

# BRUM GROUP

# NEWS

December  
1991

Issue  
243

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

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

**MERRY  
CHRISTMAS  
AND A  
HAPPY  
NEW YEAR  
TO ALL  
BRUM GROUP  
MEMBERS**

PLEASE NOTE

THERE IS NO FORMAL MEETING OF THE BSFG IN DECEMBER

The BSFG normally 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).

"Ask not what your Group  
can do for you..."

by Bernie Evans

**THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
OF THE BIRMINGHAM  
SCIENCE FICTION GROUP  
17th January 1992**

Next month is the AGM, and therefore it's time for all you enthusiastic members to send in your nominations for Committee posts.

You can, of course, nominate from the floor at the meeting if you wish, but if you KNOW you will be standing, please send in your written nomination (which should be no more than 150 words in length), together with your nominator and seconder (if known), so we can print it in the January edition of the *BRUM GROUP NEWS*.

Written nominations must reach me, Bernie Evans -- who will be typing them up, by the end of December.

So, what positions are there?

**CHAIRMAN**

Will chair and keep order (?) at all meetings, and will also hold regular committee meetings (currently on the Tuesday following the Brum Group meeting). Will contact and make appropriate arrangements for speakers, etc.

**SECRETARY**

Should be able to type, attend all committee meetings and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee Members. Likewise the A.G.M. or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

**TREASURER**

If you don't know what a treasurer does, don't bother to apply...

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

Has to produce the newsletter every month. Access to a computer and desktop publishing software and/or a word processor is an advantage, but not essential, as a typewriter and a pair of scissors will suffice. The ability to type AND meet a monthly deadline

IS essential, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

**PUBLICITY OFFICER**

Will produce A4 posters, A5 flyers, and so on for meetings, and arrange for them to be displayed in local shops, libraries, and as many other outlets as possible. Will also produce general publicity for the Group, and contact radio and TV as necessary. Enthusiasm and the ability to get new IDEAS are an important factor.

**REVIEWS EDITOR**

Is actually an Ordinary Member, (see the Constitution), but may be appointed to receive and distribute review copies of books as fairly and appropriately as possible, and extort and compile (re-type) reviews in time to be included in the Newsletter each month. Ability to type and access to appropriate equipment are obviously essential.

One other ORDINARY MEMBER may be appointed by the Committee at any time during the year if deemed necessary.

So, that's who we need. Which do YOU want to do ?

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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, TONY BERRY for putting up with me and the *CRITICAL WAVE* photocopier and to all of our book reviewers.

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Many apologies to STAN ELING for misplacing his puzzle -- I hope to find it over Christmas and will run it in the January issue.

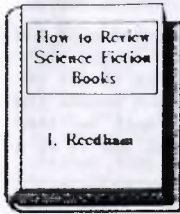
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# Book Reviews

SUMMER OF NIGHT by Dan Simmons  
Headline, 634 pp. £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Dan Simmons' latest novel marks his dramatic return to the horror field after a brief, but successful, two book sojourn in the science fictional universe of *Hyperion*. Having taken the fantasy world by storm in 1986 with *SONG OF KALLI*, winner of the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel, Simmons went on to win both the British Fantasy and the Bram Stoker Awards in 1989 for his massive horror novel *CARRION COMFORT*, he followed his initial successes with the Hugo award winning science fiction novel *HYPERION*, its sequel *THE FALL OF HYPERION* and the more difficult 'to categorize' *PHASES OF GRAVITY*.

Given this impressive track record I approached *SUMMER OF NIGHT* with some trepidation -- was it possible for Simmons to top what he had produced before? I needn't have worried, *SUMMER OF NIGHT* is a beautifully paced, disturbing and moving tale of horror, as enjoyable as anything yet produced by masters of the genre such as Stephen King and Dean Koontz.

*SUMMER OF NIGHT* is set in Elm Haven, a small town in Illinois, during the summer of 1960. Eleven years-old Dale Stewart and his friends attend Old Central -- an immense, bizarre, old school built eighty years earlier to accommodate the hordes of children which were anticipated as the town grew. But the town didn't grow, so there were no hordes of children and most of Old Central's rooms have remained unused.

The story opens on the last day of the last term that Dale, his younger brother Lawrence and their friends Duanne, Mike, Jim and Kevin, or indeed anyone else, will have to go to Old Central. The authorities have finally decided that the school has reached the end of its useful life, and plan to demolish it before the end of the year. However, Old Central or something that is lurking there seems to have different plans.

On the last day of term a school boy, Tubby Cooke, goes missing, the authorities are

sure he's merely run away but his sister, family and the Bike Patrol (Dale and his friends) are convinced of foul play, they are sure that he never left the school.

At a leisurely pace we are introduced to each of the boys, Simmons capturing accurately what it is like to be eleven years-old with the summer holidays stretching before you. The characters and small town America are lovingly portrayed, the descriptions of both the Illinois countryside and the townsfolk of Elm Haven are moving and evocative. The pace of the plot is slow, but all the better for it. For the first few hundred pages Simmons concentrates on painting a detailed picture of Elm Haven, with only the occasional bizarre occurrence and a few chilling minor incidents hinting at what is to come.

All of the boys feel there is something strange about this summer, they share a sense of foreboding, the malevolent influence of Old Central seems to be spreading across the county. Duanne hears a frightening voice over his radio at midnight, Dale is haunted by the stench of death, Lawrence by the dark, Mike by a faceless World War I soldier, all the boys come to fear the sinister rendering truck and strange, gaping holes with raw, red walls appear in the ground. Slowly the tension builds until the hidden evil in Elm Haven erupts in an orgy of violence, and only Dale and the rest of the Bike Patrol stand between the town and total chaos. This is an excellent novel and an absolutely riveting read.

THE ROWAN by Anne McCaffrey  
Corgi, 320 pp. £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This novel started life as a short story, "Lady in the Tower" (Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction in April 1959). It was later collected in *GET OFF THE UNICORN* (1977) and had since lain dormant, until now. The original story has become embedded into the centre of a novel which is very patchy.

It begins with a disaster on the planet of Altair. The only survivor of the mud-slide at the Rowan mining camp is a girl child, who is rescued only because she screams telepathically at all who can hear her. This is a world where many people have some degree of psionic talent, but the most treasured are those who may become Primes. These people have telepathic and telekinetic talents to a very high degree and thus are the prime movers of cargo and passengers across space. The child, who calls herself the Rowan, grows up knowing that this is what

she will become. The style in the initial pages is a little condensed and stilted but quickly opens out into the flowing, readable prose associated with Anne McCaffrey.

The second part of the novel begins with the original story. The Rowan has matured. She is a Prime operating from a control Tower on Jupiter's moon Callisto, shifting objects about the universe. She is to some extent a wilful and self-centred person, but then there are very few who are her equal, and she can never meet them in the flesh. The only one she has met is her trainer, Siglen of Altair - as Primes are agoraphobic, unable to travel in space. This is where the serious action begins, with a desperate mayday from an unknown Prime on the barely settled planet of Deneb.

This section and the climax of the novel have all the excitement and adventure expected in an sf novel. Unfortunately, between them is an unashamedly sentimental passage dealing with the romance of the Rowan and the Deneb Prime, Jeff Raven, and all the problems that talented people have in producing babies. It lowers the tone of the novel. The novel also misses the opportunity to explore the characters of the handful of other Primes, all of whom have fascinating, if bizarre, personalities - perhaps another time - whereas beside them the lovers, Jeff and the Rowan, seem a little ordinary. The book does have interesting aspects and is a refreshing break from the stories set on Pern, proving that Anne McCaffrey is still capable of developing good, new scenarios.

*(NB: the Bantam hardback and "C" format paperback are also available at £12.99 and £7.99 respectively - Bernie Evans.)*

#### CHUNG KUO BOOK 3: THE WHITE MOUNTAIN

by David Wingrove

NEL, 439 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the third in a seven volume series of Earth in the near future but under Chinese rule, with the populace living in vast hive-like cities. The ruling council of seven Tongs have a policy of stagnation, but there are those who want change and expansion off-planet, and are prepared to use any means to gain their goal. The leader of one such faction is Howard Devore, who links up with the the Ping Tao, a terrorist group. By the use of terrorism, assassination and bribery they fight for change. Political infighting within Ping Tao causes a change of leadership and a move towards even more extreme

methods, all of which is very much to Devore's liking.

The young prince Li Yuan accedes to his fathers place on the council of Tongs after the old Tong's death. This change causes yet further political manoeuvrings and behind the scenes dealings between the Tongs as they fight to preserve the status quo, but it is a fight they are slowly losing.

What started as a series with very definite sf themes has changed as the series has progressed. The sf elements have become submerged under the political bias of the tale. The sf elements are still there - the Moon bases, the "wiring project" (controlling of minds by brain implants) and Ben Shepherd's "total" entertainment system - but you will have to look hard for them. This is now a political story set in our near future and not a true sf tale.

#### WOLF AND IRON by Gordon R Dickson

Orbit, 468 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

In Gordon R Dickson's reworking of his short story "In Iron Years" he has lost none of the power of the original narrative and must still rank as one of the legends of sf. The expanded tale of the collapse of America through social reasons rather than war, and the journey of Jeeris Belemy Walter (Jeebee) through the troubled lands of the USA, is still as plausible as when it was first written. Much more attention is paid to the lifestyle of the wolf, as Jeebee's companion, and the story is enhanced by the extra research. The bond between human and wild animal is allowed to grow throughout the book and is the central pivot of the tale.

The look at life within a collapsed society, and the stripping away of the thin veneer of civilisation that keeps a large population from breaking down, is well described. Gordon R Dickson has once again shown why he ranks so highly in the SF world, as even a reworking of an old story can be made as fresh as a totally new work.

#### REIGN OF FEAR: THE FICTION & FILM OF STEPHEN KING (1982-1989)

Ed by Don Herron

Pan, 247 pp, £4.99 "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The best - most interesting - thing about Stephen King is his fiction. Or some of the films made from his fiction. Millions of people read the books and see the films, but few will bother to wade through this anthology of essays about King's fiction and



the films made from it. Nor should they bother because, despite claims to the contrary in one of a whole clutch of brief introductory articles, most of the book's contents are boring and inconsequential. Who cares whether Whoopi Goldberg enjoyed reading King's novel *IT* or not? *Who cares about the circumstances in which Guy N Smith read THE SHINING*, or Stephen King first intruded into the life of Peter Tremayne? Is there anybody out there who has a compulsion to know how often King has mentioned proprietary medicines in his novels and whether he got the details right? And aren't you just dying to know how frequently King writes a glowing recommendation to be used as cover blurb for somebody else's horror novel? Okay, so there's a good essay by Bill Warren on the film's from King's work, full of strong (and, one feels, authoritative) opinions. And some of the contributors, like Thomas M Disch, are witty and literate. But most of these essays are well worth avoiding. Another problem is that they're all out of date. Despite that hopeful reference to 1989 in the subtitle, this is a book published in the US in 1988. Its contents refer to 1987 and earlier. All recent King books and film projects are omitted.

To be brutally honest, this is a book that shouldn't have been published in Britain in 1991. If you're really interested in King, the man, I advise you to stand in a bookshop and read the entertaining 8-page interview with him that kicks off the book, but don't bother to buy the book itself. Read King's fiction instead.

DARK PRINCE by David Gemmell  
Legend, 449 pp, £8.99 "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is the follow up to *LION OF MACEDON*, and continues the story of Parmenion, though the events relate more specifically to the rise of Alexander. Gemmell assumes the reader's knowledge of the previous novel and its background content and, more importantly, his "disclaimer" of writing "real" history. Basically, although the persons in the novel existed, as did the events occur, Gemmell imposes his versions on both to provide an heroic fantasy.

On this basis the novel works well. Giving Alexander an "evil" side in the shape of the chaos spirit (Kadmilos), which gains control on occasion and wreaks havoc, provides the main theme. The sub plots are also up to Gemmell's usual high standard, with the characterisation and character by-play cleverly orchestrated. However as records

exist of these times, the events, places and styles of writing only needed research. Overall I came out at the end of the story feeling slightly disappointed and not knowing why.

Historically accurate and providing an "alternate" thesis to Alexander and his make up, the novels make interesting reading. Personally I don't feel these stand up as well as Gemmell's other works and although, as you would expect, well written and well told, I prefer the "Sipstrassi Tales" series.

CAPTIVES by Shaun Hutson  
Macdonald, 432 pp, £14.95 h/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

If, like me, you feel that *SUMMER OF NIGHT* is how horror should be written -- first develop your characters so that the reader begins to identify with them, providing them with believable motivations, and a realistic setting. Allowing the reader to continue to identify with the characters as all hell breaks loose -- then you will probably see Shaun Hutson's *CAPTIVES* as a prime example of how horror shouldn't be written.

Those familiar with Hutson's work will already know that to a large extent he relies on realistic descriptions of physical violence to shock his readers, rather than allowing the inherent horror of a situation to disturb them. His aim seems to be to shock and disgust, rather than frighten, and he is very good at his job.

*CAPTIVES* is a typical example of his work, in the first five pages the body-count is six (not counting the horribly mutilated victims who managed to survive), I have no idea what it was by the end I lost count shortly after twenty or so were killed in chapter eighty-six alone. Almost every death is lovingly recorded in the greatest, and supposedly accurate and realistic, detail.

Witness the murder of a tramp: having already rammed a twenty inch blade through the tramp's chin out of the top of his head severing his tongue in its passage, the assailant moves on to the tramp's eyes, using "his thumb and forefinger to push back the lids. He (drives) the corkscrew forward, burying it in the man's right eye, shoving down hard on it, twisting it in the socket, ignoring the spouting vitreous liquid that (erupts) from the riven orb. He (feels) the point scrape bone and (pulls) back hard. Most of the eye (comes) away, torn from the socket. But the corkscrew (has) burst it like a corpulent balloon and its fluid (runs) down the tramp's face, clear liquid mingling with

For Asprin, and I must claim to be a fan of the "Myth" books, this does not live up to expectations. While I see the difficulty in "setting up" the background for a series, this somehow fails to work either as a sole novel or as a believable yarn. Disappointing.

THE DIVIDE by Robert Charles Wilson  
Orbit, 249 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

In the sf genre stories of the manipulation of the human animal by chemical or genetic means are many and varied, and Robert C Wilson has produced a taut thriller about just such a person.

The "hero" of the narrative is one John Shaw, the result of an experiment into enhancing the human potential, but as he grows older subtle changes take place within his body. Shaw's story of how he comes to terms with the changes, and how he resolves his alter ego Benjamin to become a complete person, is well told. The effect upon Shaw of finding out his past when Dr Kyriakides, the instigator of the original test programme, tries to find him after twenty years is devastating.

Robert C Wilson tells a clever, tight story of a "superman" and the effect that this super personality has on the people in his life, both old friends and newcomers in his search to become a whole man. Even though *THE DIVIDE* is not a hard core science fiction story (it has shades of cyberpunk woven into a non sf thriller) it is still recommended.

FOUNDATION'S FRIENDS ed by Martin H Greenberg  
Grafton, 511 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

Sub-titled "*STORIES IN HONOUR OF*" this is for the most part an interesting anthology by 17 different authors using Isaac Asimov's themes and ideas. I came into sf after Asimov's "golden periods" and do not claim to be any sort of authority on his work, but I did recognise quite a bit in this volume, and I must admit it whetted my appetite to seek out some of the originals. It's fairly boring just to make lists of stories and authors when reviewing anthologies so I'll try and exercise some restraint. My favourite story by far is "The Asenion Solution" by Robert Silverberg, based on Asimov's jokey element Thiotimolene. Definitely one for Silverberg completists. Also worth mentioning is "Strip-runners" by Pamela Sargent (Caves of Steel?). Robert Sheckley comes up with "Carhunters of the

Concrete Prairie", which started off building up my hopes of vintage Sheckley but got a little silly as it progressed (still worth a read though). A few I found boring, Poul Anderson's writing style just didn't appeal and I was a little disappointed by Orson Scott Card's effort, but overall a book worth investigating, and not just for Asimov fans.

THE FETCH by Robert Holdstock  
Orbit, 376 pp, £13.95 h/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Although not really part of the acclaimed "Myathgo Wood" cycle *THE FETCH* shares some of its themes, and to some extent, has a similar atmosphere.

It tells the story of Michael Whitlock a lonely boy who, like many children, plays with his imaginary friend in his imaginary castle by the sea. Nothing to worry his adoptive parents there, but when Michael's 'imaginary' friend, Chaik Boy, begins to help him to 'fetch' objects from the past his parents begin to take an interest. Especially when Michael's gifts are valued at thousands of pounds.

This is a fascinating novel, mixing the legends of "The Fisher King" and the "Holy Grail" with a number of other myths Holdstock presents a haunting tale of a confused, lonely and unloved boy, desperate for affection, who gradually becomes aware of the tremendous power at his disposal. A tale of obsession, the paranormal, greed and, ultimately, love, *THE FETCH* is a powerful work by a mature and confident writer who is now, like his character Michael, beginning to realise his potential.

THE GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS by Arthur C Clarke  
Orbit, 253pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by David A Hardy.

The blurb on the back says "one of the finest works from science fiction's Grand Master.... a major sf event". I'm sorry that I can't agree. Oh, no doubt it's a must for Clarke fans, and it's still a much better read than a good many books currently on offer, but there's something missing, and I think it's conflict.

The science is as good as one has come to expect, the author tosses in ideas on nearly every page, and his research and historical references are impeccable. But one is never in suspense, there is never a real problem in putting the book down. The story is, of course, about plans to raise the *TITANIC* from the sea bed (a recurring theme in this author's writings). There are two



blood." Brings a whole new dimension to the phrase 'eye watering' doesn't it? The rest of the page continues in the same vein (sorry) as the assailant turns his attention, and corkscrew, to the victim's left eye.

I'm afraid Hutson's work has always left me cold, it doesn't horrify, frighten or entertain me, I find it merely distasteful. That isn't to say, however, that Hutson can't write. He certainly can. The plot, though slight, makes sense within the parameters of the novel, the sub-plots are interesting, the action is clearly presented and the whole work moves along at a satisfyingly swift pace.

I think Hutson's approach to horror is a legitimate one, it is just an approach I don't like. To borrow a phrase from Barry Norman if you like this kind of stuff you'll enjoy this... Me? I'll give it a miss in future.

#### STAR TREK: PRIME DIRECTIVE

by Judith & Garfield Reeves-Stevens  
Pan, 404 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Star Trek novels can be so variable in quality. This is partly because each one seems to be written by a different author -- not a bad thing in principle as it can provide recognition (if in a limited way) to authors who haven't yet "made it" in mainstream sf. Sometimes these authors don't care enough about their characters, others care too much, some can write, others can't. Fortunately, the team who produced this novel know their craft, their characters, and have just the right amount of feeling to produce a very creditable job. The story is set towards the end of the *ENTERPRISE*'s first five year mission. Kirk has been forced to resign, as have McCoy, Sulu and Chekov. Spock has been broken to ensign and Uhura is held in a Starfleet prison for non-cooperation. The *ENTERPRISE* herself is crippled. The reason -- they are accused of wilfully breaking the Prime Directive and interfering with a world, Talin IV, which blows itself to radioactive dust as a result. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear to Scott, left aboard the near derelict ship, everything is not as it seems. The bridge crew may have been innocent but he cannot prove it. A good Star Trek novel.

SONG OF ALBION BOOK 1: THE PARADISE WAR by Stephen Lawhead  
Lion, 416 pp, £13.99, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The appearance in Scotland of a supposedly extinct ox-like aurochs so intrigues two

Oxford graduate students, Simon Rawnsdon and Lewis Gilles, that they travel north to investigate. What they discover is a "leak" in a time portal that allowed the aurochs through. Simon disappears through the portal, but the more timid Lewis hesitates and the portal closes. An engineered meeting between Lewis and Professor Nettleton, an Oxford Don, prompts a return to Scotland. Here Lewis manages to pass through the portal and finds himself in ancient Albion, a mythical parallel to Bronze Age Britain, but where magic exists. Lewis meets Simon, now an accepted warrior, and explains that they must both return to present day Scotland to stop the leakage getting worse. Simon refuses to leave. Lewis is then sent by the chieftain of the tribe who adopted Simon to train to be a warrior. During his seven years of training, Lewis also becomes increasingly reluctant to leave. The destruction of the tribe's fortresses and homes by Lord Nudd of the Underworld, and the subsequent desperate search for the lost song of Albion, cause Lewis to re-think his position, and attempt to return before Nudd can get through the portal.

An interesting, entertaining and well researched story that not only has an excellent plotline, but has absorbing narrative and very good characterisation. Lawhead has taken over the abused subject of Celtic mythos and given it a refreshing treatment. The only quibble I have is that the meeting between Simon and Lewis in Albion occurs just a little too conveniently, and far too soon after Lewis's translocation there. That apart, this is a series to watch out for.

PHULE'S COMPANY by Robert Asprin  
Legend, 268 pp, £5.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

After Asprin's success with the "Myth" series he's searched for a new direction and come up with the idea of a super-rich "playboy" type hero-cum-captain with the Space Legion taking command of a company of dregs and losers. Not overly inspired so far and, to be honest, not a particularly inspiring debut for a new series.

Phule is "given" the command as a punishment, and decides to make them the Legion's elite force. Possibly predictable to Asprin fans, the text fails to grasp the reader for any length of time. Several passages prove entertaining and raise the level, but overall the narrative feels disjointed. Could the problem be the narrator not being present at all events, or misgivings at the turns taken in the tale?

rival plans, actually, but relations between their proponents are never other than gentlemanly. The few shocks are mild ones.

I won't give away the ending, but I felt let down. By the way, the last twenty pages consist of appendices and acknowledgements.

THE GAP INTO VISION - FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

by Stephen Donaldson

Harper Collins, 410 pp, £14.99 h/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

This is part two of Stephen Donaldson's epic new five volume science fiction novel. Part one was a surprisingly slender volume, which in fact did little more than set the scene and introduce the principal characters. The increased length of this second volume is more typical - moreover the increase can be seen as symbolising the more expansive stage on which the story is now seen to be taking place. More characters, with important roles to play, are brought in, and implications only hinted at previously can now be developed as key plot elements. In particular, we meet the Amnion, a strange alien race with which humanity maintains an uneasy truce barely concealing outright hostility.

Morn Hyland has escaped the clutches of the unpleasant Angus Thermopyle and has thrown in her lot with his rival, the handsome swashbuckling Nick Succorso. However, she has fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire - Succorso is even worse for her than Thermopyle was, and she is soon fighting for survival as he tries to sell her to the Amnion to pay for repairs to his ship. At the same time, he may actually be in collusion with the authorities, the same Security Police who, instead of jailing Thermopyle, are preparing him for a new and significant role in the struggle with the Amnion. The relationship between these three is far from played out as yet, while others on the sidelines seek to manipulate events to serve their own ends.

THE GAP INTO VISION is a long and complex book, carefully plotted and richly detailed. Donaldson is an accomplished and able writer, but although the "Gap" series showcases his talents to excellent effect, he may have overreached himself in turning to SF in this form. Its five volume length will enable him to tell the whole of his story in full, but he will need all five volumes if he is going to continue telling it in such detail as he does here. A shorter, more tightly plotted book would have been better.

More importantly, the change to sf from fantasy serves to demonstrate Donaldson's lack

of a scientific background. He displays serious ignorance of the laws of motion and relativity, and in fact virtually all the science in this book is implausible, to say the least. The reader can, if he chooses to make a conscious effort, ignore this, since it is not like hard sf where the story is basically about science or technology. Donaldson's story is about people and the science (whether fiction, fact or false) simply provides the background against which their story takes place. The book can be enjoyed by bringing to it only the level of scientific expertise displayed by the author, but after all that is not what science fiction is all about.

Above all, of course, it must be remembered that this is one book in a series or, to be more precise, a serial. It starts and finishes in mid-air and it cannot be read or discussed without reference to what came before and what will come after: it will stand or fall as the whole series stands or falls. On the evidence of what I have read so far I think it is a good book, but too flawed to be a great one. However, anybody prepared to make the commitment, as I have, to read the whole thing may find it a rewarding experience.

FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT by Stephen King

NEL, 930 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by William McCabe.

I suppose this is about as close as Stephen King gets to writing regular length novels nowadays. Like the previous collection DIFFERENT SEASONS (which got lots of nominations for genre fiction awards despite the fact that all except one story was "mainstream") this is a collection of four stories. Unlike the previous collection these are all "horror" stories. I use these classifications in quotes because that is how they are referred to in the introduction.

With the exception of the finish to the last story, "The Sundog", I would not call this stuff "horror" because it just isn't that scary. It does follow many of the traditions of the horror story - something nasty is "out there" and "coming to get you", but once you get used to this sort of thing it becomes pretty obvious that "you're" going to get "it" first, and "it" isn't quite as nasty as you thought. OK, so this isn't strictly true and in one case the central character gets his, and in another you get the "it's still out there and waiting for the sequel" ending but it generally seems that someone tossed a coin to decide which ending you get. This said,



the writing is good enough and the characters are mostly strong enough to hold the whole thing together.

The stories are: "The Langoliers" - the passengers of an aeroplane are stuck in a kind of used-up past and have to get back to their own "time" before "it" gets them. When (if) you figure out what "it" is, it will seem ridiculous.

"Secret Window, Secret Garden" - a "blocked" writer is faced with someone who claims to have written his best story. I liked the little twist on the end (the name of the story).

"The Library Policeman" - the nasty librarian wants the books back in a week but they've already been pulped and recycled. The final destruction at the end is just silly.

"The Sun Dog" - a particularly nasty dog is waiting in the pictures from a polaroid camera, and it's going to get out. Well, that's it, good stories, but not particularly frightening.

#### TAKE BACK PLENTY by Colin Greenland

Grafton, 528 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

*TAKE BACK PLENTY* is one of those rare animals -- a book that deserves all the praise that has been heaped upon it. Winner of both the Arthur C Clarke and British Science Fiction Awards, this is a superb science fictional romp.

Tabitha Jute, a down at heel space barge pilot finds herself drawn into an increasingly fantastic series of adventures in her increasingly desperate attempts to earn some quick cash. The back cover blurb proclaims that this is "a space extravaganza" and for once it is right. Fast moving, exciting and great fun, *TAKE BACK PLENTY* is space opera of the old school, but with the added element of real, rather than, cardboard, characters. On a par with the best galaxy spanning work being produced today by the likes of Iain M Banks and Dan Simmons.

#### THE DARK DESCENT: THE MEDUSA AND THE SHIELD

ed by David G Hartwell  
Grafton, 607 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

David Hartwell's massive reprint anthology of horror fiction was split into three for British publication. The first volume, *THE COLOUR OF EVIL*, I found truly excellent. The second, *A FABULOUS, FORMLESS DARKNESS*, was frustrating because too many of the stories were over-subtle. This third volume is again

very good, with excellent stories by well-known writers, but its problem (for me) is that too many of the stories are too familiar. For example there's Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", H P Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls", J Sheridan Le Fanu's "Schalken the Painter", D.H Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner", Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", Richard Matheson's "Born of Man and Woman", Theodore Sturgeon's "Bright Segment" and Ramsey Campbell's "Mackintosh Willy". They are good stories all, but they've been reprinted in so many previous anthologies that anybody with some experience in the horror field will surely have read them before. I question the wisdom of assembling so many common stories in one volume. Highly recommended if you like horror and don't already know any of the titles I've listed above.

#### SYNNERS by Pat Cadigan

Grafton, 435 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Synners are people who create images directly from the mind onto video for others to experience. The best of them began as computer hackers. Imagine, it's not too difficult, a world where a laptop computer is as common an adjunct to your attire as a walkman is today. Drugs are a way of life, like alcohol and cigarettes are for some people, and the roads are clogged with traffic -- computer controlled, of course. Young people drop out to become hackers, programmes are continually being changed to avoid them. For everyone, intensity of experience is the ultimate ambition. The latest invention are sockets -- not inorganic ones that are connected to wires leading directly to the brain (they have been around for years) but constructed organic ones. Through them you can experience exactly what the synner did in creating the video, and only the best synners can create this new product.

Mark, though talented, has been around for twenty years, toxed most of the time. His brain is wearing out. When he strokes out, he is on line, connected to the network that links every corner of the civilised world. Anyone who is on line with him at the time dies, of a stroke, as the diseased impulses infect every part of the net. Computer systems crash as the new virus runs riot destroying everything. Ranged against this are a group of miscellaneous hackers including Gina, who has been Mark's partner for twenty years, Gabe, who does a nice line in wannabee videos (when he should be

creating advertisements) and Sam, Gabe's daughter. They have help from Art, a benign computer virus with a sense of humour, who is sentient though non-corporeal.

This is a densely packed volume. Cadigan has created a very plausible and unpromising future. She does not make any concessions to her readers so it is a book that needs effort to be put into it to find the way through the jargon, background and mix of characters. It is worth while because it portrays vividly a sub-culture that is probably already in the making. Try it, and persevere.

THE HEMINGWAY HOAX by Joe Haldeman  
NEL, 155 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A fascinating, inventive story revolving on the idea of a Hemingway "nut" attempting to write the "missing" Hemingway novel. On meeting with a con artist, Baird considers just such an act, but this attracts the attention of the Spacio-Temporal Adjustment Board who are attempting to keep the universe straight. Acts such as a pastiche on Hemingway could somehow distort events throughout the omniverse, so the STAB agent has to kill Baird. Unfortunately, (though fortunately for Baird) this somehow fails, and Baird is transported into the next universe on. This goes on until a climax is reached with a complex, highly original closing.

An exceptional story, well written and told. Excellent value and a must to read. Very highly recommended.

KEEPERS OF THE PEACE by Keith Brooke  
Corgi, 252 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Earth in the not too distant future is a world divided. In the USA the federal government has broken down and the states have sub-divided into a number of loose, warring federations. Into this melee is thrown Jed Brindle, a young farm boy from one of Earth's orbiting colonies, to help keep the peace on Earth. The tale of Jed's indoctrination into the peace keeping forces is one of a naive young man moulded into the military way of life. With his cyborg implants he becomes one of the "aliens" helping to defend one of the factions fighting to control the old USA. On a clandestine mission Jed and his comrades are forced to reassess their stand when the mission goes wrong. The unfolding tale of their fight for survival and their trek back to friendly lines is well recorded by Keith

Brooke. As a first novel this is a worthy start to what will be a long line of successful novels. The spirit of a young man cast loose in a world not of his making has been well caught and told in such a manner as not to get bogged down in sentimentality. The end to the story is not the usual "hero wins at the end of the day" finale, and I look forward to reading more of Keith Brooke in the future.

MOVING PICTURES By Terry Pratchett  
Corgi, 333 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Once again events on the Discworld, where anything can happen (and will, sooner or later), provide an irreverent parody of one of our own hallowed traditions. This time the age-old spirit of Cthinema is enabled to break through the barriers set up long ago in Holy Wood and begins to take over people's minds with the idea of Moving Pictures. The results are rather like viewing what happened in California through a distorting mirror, building up to an impressive climax which blends King Kong, Ghostbusters and H.P. Lovecraft (Cthinema - geddit?) to produce one of the corniest visual puns imaginable. Not that either the imagination or sense of humour of Terry Pratchett have ever been subject to any limitations. The old adage that practice makes perfect is nowhere better exemplified than in his never-ending stream of "Discworld" novels and unstinting praise for the latest can only be tempered by the realisation that the next one will probably be better still.

THE HELLBOUND HEART by Clive Barker  
Fontana, 161 pp, £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by W.A.McCabe.

Firstly, I must admit to not having seen HELLRAISER - the film version of this story. I can believe that this would work better as a film because enough of it seems angled toward some visual impact, but maybe not quite the one that was conveyed in the book. While the image used on the cover (and in the publicity for the film) does occur in the book, it is only minor.

The plot can be described simply: Frank is jaded after having seen and done everything humanly possible, and gets his chance for something more from a box that is the key to another dimension. Julia is married to Rory (Frank's brother) but has been in love with Frank ever since he raped her the day before her wedding. Frank doesn't like his



new existence and wants to come home so he gets Julia to help. This involves killing several men that she lures back to the house on some kind of sexual promise. Obviously a horror story in the usual blood and guts tradition, but SF apologists will find something in the multi-dimension thing.

Although the novella itself only comes to 126 pages there are another 50 to the book - 34 pages as introduction to the new hardback *IMAJICA*, 6 pages of reviews, and 10 pages of the usual biography and credits (including 2 title pages). While I understand that this does not add to the cost of the book maybe it is a little too much padding for something so small.

OOOOO

*NB: Book reviews should be handed to Mick Evans the month after receipt of the review copy, thank you.*

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**20 DECEMBER** - No "formal" BSFG meeting this month, although there will be a Christmas meal at the Wagon & Horses in Oldbury. Too late to book now so if you're not coming I promise we'll be thinking of you as we tuck in -- have a Merry Christmas wherever you are -- Martin Tudor.

**17 JANUARY 1992** - BSFG AGM and Auction to raise money for the Group. If you have any auction material please contact a committee member at one of the meetings in November.

**6-8 NOVEMBER** - NOVACON 22, Royal Angus Hotel in Birmingham city centre. Guest of Honour Storm Constantine.

The chairman, Helena Bowles, is interested in hearing what people would like to see at Novacon, suggestions should be sent care of Bernie Evans (address follows).

Attending membership costs £18 until the end of Eastercon 1992, then £20 until 12 October 1992, and £25 on the door. Membership will be limited so it is advisable to register early. Further information from Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

**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.) 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 and any reasonable offer will be 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 £1.95 (inclusive of p&p), cheques payable to "THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP", to MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

As well as producing the BRUM GROUP NEWS Martin Tudor is co-editor of CRITICAL WAVE, Britain's only independent sf, fantasy and horror news and reviews magazine. Over its four years of publication CRITICAL WAVE has established a reputation for hard-hitting news coverage, perceptive essays on the state of the genre and incisive reviews of the latest books, comics and movies. Regular features include publishing news, portfolios by Europe's leading science fiction and fantasy artists, extensive club and convention listings, interviews with prominent authors and editors, video, film and comics reviews, fiction market reports, fanzine and small press reviews, convention reports and theatre reviews.

Previous contributors to CRITICAL WAVE have included: MICHAEL MOORCOCK, IAIN BANKS, CLIVE BARKER, LISA TUTTLE, COLIN GREENLAND, DAVID LANGFORD, ROBERT HOLDSTOCK, GARRY KILWORTH, SHAWN HUTSON, DAVID WINGROVE, BOB SHAW, TERRY PRATCHETT, RAMSEY CAMPBELL, LARRY NIVEN, STEVEN BARNES, DAVID A HARDY, BRIAN ALDISS, ANNE GAY, STEPHEN BAXTER, GRAHAM JOYCE, J. WEST, RAYMOND FEIST, CHRIS CLAREMONT and STORM CONSTANTINE. A six issue subscription costs only £7.50, cheques payable to "Critical Wave Publications" should be sent to Martin at 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

## NOVACON 22

WHEN: Friday 6th November to Sunday 8th November 1992

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WHERE: By popular demand we return to:  
the Royal Angus Hotel  
in  
Birmingham city centre.

NB: Due to limited space and restrictive fire regulations at the Angus we are forced to limit membership -- details of exactly how few we will be allowed to have will follow once this has been agreed with the hotel. In the meantime we strongly advise that you REGISTER EARLY...

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WHO: Authoress extraordinaire - STORM CONSTANTINE

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COST: £18 until the end of Eastercon 1992, £20 until Monday 12th October 1992 (or 4 weeks before the Convention). £25 on the door. NB POSTAL APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DEADLINE. THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME TO SORT OUT HOTEL ACCOMODATION AND CONFIRM THEM. But Bernie may be prepared to re-consider if you phone her and convince her you have a good enough excuse.

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COMMITTEE: The person who brought you the Wonderful TWENTYCON hasn't had enough yet - HELENA BOWLES is in the chair. Backing her are:

Bernie Evans on Registrations (when will this woman give up? Anyone willing to run a sweep?).

Richard Standage Treasurer (if we can drag him back from South America in time).

Tony Berry, Ops supremo and Guest Liason (we told him he could talk to Storm anyway, but he insisted...)

Carol Morton on Programme (Ex Newsletter Editor, Registrations bod for Twentycon, whither will our Carol go next?)

There are so many people wanting to do Publications, we'll have to let you know who the Chosen One is later.

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PROGRAMME: At this stage you expect Programme information!

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HOW: That's easy get your money out, and find Bernie (or another member of the Committee). If this is beyond you, make out a cheque to "Novacon 22" and post it to: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH. Further information from Bernie on 558 0997.



## GUFF 1992

**WHAT IS GUFF?** The Get Under Fan Fund (known in alternate years as the Get-up-and-over Fan Fund) was established in 1979 to further contacts between European and Australian fandom by bringing a well-known and popular fan from one hemisphere to attend a convention in the other. GUFF exists solely through the support of fandom. The candidates are voted for by interested fans all over the world and each vote is accompanied by a fee of not less than NLG 5, GBP 1.50 or A\$ 4.00. These votes and the continued interest and generosity of fandom are what makes GUFF possible.

**WHO MAY VOTE?** Voting is open to anyone who has been active in fandom (fanzines, conventions, clubs, etc) prior to January 1990 and who contributes at least GBP 1.50 or the equivalent in another currency to the fund. Contributions in excess of this minimum are gratefully accepted. Voting is by secret ballot, only one vote per person is allowed, proxy votes are forbidden and you must sign your ballot. "Write-in" candidates are permitted. Cheques and money orders should be made payable to 'Roman Orszanski' if in A\$, to 'Eve Harvey' if in GBP and to 'Roelof Goudriaan' if in NLG or US\$. If you cannot provide these, any currency in notes will also be accepted.

**DEADLINE** Votes must reach the administrators by 31 January, 1992.

**VOTING DETAILS** GUFF uses a preferential ballot system, which guarantees an automatic run-off and majority win. Rank the candidates in order of your preference. If the leading first-place candidate does not get a majority of the total votes cast, the first-place votes of the lowest-ranking candidate are dropped and the second-place votes on those ballots are then counted. The process goes on until one candidate has a majority. It is therefore important to vote for second, third, etc. on your ballot.

**HOLD OVER FUNDS** This choice, similar to No Award in the Hugo Award balloting, gives the voter the chance to vote for no GUFF trip in 1992, should the candidates not appeal to them or if they feel that GUFF should slow down the frequency of its trips. Should Hold Over Funds receive a majority of votes on the final ballot no GUFF trip will be awarded.

**DONATIONS** GUFF needs continuous donations of money and material to be auctioned in order to exist. If you are ineligible to vote or don't feel qualified to vote, why not donate anyway? As important as donations is publicity - in fanzines, letters, convention literature and by word of mouth - to increase voter participation and fandom's overall awareness of GUFF.

**THE CANDIDATES** Each candidate has promised, barring acts of god, to travel to the 1992 Australian National Convention in Sydney, if elected, has posted a non-refundable bond, and has provided 5 nominations and a platform. The platform and nominators are detailed overleaf.

### VOTES AND CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE SENT TO:

**EUROPE:** Roelof Goudriaan  
Caan van Necklaan 63  
2281 BB Rijswijk (ZH)  
the Netherlands.

**AUSTRALASIA:** Roman Orszanski  
PO Box 131  
Marden, SA 5070  
Australia.

CANDIDATES' PLATFORM FOR GUFF 1992

**EVA HAUSER** I am a Czechoslovak fan, editor and writer. I write BIOPUNK stories which are (according to some people) disgusting. I like to write funny articles for fanzines. Unfortunately, I can't write anything funny in English. I am also very fond of discussions - about society, the future, feminism, the environment, literature etc.

Nominators: John Foyster, Jenny Glover, Ian Mackereth, Cyril Simsa, and Bridget Wilkinson.

**BRIDGET WILKINSON** acquired a know of European fandom through Fans Across The World, where she also learned how to tie knots in red tape, and how to raise funds. She hasn't yet learned how to duck under the table fast enough, which is why she ended up becoming treasurer of the European SF Society. Known from her FATW newsletter and "Worlds Apart", her fan writing has made erratic appearances in respected places. She has been a member of The Womens' Periodical (an amateur press association) for several years. Having discovered how room parties run all over Europe, it's time to check out the Australians'.

Nominators: Justin Ackroyd, Paulina Braiter, Piotr Cholewa, Elzbieta Gepfert, and Roger Weddall.

I VOTE FOR (rank 1, 2, 3 etc)

- ( ) Eva Hauser
- ( ) Bridget Wilkinson
- ( ) Hold Over Funds
- ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ (Write-in)

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME & ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ as a donation to GUFF (Make A\$ cheques payable to 'Roman Orszanski', GBP cheques payable to 'Eve Harvey' and US\$ and NLG cheques payable to 'Roelof Goudriaan'.)

If you think your name may not be known to the administrators and that your vote might be disqualified, please give the name & address of a fan (not a fan group, a candidate or their nominators) to whom you are known: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Reproduction of this sheet is encouraged provided that the text is reprinted verbatim. Anyone doing so should substitute their name here: Martin Tudor