript. The destruction of a prize jewellery exhibit releases the trapped souls Salah-ed-Din and Richard the Lionheart. More bungling ensues, but eventually Lysi truly begins to care for Noel and in revenge is banished by her demon brother. A tongue-in-cheek yarn, very amusing and a story that should keep you entertained for a few

hours. A word about the cover, it is a Kirby, honest, but he must have had a bad day!

THE BOOK OF CONQUESTS by Jim FitzPatrick

Paper Tiger, 110 pp, £8.95, large p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan,

I've always wondered how anyone can possibly draw the complex intertwinings so typical of Celtic designs. This book doesn't explain it, but it does give lots of beautiful examples, most of them as page borders. In words and pictures, FitzPatrick tells part of the great Irish Myth cycle, dealing with Tuan (a man who is transformed into a god), the coming of the Tuatha Dé Danann (a divine race) to Ireland, and the first Battle of Moy Tura. The astonishing thing about the book is that FitzPatrick is pretty good as a word-smith (using a fairly traditional saga-type style) as well as being a fine artist. His pictures are in a kind of comic-book style - lines with areas of colour - but often very complex. This is a reissue of a 1978 book, well worth having.

TIGANA by Guy Kavriel Kay

Penguin, 688 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan,

Guy Kavriel Kay possesses the knack of taking ordinary fantasy elements and twisting them in such a way to produce bright new tapestry. The Peninsula of the Palm is conquered and divided between two opposing sorcerers, thus there is already disquiet in the land. One of these two, Brandin, has cast a spell over the minds of the people, so that they cannot hear the name Tigana. This is his revenge against the province for the death of his son - that it should no longer exist. But a few, the survivors of the purge, remember. After 20 years of careful preparation, Alessan, Prince of Tigana, is ready to put into motion the events he hopes will free his province. It is a thick book, and one section, although interesting, seems redundant. Dianora's story gives Brandin too human a face, though this too is perhaps calculated, showing that even villains do sometimes have redeeming features. This is an excellent read, take it on holiday with you and share it with your friends.

MOONHEART by Charles De Lint

Pan, 476 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton,

Sara Kendell finds a small bag containing, amongst other things, a Celtic ring in a ball of clay. The same week she meets Kieran Foy, who is looking for his mentor Thomas Hengwar, a powerful advocate of The Way. While they talk, Kieran is attacked and, in unleashing his powers to defend himself, he and Sara each find themselves transported, separately, to The Otherworld, which seems to be a mix of Celtic and

North American Indian legend. Kieran discovers that his teacher is hunted by the Bard Taliesin, he wants revenge on Thomas, who is in reality an ancient Druid who exiled Taliesin from Ireland. The only way that Taliesin can begin his campaign of revenge is to regain his ring of power, which has fallen into Sara's hands. But what Kieran has been told, and the truth, are very different things, as Sara and Kieran discover when they both try to prevent a malevolent force from entering our world through Sara's home, Tamson House, which seems to straddle both our world and the Otherworld.

This is a wonderful tale, the marriage of the two mythos is superb, De Lint is a storyteller par excellence.

GREENMANTLE by Charles De Lint

Pan, 326 pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton,

When Frankie Treasure wins the state lottery and buys her childhood home for herself and her daughter Ali, little do they know, but their neighbour is an ex-Mafia hit-man, Tony Valenti, in hiding from his former bosses. Earl, Frankie's ex-husband and Ali's father, tracks them down and, in trying to extort money from Frankie, sees Tony and calls in the Mafia. A battle royal then ensues. In the forest near to the Treasure house is a village whose population is ageing, but they have the power to call on the Green Man, a benevolent force for good, but he is being stalked by the Hunt, on varying occasions dogs or clerics. Ali is the only one who can save him, but the three way fight going on around her home is likely to prevent her.

I do feel that the mundane elements of this story have intruded to the detriment of the mystic, the characters are a bit sketchy and the ending is hurried. Not as good as 'Moonheart', but an entertaining tale nonetheless.

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As mentioned in our last issue, future editions of the BRUM GROUP NEWS will see changes in our reviews section. With this issue we have finally cleared our backlog of reviews and in future we hope to both keep the reviews section more up to date than it has been in the past and to make room for more in-depth reviews of what we consider to be important books.

Dated reviews help neither you, the reader, nor the publishers, so from now on we intend to turn the reviews around more quickly. For example, if we get a book in July, we want the review of that book in our hands by the August meeting, so that we can publish it in the September newsletter.

We are sure you will appreciate the reasons for this change of policy and look forward to the co-operation of our reviewers in implementing it over the next few months. — Martin Tudor & Bernie Evans.

