

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

October
1991

Issue
241

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

This month's speaker is **DAVID A HARDY**

After working as a commercial artist for Cadburys (producing chocolate boxes and catalogues) in the 1950s, David Hardy did his first science fiction painting in 1970 (a vertical version of which was used on the June 1971 issue of *THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION*.)

Since then his covers have appeared on such classic magazines as *AMAZING*, *GALAXY* and *IF* as well as *VISION OF TOMORROW*, *SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY* and *INTEKZONE*. In 1974 he wrote and illustrated his first science-fiction book, *THE SOLAR SYSTEM*, the sixth of these entitled *ATLAS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM* appeared in 1982. He has also produced "an interstellar travel brochure" with Bob Shaw called *GALACTIC TOURS* (1981) and recently his latest book *VISIONS OF SPACE* saw publication.

VENUE: THE AUSTRALIAN BAR

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at *THE AUSTRALIAN BAR*, corner of Hurst Street & Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham city centre. Subscription rates: £6.00 per person, or £9.00 for two members at the 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, West Midlands, 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

18 OCTOBER - Unfortunately KEN CAMPBELL will be unable to speak to us this month as he will be attending the Phillip K Dick Celebration in Essex at the weekend. But fortunately for us our very own DAVID A HARDY, the renowned sf artist has agreed to speak to us. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./ Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre.

24 OCTOBER - NASA astronaut Bill Thornton who is currently touring the UK, will be speaking at King Edward VI school in Dudley. Further information from Colin Reid at Dudley Museum. call 0384 453574.

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 membership costs only £15.00 BEFORE 19th OCTOBER, although membership is FREE to anyone who has attended ALL of the first 20 Novacons. After the 19th October the cost will be £20 on the door. Cheques made payable to "Novacon 21" should be sent to: BERNIE EVANS, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

2 NOVEMBER - Between noon and 2pm there will be a joint signing session at Andromeda Bookshop: LOUISE COOPER will be signing copies of AVATAR, the latest book in her "Indigo" series and COLIN GREENLAND will be signing copies of his award winning novel TAKE BACK PLENTY.

11 or 12 NOVEMBER - Possible special meeting of the BSFG and/or Signing Session at Andromeda Bookshop featuring DAN SIMMONS. Watch this space for further details as they are confirmed.

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.

16 NOVEMBER - TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing at Andromeda Bookshop from 10.30am. Also sometime in November it is hoped that JOSH KIRBY will be signing copies of his new

book from Paper Tiger. Call 643 1999 to confirm details of these and other signing sessions.

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. Contact Martin Tudor ASAP. A £10 deposit is needed to reserve your place, the deposit will be deducted from the cost of your meal which will be in the form of a set menu at around £12 to £16 per head.

17 JANUARY 1992 - BSFG AGM and Auction to raise money for the Group. If you have any Auction material please contact a committee member.

FEBRUARY 1993 - GREG BEAR has been in touch to say that he would like to speak to us this month. (Please note that this is a year later than previously stated. Chris Chivers apologizes for the misunderstanding.) Further details as they are confirmed.

ADVERTS

FOR SALE: RONEO 750 ELECTRIC DUPLICATOR in working order (but can be fussy on paper feeding). Complete with spare drum, ink, instructions and cabinet (holds spare drum and drawers). A straw poll indicates that this is worth £100-£175, but as buyer must collect from Bristol, first offer over £70 will be accepted. Any reasonable offer considered. All proceeds to TAFF (the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund). Contact PAM WELLS, 24A Beech Road, Bowes Park, London, N11 2DA (081 889 0401) for full details.

BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP 20th ANNIVERSARY SOUVENIR BOOKS: Articles by BRIAN ALDISS, HARRY HARRISON and ANNE GAY, cover and cartoons by TIM GROOME, features covering the last five years of the BSFG. Numbered limited edition, A5, 28pp, laminated two-colour cover. Only £2.50 (inclusive of p&p), cheques payable to "THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP", to MARTIN TUDOR, 645 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

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[Thanks this time to DAVE HARDY for the DTP headings, MICK EVANS for typing up the book reviews, BERNIE EVANS for the labels and editing the book reviews, STUART WILLIAMS for his map and to all of our book reviewers.]

The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 46th Jophan Report

Okay, time for the full story behind Twentycon's £1,000+ loss. Despite the heaviest publicity campaign of any previous Birmingham-based sf event, Twentycon, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group's 20th anniversary celebration, managed to attract only 120 attendees. As the convention committee was aiming for 250 and had a break-even point of about 180, resulted in a shortfall of £1,105.95.

The committee had realized early on that it might be in trouble and organized a massive mailshot and leafleting campaign. In addition to a two page spread in the Midlands edition of *WHAT'S ON* and mentions on local radio, around 10,000 flyers were distributed through Novacon 21's progress reports, *CRITICAL WAVE*, Andromeda Bookshop's catalogues, the BSFA and via conventions such as Speculation and Mexican 4, as well as all of Birmingham's main bookshops and most specialist shops in London.

The limited response generated by this campaign is especially surprising given the calibre of the guests at the convention. In addition to guests of honour Harry Harrison and Anne Gay, Twentycon also featured Andromeda Bookshop's combined 20th anniversary party and multi-author signing which involved 12 other authors: Storm Constantine; Mary Gentle; Dave Hardy; Graham Higgins; Graham Joyce; Roz Kaveney; Dave Langford; Terry Pratchett; Bob Shaw; Alex Stewart; Frede Warrington; Angus Wells.

Although our illustrious chairman, Chris Chivers, has blamed the disappointing attendance on the apathy of the current membership of the group, this is not the whole story. It is worth noting that Twentycon is not the only convention to suffer this year. Other conventions have been postponed or cancelled due to insufficient response and Novacon 21 reports that registrations are very slow, with only 180 members as of mid-September, compared to the 300 which might normally have been expected.

Despite its problems, most Twentycon attendees declared the con a great success. The various fund-raising activities in aid of the RNIB's "Talking Books" project, which included an auction of rare items donated by a large number of authors and fans, raised a respectable £385. However, several auction items failed to raise bids matching their reserve prices and these will be auctioned at Novacon 21.

Newsfield, the British magazine publisher whose titles included *FEAR*, *GAMESMASTER INTERNATIONAL* and the horror digest *FRIGHTENERS*, went into voluntary liquidation on 17 September, with debts reportedly totalling £500,000. *FEAR* editor John Gilbert is quoted in *CRITICAL WAVE* #23 as saying that he had advised Newsfield one week before the collapse that he wished to leave in order to set up a new genre magazine, provisionally entitled *NIGHTFALL*.

A creditors' meeting is scheduled for 15 October, although it seems unlikely that payments will be significant, figures of 15 pence in the pound now circulating. Gilbert himself is owed £3000 and regular contributor Liz Holliday nearly £1000, whilst no freelance accounts have been paid for two months.

A science fiction short story is one of the 50 finalists in this year's Ian St James Award. "The Golem Risen", by Michael Cope and David Walker, is now being considered for the final shortlist of nine stories, all of which will appear in the contest's annual anthology; the outright winner will receive £12,000, the runners-up between £1000 and £5000.

The second issue of the new British sf magazine *R.E.M.* will feature a Storm Constantine novella, "Preservation", an interview with Paul diFilippo and a short story by Colin Greenland.

The independent British production company Zenith has reportedly signed a £4m contract to produce a 12-part tv mini-series featuring the comic strip hero Dan Dare, 41 years after he first appeared in *THE EAGLE*.

The lead role has yet to be cast, although the bookmakers Ladbrookes were offering odds on Leslie Grantham (from Dirty Den to Daring Dan?), Jason Connery and Rupert Everett.

Dare early adventures were the creation of the publisher Marcus Morris and artist Frank Hampson. In later years, Hampson poured vitriol on Morris' successors for their portrayal of Dare, which by the mid-1980s had

mutated from stiff-upper-lipped hero to vicious commando. He might conceivably have found more to praise in Dare's most recent series, a revisionist strip in the ill-fated *REVOLVER*, showing Dare as an ageing figure-head engulfed in political machinations.

I'm sorry to report that there has been a recent addition to 'Major's Millions'. The Brum Groups Publicity Officer, Al Johnstone, has just been made redundant. Which rather takes the edge off my good news, which is that after three years of alternating temp work and unemployment I have just started work as a clerical assistant with Birmingham Social Services. Stick with it Al, best of luck.

George Lucas is rumoured to be planning the long-awaited first chapter of *STAR WARS* (the original movie being chronologically fourth in the nine-part history), with 1997 mooted as the release date - 20 years on from the saga's debut. Meanwhile, Bantam has launched a new series of novels by Timothy Zahn set in the aftermath of *RETURN OF THE JEDI*.

Principal photography has been completed on *SPLIT SECOND*, a new British science fiction thriller starring Rutger Hauer, Kim Cattrall, Neil Duncan and Michael J Pollard. Set in London, AD 2008, the movie pits supercop Hauer against the vicious demon responsible for the gory death of his partner.

THE DARK SIDE has been sold by Maxwell Publications to Stray Cat, a consortium headed by editor Allan Bryce; the first issue under the new owners is cover-dated October.

Michael Moorcock has blocked Grafton's release of the new, revised edition of *GLORIANA* and announced he is withdrawing his books from the imprint. This move, he says, was prompted by recent staff cuts, which Moorcock described as "ruthless and, in my view, unprofessionally foolish".

HarperCollins were fined £6250 with £4151 costs by magistrates at Stratford-upon-Avon on 28 September after being found guilty of five offences under the Trades Descriptions Act. The three-day trial followed the release of two novels adapted from storylines drafted by Alistair MacLean, who died in 1987; the court found that the cover failed to make it sufficiently clear that the novels were actually written by Alastair MacNeill, whose name appeared at the foot of the cover in much smaller type than MacLean's. Although

neither book was science fiction, the decision casts doubt upon the cover designs for such works as Stephen Goldin's posthumous "collaborations" with E E "Doc" Smith and the recent "Isaac Asimov presents" series.

The Net Book Agreement, which has regulated book prices in Britain for more than a century, is once again under threat. Terry Maher, chair of the 100-store Dillons chain, has announced cuts of up to 25% of the cover price on 37 titles, which could force rival Tim Waterstone to follow suit at his 85-store chain. Three publishers - Faber, Random Century and Sinclair-Stephenson - obtained High Court injunctions on 27 September restraining Dillons from discounting a further four titles, including Martin Amis' *TIME'S ARROW*, but many of the books chosen are from publishers who have withdrawn from the NBA.

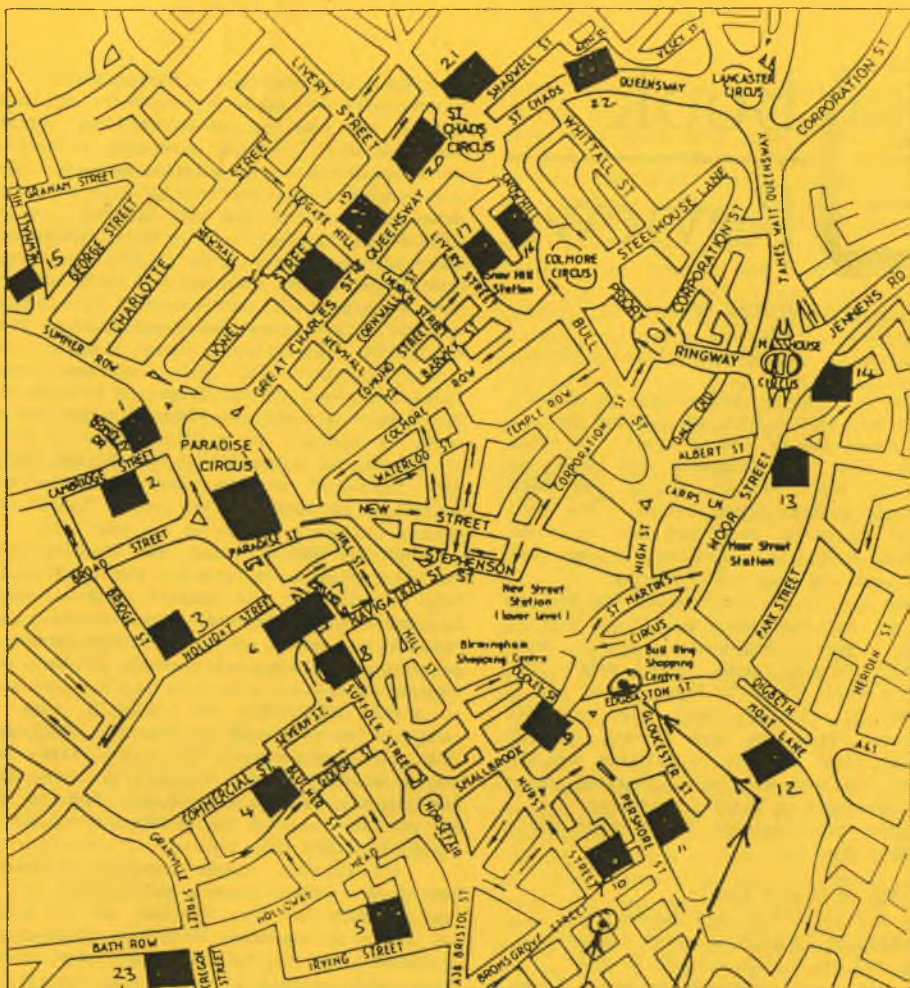
Mike Gunderloy is reportedly selling the acclaimed listings magazine, *FACTSHEET FIVE*; special arrangements are being made to preserve the extensive fanzine and small press archives.

Dave Langford is in the news again having revived his Hugo Award winning fanzine *ANSIBLE*. I understand that his intention is to publish it as a monthly news-sheet, distributed at "random pub meetings, by whim or for stamped addressed envelopes (no subscriptions or mailing list". Issue 51, October 1991, is two A4 sides of the old *ANSIBLE* mixture of news snippets from the world of fandom and publishing, all stamped with Langford's inimitable wit. (Contact Dave at 94 London Road, Reading, Berks., RG1 5AU.)

"The Black Lodge" is the name of a new Birmingham based monthly meeting this time aimed at fans who "appreciate the subtle horror of *THE HAUNTING*, the rollercoaster gore of *EVIL DEAD II*, the choreography of *OPERA*, the bizarre post-modernism of *TWIN PEAKS*. Argento, Barker, Cronenberg, De Palma, the alphabet of terror from *ASYLUM* to *ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST*. "The strictly informal meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday of each month in the lounge of the Australian Bar, from 7.30pm.

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As usual news for the Jophan Report has been supplied by *CRITICAL WAVE* except where otherwise stated. *WAVE*, Britain's only independent sf, fantasy and horror news and reviews magazine, is available for £1.95 per copy or 6 issues for £7.50 from: 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.



KEY TO CAR PARKS

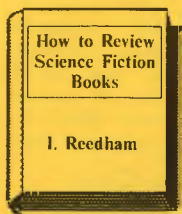
*Multi-Storey Car Parks

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|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Brindley Drive* | 7. Brunel Street* | 12. Moat Lane* | 18. Gt. Charles Street |
| 2. Civic Centre | 8. Royal Mail Street | 13. Albert Street | 19. Ludgate Hill |
| 3. Holliday Street* | 9. Dudley Street | 14. Masshouse Circus | 20. Lionel Street |
| 4. Blucher Street | 10. Hurst Street | 15. Newhall Hill | 21. St. Chads Circus |
| 5. Irving Street | 11. Pershore Street* | 16. Snow Hill | 22. Bath Street |
| 6. Navigation Street | | 17. Livery Street* | 23. Cregoe Street |

THE AUSTRALIAN BAR,
ON THE CORNER OF
HURST STREET &
BROMSGROVE STREET.

Entering through the Lounge Bar
you walk through to the stairs,
past the bar on your right,
our function room is upstairs.

BUSES: Numbers 2, 12 & 35
DISEMBARK HERE COMING FROM TOWN.
BOARD HERE GOING INTO TOWN.



Book Reviews

IMMIGRANT & OTHER STORIES by Clifford D Simak
Mandarin, 190pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This is another collection of Simak's short stories, dating from the fifties through to 1980, assembled by Francis Lyall. The title story is also the longest, and will be familiar to most readers as it has been anthologised several times before. The hero is one of an elite, permitted into an alien world, and gradually comes to realise that getting there was only the beginning.

Simak has always represented the gentler face of sf, and the remainder of the stories collected here emphasise that fact. "Neighbour", "Green Thumb", "Small Deer", "The Ghost of a Model T", "Byte Your Tongue" and "I am Crying All Inside" cover many subjects from space distortion and privacy through intelligent plant species to politics and the afterlife, but are all bound together by a strong atmosphere of wistful nostalgia.

A good accompaniment for a drink and a warm summer evening.

SHADOWFIRES by Dean R Koontz
Headline, 372 pp, £14.95, h/b (£4.99 p/b)

THE SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT by Dean R Koontz
Headline, 313 pp, £14.95, h/b (£4.99 p/b)

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

Publishing information first. Headline are currently following a somewhat confusing policy. They have the usual back-list of Koontz's work in paperback, and are still issuing new titles. AT THE SAME TIME they are re-issuing EVERYTHING in matched hard-backs, so we sometimes get what amounts to simultaneous h/b and p/b publication. In the case of these two novels, *SHADOWFIRES* is a new p/b in August, and a re-issued h/b in September, while *THE SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT* is a stock p/b, and a re-issued h/b in September. Don't worry if this is confusing the hell out of you, it did me as well, what it boils down to is that Koontz's fans will be able to achieve a matching collection in whatever format they wish, in very short order. To this news I can only say - GREAT!

What of the books themselves? In recent years I've read a few books by Leigh Nicholls, and said to myself "This is a female Dean R Koontz". Now I know why, to add to the above publishing confusion, these two (and others forthcoming), were originally published under that name, and the August p/b of *SHADOWFIRES* is the first British publication under his real name. This is NOT, however, a case of publishers churning out early inferior work by a now well known author in order to cash in. The originals were published in 1987 and 1984 respectively, when Koontz was already selling well under his own name. There is a very subtle difference between the "Nicholls" books and the "Koontz" books, not of style, or content, or quality, rather of mood, of nuance, of viewpoint. Had I read these with "Nicholls" on the cover I would have definitely assumed that the unisex "Leigh" was female, but don't ask me to pin down why.

SHADOWFIRES is about DNA meddling gone horribly wrong. Fortunately the meddler did his experiments on himself, (quite well-thought out believable experiments, and results) and he's a nasty unpleasant person so he gets what's due to him, while the hero and heroine survive.

THE SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT has a religious nutcase who is also an old crone, (the usual unpleasant "bad-guy"), this time trying to kill a cute six-year-old boy, whom she reckons is the Anti-Christ. Yes, he and his mum survive, but the ending isn't quite so black-and-white this time.

All Koontz's novels have an unlikeable bad guy, a likeable hero and heroine, and a happy ending, and why the hell not? I like it, and so do thousands of others if sales are anything to go by. He weaves a good adventure story with touches of horror, or fantasy, or dark powers, and when good wins out over evil it's because good is stronger, or more crafty. It isn't contrived or preachy, it's internally consistent, written INTO the story, not just tacked on as so often happens. If you enjoyed his other stuff, you'll enjoy these. If you've never read him, it's time you did, not heavy, not deep, but skilfully written and a joy to read.

DEEP WIZARDRY by Diane Duane
Corgi, 254 pp, £2.95, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Not long ago thirteen-year-old Nita Callahan discovered a book called *SO YOU WANT TO BE A WIZARD*. As a result she discovered she had magical powers and met Kit Rodriguez, another budding wizard.

DEEP WIZARDRY is another adventure about these two. This time they meet cetaceous wizards while holidaying on a Long Island beach. From them they discover that the Lone Power, their evil adversary, is waking from captivity beneath the sea bed. Taking the shape of a humpbacked whale, Nita volunteers to sing the vital part of the song which will keep the Lone Power bound, but without making sure she knows exactly what she is committing herself to. Both Kit and Nita learn a lot about responsibility and the power of truth, and they do a little more growing up during their adventures.

This is an excellent children's book and will be well liked by many adults as well.

HUNTING THE GHOST DANCER by A A Attanasio
Grafton, 371pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Attanasio obviously believes in Hobbes' dictum, that life for our ancestors was nasty, brutal and short. Less than a handful of his characters survive from one end of the book to the other. This gritty, often violent but also charming fantasy is set in pre-history as Cro-Magnon man supplants the Neanderthal.

Baat is one of the last of his people, a Ghost Dancer, able to communicate and use the power of the Ul-udi, spirit beings of both good and evil varieties. What results from this depends on the relative strength of Dark and Bright Ones, and, to some extent, Baat's own will-power. Baat is old and seeking a place to die and find peace.

As the title suggests, Baal is being hunted by a varying cast of Cro-Magnon "smallheads", foremost of whom is Yagut, a scarred and vengeful killer, frighteningly proficient. Lasting the course are Dune and Timor, lone survivors of the Blue Shell clan, with some Neanderthal ancestry and hence some latent powers. There are also two witches who try to protect Baat for the magic he represents.

The mixture produces a fascinating and very readable fantasy far removed from the sword and sorcery elf-bashing that tends to typify and demean the genre.

FEATHERED DRAGON by Douglas Niles
Penguin, 311pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Colin Mee.

When you review a book it's important to make sure that you compare like with like; there's no point in looking for the prose of Peake or the atmosphere of Tolkien in a "Forgotten Realms" book. This novel is pretty

rotten even if the first two parts of the Maztica Trilogy (*VIPERHAND* and *IRONHELM*) are used as a yardstick. The plot of the first two novels parallels Cortez' invasion of Mexico. *FEATHERED DRAGON* however strikes off at a complete tangent. It's as if the editors at TSR have looked at the first two books and said "Hang on a minute Doug, where are the Trolls, Orcs, Hobbits and Dwarves?" That's the only reason that I can conceive of to explain the substitution of a bog-standard fantasy travelogue for the Aztec culture and atmosphere of *VIPERHAND* and *IRONHELM*. The only reason I can think of to read this book is if, like me, you hate leaving a trilogy unfinished. Otherwise, don't bother

HEAVY TIME by C J Cherryh
NEL, 313 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

HEAVY TIME is set in the same universe as such excellent novels as *CYTEEN* and *DOWNBELOW STATION*, both of which won Hugo awards. This isn't quite in their league but still has many of the features that make Cherryh a force to be reckoned with amongst current sf writers.

It is set much closer to home than her other books, in the asteroid belt. From current scientific research we know that prolonged periods spent in free-fall cause changes in the body such as redistribution of calcium and loss of muscle tone. The heavy time of the title is the time that the miners and other workers in the Belt have to spend under the influence of gravity in between their trips into space. It is strictly enforced by the ASTEX, the company that runs station R2. Everything else is also very tightly controlled and the contract workers, the miners who own their own ships and the Shepherds, an elite band of pilots, find this increasingly repressive. They feel that behind it is an attempt to drive them out of business and so use direct employees instead. Two miners are Ben Pollard and Morrie Bird. While working their spell in space they pick up a distress beacon and discover a derelict ship. Surprisingly, the pilot is still alive, though barely. Until now, Ben and Bird have worked excellently as partners, but the rescue of Dekker begins to show up the differences in their temperaments. Ben is ambitious and sees Dekker's ship as potential salvage, Bird is more sympathetic to Dekker's plight. Most of the story takes place at R2, where Ben and Bird are taking the compulsory heavy time.

Human reactions are very important in this book. Dekker, unlike so many heroes,

falls apart as a result of the accident, the death of his partner and the deprivation he has undergone before his rescue. Then he loses his licence and his ship. His breakdown and the way he attempts to put things back together, with the reluctant aid of Ben and Bird and their friends Sal and Meg, make an excellent foreground for the very realistic picture which is slowly built up of the problems the people who work in the Belt have to face. And, as in so many of Cherryh's novels, there is a strong political force in the background, the manipulations of which influence much of the plot.

This may not contain quite as much continuous action as some of Cherryh's books (e.g. the "Chanur" stories), but there is still a lot to keep the interest of any hardened sf reader.

RAISING THE STONES by Sheri S Tepper
Grafton, 465 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This excellently written book conveys a placid stately mood, very much in keeping with its subject matter. Ostensibly this is an adventure, pitting the light and dark sides of human nature against each other as the various nations and worlds of a solar system play at politics and war. The title comes from the driven nature of the hero who, influenced by ancient legend, is forever metaphorically looking under rocks for the legacy of his father. The more interesting element, however, is the history of an extra-terrestrial fungoid organism, which functions as a fully operational God.

The book contains some wonderful invention, from the Utopia of Hobbs' Land to the psychopathic sadism of Voorstad, through such as the Low Baidee, following the tenets of their prophethet and the High Baidee, who of course Know Better.

All in all a very good read, with excellent depth.

LYONESSE I:- SULDRUN'S GARDEN by Jack Vance
Grafton, 436 pp, £4.99, p/b

LYONESSE II:- THE GREEN PEARL by Jack Vance
Grafton, 407 pp, £4.99, p/b

LYONESSE III:- MADOU by Jack Vance
Grafton, 544 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Set just prior to the age of King Arthur in the Elder Isles which lie west of Gaul. The Isles have been invaded by all the neighbouring lands at one time or another, and thus become home to all manner of

Phoenecians, Greeks, Celts and Romans, as well as several tribes which do not survive elsewhere, such as the Fomoire of Irish legend and the feirce Ska. The isles also provide a last refuge for all the magical creatures of Europe.

King Casmir of Lyonesse has plans to become ruler of all the Elder Isles. There is a prophesy that his daughter's son will supplant him, so he locks her in a secluded garden. Of course, she still meets Aillas, heir to the throne of Troicinet, and bears his son, Dhrun. A fairy takes a fancy to Dhrun and replaces him at birth with a changeling called Madouc. Aillas is not fooled and, having sworn vengeance on Casmir, goes in search of Dhrun.

After an unhappy love affair, the witch Desmei magically splits herself into two beings: the beautiful enigmatic Melancthe and the handsome evil Faude Carfilhiot, who contains within himself the essence of the Green Pearl. Carfilhiot kidnaps Dhrun and holds him hostage.

These books are in many ways similar to Vance's first book *THE DYING EARTH*, in that they feature exotic characters in a magical landscape. Like all Jack Vance books, the true delight of this trilogy lies in the rich description of cultures, customs and costumes. One menace that persists through all three books is the fearsome Ska, who are something of a cross between Vikings and Vulcans. In quality of imagination and writing *LYONESSE* is far above most fantasy published today.

THE GODWARS VOL I:- FORBIDDEN MAGIC by Angus Wells
Orbit, 586 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It always seems ludicrous that an evil wizard should do his utmost to prevent the agents of a good wizard fetching the one thing he desires most, instead of waiting for others to brave the hazards before stealing it. Yet this is what Calandryll believes to be true. Told by his father that he is to enter the priesthood, and spurned by the woman he loves, the young princeling flees the city of Secca, protected by Varent, the ambassador of Aldarin. Trusting his benefactor implicitly, and following the scrying of a seer, Calandryll sets out with the mercenary Bracht to fetch the Arcanum from the legendary city of Tezin-dar so that it might be destroyed. As the quest proceeds, Calandryll changes from being a naive and spoilt youth to a capable adventurer. He also becomes less trusting as he begins to discover that it is not always wise to take

people at face value. Calandryll and Bracht are joined on their quest by Katya who, from being a pursuing enemy, becomes an essential part of the enterprise. This is, so far, a better series than his previous trilogy "The Book of the Kingdoms" as all the events portrayed are important to the plot and, although the tendency is still there, Wells' habit of using clever words is less intrusive. A good book to take on holiday.

THE LAST LEGENDS OF EARTH by A A Attansio
Grafton, 557pp, £4.99, p/b.

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

This is an ambitious but ultimately disappointing work. Set two billion years after the explosion of our solar system, when all life on Earth became extinct, this is the story of the desperate fight for survival of the Rimstalkers against the horrendous zötl. The Rimstalkers are a peaceful race who live on the range, in a reality which exists at the bottom of a gravity well outside of the vacuum we know as Outer Space, the zötl, a more warlike and scientifically advanced race of spiderlike beings who feed on the energy generated by the pain of intelligent life-forms, are winning the war against the Rimstalkers forcing the more peaceful race to desperate measures.

The Rimstalkers concoct a plan to send some of their warriors up out of the well into Outer Space where with the help of incredibly their advanced computers, or 'machine minds', and the tremendous energies at their disposal after the transition from one reality to another they will each produce an entire system of planets. The machine minds will scour the vacuum for the fossilized DNA of extinct intelligent races and populate their planetary systems with these regenerated races. The plan being that whilst the zötl are occupied feeding on these 'live bait' the Rimstalker warriors can search the infinite complexity of timelines for the O'ode - the only weapon which is guaranteed to destroy the zötl.

Gai is one such Rimstalker warrior who, shortly after being revived by the machine mind Genitrix, discovers that all of the other warriors have failed; the zötl having successfully infiltrated the machine minds which controlled their systems. *THE LAST LEGENDS OF EARTH* recounts the tale of Gai's last ditch battle against the zötl.

Naturally one of the intelligent races she uses to populate her planetary system is mankind, who are presented in a most unflattering manner: "*They're more cunning*

than they look ... their history is nothing more than a catalogue of wars among themselves. They are profoundly sexual ... yet their passion for procreation did not prevent them from exterminating themselves. They are vicious and selfish animals with pretensions of intelligence." Despite these faults Gai eventually enlists the help of certain humans in her search for the O'ode and war against the zötl.

This is a massive work, with the plot weaving back and forward between numerous planets and alternative realities, as well as backwards and forwards across seven millennium. Even if Attansio managed to keep to the main plot I think it would have been a confusing book, but as he constantly gets side-tracked into innumerable sub-plots, many of which are totally irrelevant, at times the book is almost unreadable.

The blurb declares that *THE LAST LEGENDS OF EARTH* is "on a grand scale rarely seen in science fiction since the great works of Olaf Stapledon", whilst this may be true the difference is that Stapledon's works were written in a simple, easily understandable style, communicating complicated concepts clearly, allowing the reader to appreciate the grandeur of the rise and falls of vast civilizations. Unfortunately Attansio constantly becomes bogged down in irrelevant detail and the density of his prose frequently exasperates even the most patient reader.

The author's pretentious postscript reveals that this is the final volume in a series he calls "the Radix Tetrad" and that his "intention has been to thematically structure each novel around one of the four cardinal dimensions that define us and our world: height, depth, width, and time". I for one am in no hurry to read the other three.

LITTLE MYTH MARKER by Robert Asprin
Legend, 167 pp, £3.50. p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This is number six in the love-it-or-hate-it "Myth" series. Devotees will know what to expect after the "Great Skeeve" wins a little girl in a card game he doesn't even understand. Opponents will not be converted by this time.

Objectively, this is not the best of the series for introducing new readers. While the outrageous puns (e.g. the Sea Sea Aute Kid, who puts up breath mints for advanced betting), myth-quoted chapter headings and oddball characters are all there, so too are the giveaway plot, the overplayed homespun philosophy, and more than a hint of tweeness.

BEST NEW SF 5 ed. Gardner Dozois
Robinson, 624pp, £7.99, 'C' format p/b
Reviewed by Martin Tudor

This indispensable anthology opens with a 32 page review of the sf year and goes on to include almost every story of interest in 1990, with many Nebula and Hugo nominated stories.

I especially enjoyed Australian Greg Egan's "The Caress" and Ian R MacLeod's "Past Magic", but also included are stories by Ursula K Le Guin, Charles Sheffield, Bruce Sterling, Michal Moorcock, John Brunner, Joe Haldeman, Robert Silverberg and many others.

WINGS by Terry Pratchett
Corgi, 176 pp, £2.99, p/b
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

What can I say about a new book by Terry Pratchett? To begin with, I can say "How the *?*** do you hijack a space shuttle when you are only four inches tall?". Well, it helps to have a super-computer in your pocket, and it helps to have useful friends, but most of all it helps to be in a Pratchett book. Anything is possible as this marvellous man brings the story of the Nomes to a triumphant conclusion, poking gentle fun along the way at a lot of things we take for granted. By the time that conclusion is reached the story has become a bit serious, quite touching and, above all, genuinely good sf - don't write this off as mere comic fantasy. Buy it, read it, enjoy it, and if you haven't already read *TRUCKERS* and *DIGGERS*, get on with it at once.

INTERZONE: THE 5TH ANTHOLOGY
Ed John Clute, Lee Montgomery & David Pringle
NEL, 280 pp, £5.99, p/b
Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This latest anthology comprises *INTERZONE* stories by Brian Aldiss, Philip Mann, William King, Ian Macleod, Kim Newman, Ian Lee, Richard Calder, Ian McDonald, Karen Joy Fowler, Ian Watson, Neil Ferguson and Nicholas Royle, from 1989 and 1990. There are also two original stories from Cherry Wilder and Barry Bayley.

Indicative of the times, a common theme for much of the book is the green apocalypse and its aftermath. Given this, there is also a great deal of variety and diversity, from hard sf to fantasy, serious to humorous, fascinating to frankly rather pointless. Conceptually there is a great range here:- Brian's surropregnant piece-worker aspiring to motherhood, Lee's psychotic gardener (the

monarchy will never be the same) and Royle's jinxed sculptor to name but a few.

Overall a very high standard is maintained, each reader will find his own exceptions, but on the whole a very worthwhile collection.

THE PRIMAL SCREEN by John Brosnan
Orbit, 402pp, £16.95, h/b
Reviewed by Martin Tudor

Subtitled a "A History of Science Fiction Film" this is by no means a definitive reference work, as Brosnan himself is the first to admit. But it is a very amusing, personal overview of sf as it has appeared on film from 1895 and Meliès' *LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE* to *TOTAL RECALL*.

Brosnan, film critic for *STARBURST* magazine and an sf writer in his own right, is an entertaining and informative writer. His love of and enthusiasm for the cinema is clear and although you may dispute some of his choices in this book I'm sure that anyone with an interest in sf films will find it excellent reading, interspersed throughout with some rare and interesting stills this criticism at its best.

XENOCIDE by Orson Scott Card
Legend, 463 pp, £14.99, h/b
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

He has done it again. Orson Scott Card has produced here a novel that is every bit as excellent as the two previous novels in this series. *ENDER'S GAME* introduced us to Andrew (Ender) Wiggin, the child strategist who destroyed an alien threat to humanity. *SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD* took him, three thousand years later, to Lusitania, where the human colony struggles against the deadly descolada virus which is determined to destroy them, and prejudice against the native pequeninos, intelligent pig-like creatures that transmute into trees when they die. Here he establishes the Hive Queen, the last of the insectoid race he helped to destroy. Both these books won Hugos.

XENOCIDE is set thirty years on. Valentine, Ender's sister, joins him on Lusitania ahead of the fleet that the Congress of the Hundred Worlds has sent out to destroy the planet. It is a race against time; to find a solution to the descolada problem, without destroying the pequeninos who rely on it for their life-cycle; to stop the fleet destroying their world; to find a way of faster than light travel in case evacuation is necessary; to prevent a young girl on a distant planet causing the death of

Jane, an entity that lives within the philotic rays that link the ansibles holding the Hundred Worlds together. But the only people who can accomplish any of these are Ender's adopted family, and they seem permanently at war with each other.

This is an extremely complex novel. At each step there are new concepts to be unravelled, new facts to be discovered, but above all there are decisions that each of the characters have to make. Xenocide, the death of a species, seems to be inevitable whichever way they turn. The pequeninos will die if the fleet reaches Lusitania and unleashes the weapon it carries. Equally they will die if the descolada is not destroyed. The Hive Queen is building space ships to send her daughter-queens off world to safety, and for the pequeninos, who will spread the virus wherever they go and perhaps wipe out the human race. Jane, the only one of her kind, will probably die if the ansible connections are all broken. Quara, Ender's step-daughter, is convinced that the descolada is intelligent - destroying it would also be xenocide. Each group has its own dilemmas to solve, and each is entwined with the other. Like in real life, there are no easy answers, some of the characters inevitably lose something, others gain inner strength.

Card brilliantly handles all the threads of his plot with ease, twisting them to make intricate new patterns as fresh ideas spill from the page. This book deserves to be read and would, like its two predecessors, make a worthy Hugo winner.

ALL THE WEYRS OF FERN by Anne McCaffrey
Bantam, 494pp, £13.99, h/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

The end of Fern as we know it. There are doubtless more stories to be told, but after this book they will be decoration rather than structure; this volume completes the edifice, tying up and connecting the loose ends from the previous novels.

Dragon lovers will be on their way to the bookshops now, and ALL THE WEYRS OF FERN was written for them rather than newcomers. It lacks (at least in this edition) the traditional maps, dragondex and story-so-far precis. I doubt that this will reduce sales, they're in the other books, which you need to have read first.

Doctors Jack and Judy Cohen (Jack is a well known Brungroup member) are credited with assistance on the scientific front, and have helped McCaffrey produce an entirely credible self-consistent corner of the

universe. For all its dangers, this piece is great fun to escape to.

To summarise, ALL THE WEYRS OF FERN is set shortly after THE RENEGADES OF FERN, and focuses on Jaxom and Ruth as main protagonists.

The story opens with the discovery of AIVAS, the Artificial Intelligence Voice Address System left behind by the original colonists. For the rest of the book AIVAS proceeds to educate the Pernese with their forgotten knowledge in order to fulfil its programme and eliminate Thread once and for all. Criticism can be levelled, as ever the "bad guys" motivation is weak, the good guys are nice to excess, and draconian talents have yet to find limits, but these are made to seem trivial by great narrative skill.

BLUE MOON RISING by Simon Green
Victor Gollancz, 486pp, £7.99, 'C' format p/b
Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Within the first fifty pages of this "fantasy of wild magic" the hero Prince Rupert has defeated a demon, frightened off a band of cowardly goblins (with a little help from his faithful steed, a wise-cracking, talking unicorn), extracted information from an aging, vampiric witch and rescued a dragon from a princess... As you might have guessed from the last deed of derring-do BLUE MOON RISING is fairly tongue-in-cheek. Unfortunately Green doesn't manage to continue in the same hilarious style throughout the novel, which is a pity as I was quite enjoying the fantasy equivalent to DARK STAR.

But having said that, this is still an excellent fantasy. Eminently readable and a lot of fun - the humour where it appears is sharp and amusing, the characterization is excellent and the brooding evil of the Dark Prince's malign, rotten forest, the Darkwood, is superbly presented. This is the first time I've read anything by Simon Green, but it certainly won't be the last, and as I see from the blurb that the author resides in the West Midlands I'd be interested in seeing if we could persuade him to come along and speak to the group.

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