

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

February 1992 Issue 245

The monthly newsletter of the
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1992 Committee:

Group Chairman - Tony Morton Secretary - Carol Morton Treasurer - Richard Standage
Reviews Editor - Bernie Evans Publicity Officer - Al Johnston Ordinary Member - Mick
Evans Novacon 22 Chairman - Helena Bowles Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor

GREG BEAR

will be addressing the BSFG on

Friday 14th February 1992

7.45pm for 8.00pm

Admittance: Members £1.75 Visitors £2.75

Gregory Dale Bear was born in San Diego, California on the 20th August 1951. Having been educated at San Diego State University he worked as a part-time lecturer, a technical writer, a planetarium operator, a bookstore clerk, an illustrator and a reviewer before becoming a full-time freelance writer in 1975.

Since then he has been the recipient of two Nebula awards (1984 and for short story in 1986), two Hugo awards (1984 and 1987) and the Prix Apollo (1986).

A prolific writer his works include *HEGIRA*, *PSYCLONE*, *BEYOND HEAVEN'S RIVER*, *STRENGTH OF STONES*, *CORONA*, *THE INFINITY CONCERTO*, *BLOOD MUSIC*, *EON*, *THE SERPENT MAGE*, *THE FORGE OF GOD*, *ETERNITY*, *SLEEPSIDE STORY*, *EARLY HARVEST*, *HARDFOUGHT*, *TANGENTS*, *QUEEN OF ANGELS* and most recently *HEADS* a review of which appeared in last month's newsletter.

(For the above information I have to thank the third edition of *TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCIENCE-FICTION WRITERS*, edited by Noelle Watson and Paul E Schellinger (published in Britain by St James Press). A review of this excellent volume will appear next issue.)

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs function room of the WHITE LION, corner of Thorp Street and Horsefair/Bristol Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include a copy of this monthly newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are nine pounds per person, or twelve pounds for two members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the Treasurer RICHARD STANDAGE at meetings or by post c/o BERNIE EVANS (address below). Book reviews should be sent to the Reviews Editor BERNIE EVANS at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries regarding the BRUM GROUP NEWS to MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).

The Chairman's Bit

by Tony Morton

Welcome to 1992, where your newly elected committee are already producing ideas with gusto. If the year continues the way it has started we are assured of an interesting and memorable time for all concerned.

To begin, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who voted for me at the AGM; and to assure those who didn't that I'll be trying to win them over!

We're off to a good start in February with two guest speakers: a special meeting featuring GREG BEAR on the 14th and JOHN BRUNNER being interviewed by Chris Morgan at our regular meeting on the 21st. Naturally there is much more to come, but I'll keep future activities under wraps for now. Adds a bit of excitement, doesn't it?

On a more serious note, I was encouraged by the decision at the AGM to raise the cost of membership, proving, as I've always known, that BSFG members put the group before personal gain. I only hope the committee (especially myself) can live up to this ideal and keep the flag flying.

I'm looking forward to an entertaining and not too contentious year, but remember it's up to you, the members, to support meetings - and bear in mind that at some it may be "First come, first served"; late comers may find a full room and be turned away. This really raises two issues: turn up and be on time. I intend to be introducing the guest at 8 o'clock sharp. You have been informed. You can also criticise if I fail to do it!

Last year's committee provides a solid base for this year (see the cover if you can't remember - or missed the AGM): with only a change of Chairman and Secretary. Helena Bowles stood down, largely I think because she's now started a 'proper' nursing job at Dudley Road Hospital, for which I wish her well. I would also like to thank last year's Chairman, Chris Chivers, for his work during the year.

Finally, tell your friends and colleagues about us and get them to come along. The new year has brought us a new home at the White Lion, with a better room for our purposes. Forthcoming meetings will be announced a.s.a.p. and are likely to include some well known names. 'Nuff said.

FOR SALE

GALAXY MAGAZINE


A selection of 75 issues
from the years 1953-65,
in good condition.

An excellent way to start
a collection and enjoy some
of the best of those years.
Best offer over £30 secures.

Call Peter Weston on 021 354 6059.

4-29 FEB

FIRESTONE



A ROCK AND ROLE-PLAY FANTASY BY
PETER FIELDSON WITH MUSIC BY STEPHEN WARBECK

BOX OFFICE:
0203 553548
0203 553055

The Belgrade
Theatre Coventry

PARTY BOOKING:
0203 225834
Reg Charity No 219163

The contents of this issue are copyright 1992 the Birmingham SF Group, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the BSFG. All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise. This publication was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier.

Thanks this time to CAROL MORTON for taking the minutes at the AGM, BERNIE EVANS for transcribing the minutes, editing the reviews and producing the labels, NICK EVANS for his work on the reviews, DAVE HARDY for the JOPHAN and REVIEWS headings, all our book reviewers, TONY MORTON for his piece, STAM ELING for his logic problem, DAVE HOLMES for liaising with GREG BEAR and TONY BERRY for putting up with the WAVE photocopier and me using his office.

The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 48th Jophan Report

Congratulations to Novacon chair Helena Bowles who started work as a D grade Staff Nurse in the Critical Care Unit of Dudley Road Hospital on the 27th of January.

Dave Cox has asked me to report that he did 38 lengths in his sponsored swim raising well over £400 for the Sandwell Diabetes Support Group of the BDA. He would like to thank all those BSFG members who supported him.

Commiserations to both Dave Cox and Al Johnston on their recent redundancies, I'm sure all of the group will join me in wishing them the best of luck in finding employment soon.

Finally this month we have the eagerly awaited results of the latest Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund race. After a close fought race the winner is JEANNE BOWMAN. In addition to the full voting figures listed below there was one deliberately blank ballot, which made the total number of ballots received in the UK 53 and in the US 125. Jeanne (pronounced 'genie') will be making the trip to this year's British national sf convention, Illumination in Blackpool, at Easter. Congratulations Jeanne, I look forward to meeting you. (Thanks to Pam Wells for the results breakdown.)

Candidate	1st Place Votes		2nd Place Votes		3rd Place Votes		4th Place Votes	
	In UK	US	In UK	US	In UK	US	In UK	US
Jeanne Bowman;	27	60	20	45	2	5	-	-
Richard Brandt;	23	58	21	48	1	4	1	-
Hold Over Funds;	-	2	4	7	30	59	-	3
Gary Deindorfer;	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No Preference;	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manuel Noriega;	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kirby Puckett;	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bill Levy;	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Loren Macgregor;	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Joe Vesson;	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Karen Atness;	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Doug Faunt;	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Pee Vee Heraan;	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Space Turkey;	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

AWAY FROM IT ALL

The Solution to Last Month's Logic Problem

by Stan Eling

Name	Home World	Occupation	Type of Ship	Hobby
Tphph	Boz	Innkeeper	Two Seater Speed	Fretworker
Faq	Othy	Retired Trooper	Old cruiser	Button Collector
Ouka	Decar	Deep Sea Diver	Space Clipper	Knitting
Littledoor	Unirra	Rich Merchant	No Ship	No Hobby
Fred	Earth	Plumber	Half-Brig	Dart Player

Therefore Ouka comes from Decar.

The first, and only, correct entry received was from CHRIS MORGAN who will be rewarded with an ANDROMEDA book token.

MINUTES OF AGM

held on 17th January 1992

The AGM Chairman, Tim Stannard, opened the meeting, the time wasn't noted.

1. ADOPTION OF LAST YEARS AGM MINUTES

Rog Peyton said he hasn't yet had a copy of the list of Novacon 19 advertisers who failed to pay (Item 3 last year). Martin Tudor said he would arrange it. The minutes were then adopted, Proposer Chris Chivers, Seconder Bernie Evans.

2. GROUP CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

Chris Chivers thanked the Committee, and commented on the difficulty of finding a suitable venue in Birmingham. He said the calibre of speakers had been high, those at the special meetings particularly so. He thanked Dave Hardy for his talk, and Anne Gay for hers, and said that efforts made to raise the Group's profile had been successful.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

(Separate accounts sheets were provided.) Richard Standage said we had 23 new members this year, lots of non-members attending the meetings, but auctions and raffles were a little down, as was interest from the building society. Room hire has been cheaper, despite moving, the newsletter dearer, as larger and the cost includes a lot more advertising due to more publicity which had paid off with new members and more walk-ins. The donation to the NSPCC in memory of Sadie Shaw was rounded up to £100. The Twentycon loss was covered from the building society account. There are no creditors or liabilities. Dave Hardy pointed out that he had kept the newsletter to 8 sides to reduce costs, Martin said he prints it at a very cheap rate, although this is offset by cost of paper & sundries increasing. Rog asked about the £200 publishers donation for the Anne Gay meeting, Richard said we haven't had it yet, but it was already paid out, from his own pocket.

There was then much discussion on the Twentycon loss, the main points being:

Vernon: in view of the loss, would there still be a Twenty-fivecon.

Bernie: Fifteencon had been fortunate with free function space, that luxury no longer exists.

Carol: Although the country was flooded with flyers from October on, we can't force people to come to cons in a recession.

Chris: Due to the presence of the ICC function space rates have gone up generally.

Richard: Memberships are down on many other conventions, the break-even point had been 200 members, by the time it was clear we wouldn't reach this, it would have cost more to cancel than to continue.

Martin: The break-even point was set at a lower membership figure than the actual attendance at Fifteencon and effects of the recession became apparent too late to revise costs.

Nick: There were more cons than ever this year, the Group needs to look closely at the Cons they run.

Rog: The 10th and 15th anniversary events were run as parties, not as Cons.

Dave: The Committee had done all they could to save the event, and no blame should be attached to them.

Pauline: We need to advertise WELL in advance for Twenty-fivecon.

Martin: Hotels were not willing to give us special rates.

Vernon: We should be thinking WHO we are holding these events for, the Group or fans at large, possibly we should have a different event.

The conclusion reached was that we should learn from our mistakes and plan accordingly for the 25th anniversary. Also mentioned were a wider membership base, more support from the members, possibly increasing room rates and/or subs rates. It was pointed out that if the Twentycon loss was taken out of the reckoning, the Group had in fact made a small profit this year.

4. PUBLICITY OFFICER'S REPORT

Al Johnston said he has produced lots of publicity this year, and new avenues are always welcome. Pauline said the Cannon Hill

Arts Centre and various Museums may display adverts, Roger said What's On now do a free listing.

5. NOVACON 21 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Nick Mills said that membership was less than in recent years, but at 300 it was about right for the venue. Accounts aren't finalised yet, but the convention is expected to make a minimal profit, below £100. Nick thanked the Con Committee and members.

6. ADOPTION OF REPORTS

Treasurer's) Proposed by Bernie Evans
Publicity) Seconded by Dave Hardy
Novacon 21) Adopted

7. THE 1991 COMMITTEE STOOD DOWN

8. ELECTION OF 1992 GROUP CHAIRMAN

The candidates were:-

Chris Chivers, nominated by Pete Weston
seconded by Rog Peyton

Tony Morton, nominated by Martin Tudor
seconded by Richard Standage

The 2 candidates each presented their platform, and invited questions. They then left the room whilst the vote took place by a show of hands.

The result was:-

Chris Chivers - 6 votes
Abstentions - 4
Tony Morton - too numerous to count

Tony was declared 1992 Group Chairman.

9. ELECTION OF 1992 COMMITTEE

Secretary: There were no candidates. Carol Morton was nominated from the floor by Bernie Evans, seconded by Tony Morton. She accepted the nomination and was duly elected.

Treasurer: The only candidate was Richard Standage, who was duly elected.

Newsletter Editor: The only candidate was Martin Tudor, who was duly elected.

Publicity Officer: The only candidate was Al Johnston, who was duly elected.

Ordinary Members: There was only one candidate for each post, Mick Evans and Bernie Evans, who were duly elected.

10. CONFIRMATION OF NOVACON 22 CHAIRMAN

Helena Bowles was confirmed as Chairman of Novacon 22.

11. APPOINTMENT OF LEGAL OFFICER

Tim Stannard was re-appointed as Group Legal Officer, and yet again commented that he couldn't get rid of the job.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Matters discussed were :-

Increasing subscriptions - Postal rates changing twice a year - Leaving entrance monies as they are - Reduced rates for unwaged people - Reducing running costs generally, with specific emphasis on the newsletter - no smoking at all (committee to discuss) - Social functions (insufficient interest) - Liaising with TV for special meetings - Making extra money for the group by sending a video to "You've Been Framed".

Regarding the newsletter, it was decided to leave things as they are, the Committee to keep a close watch on costs.

Regarding entrance monies, it was decided to increase these if there were special costs involved for any given meeting, so the door rate would reflect actual costs, and help to offset, such costs.

No reduced rates for the unwaged, it costs the same to run the Group for them as it does for wage earners.

Subscription rates were discussed in greater depth and a vote taken on three suggested rates. The final decision was £9.00 per person, £12.00 for 2 people at the same address, an increase of 50%, but the first increase in several years.

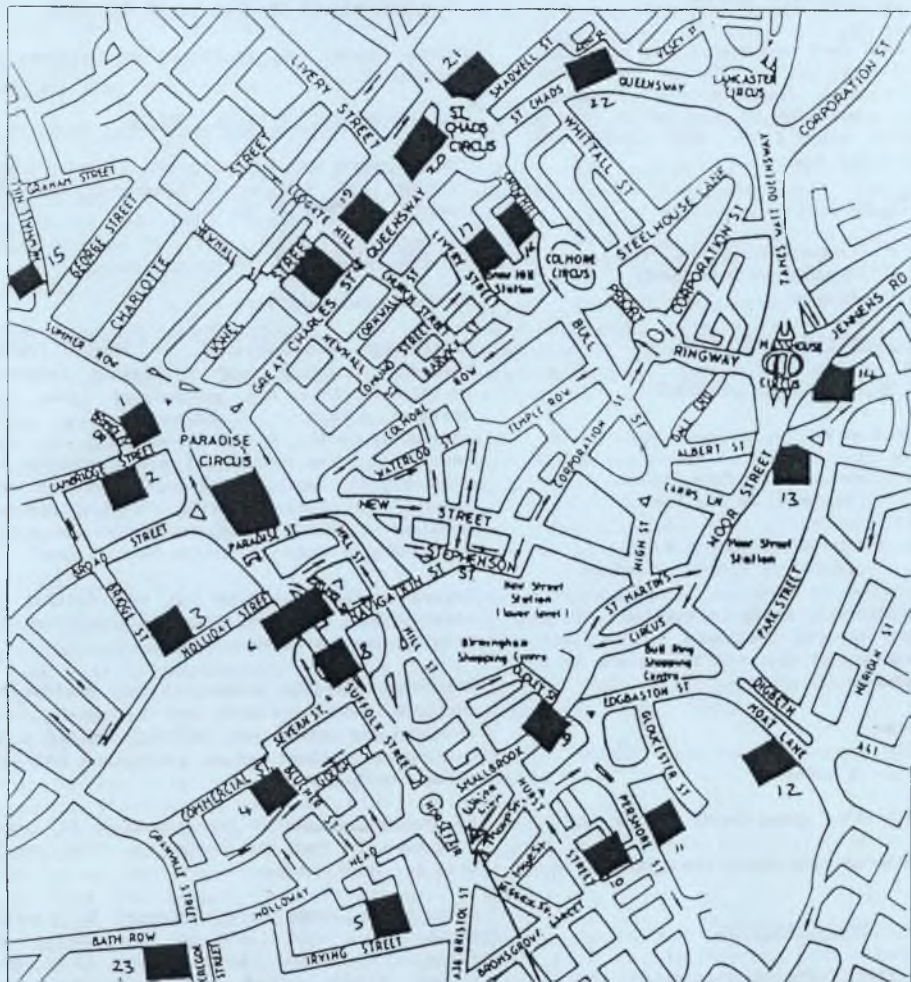
13. VOTE OF THANKS TO OUR CO-PRESIDENTS

Proposed by Martin Tudor, seconded by Carol Morton, carried unanimously.

14. CONCLUSION OF AGM

Tim Stannard, AGM Chairman, closed the meeting at 9.17 pm.

THE NEW VENUE OF
 THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP AS FROM
 17 JANUARY 1992 WILL BE THE
 UPSTAIRS FUNCTION ROOM OF THE
 WHITE LION PUB ON THE CORNER OF
 THORP ST. & HORSEFAIR/BRISTOL ST.
 IN BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE

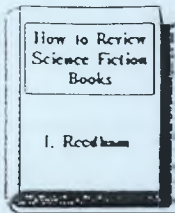


KEY TO CAR PARKS

*Multi-Storey
 Car Parks

- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 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 White Lion



Book Reviews

DRAGONLANCE TALES

ed by Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman
Penguin, 698pp, £9.99 "C" format

Reviewed by Zoe Abbott.

This book, containing the three volumes *THE MAGIC OF KRYNN KENDER*, *GULLY DWARVES AND GNOMES* and *LOVE AND WAR*, is a large collection of short stories to add to the flavour of Weis and Hickman's excellent Dragonlance Chronicles. Unfortunately a lot of the stories appear to be merely weak attempts to cash in on the success of the Chronicles. Several shouldn't appear at all in a product people are expected to pay for, such as "The Blood Sea Monster" by Barbara and Scott Siegal, and "The Wizard's Spectacles" by Morris Simon.

The stories range from those expanding events in the Chronicles that were merely mentioned as background, such as the minotaurs, to some totally original stories and ideas. In each volume there is a story by the original authors, but virtually all the others are from people not involved in the writing of the Chronicles, although they should not be dismissed out of hand merely because they were not written by Weis and Hickman. For instance, "Daggerflight" by Mike Donohoe, about a magic dagger awakened when the Old Gods return, is excellent.

The high spots for me were the Weis & Hickman stories (as excellent as ever), and stories about the Solamnic Knights (especially one by Richard A Knaak about a lone Solamnic Knight who stops an army of the Dark Queen by faith, determination and self-sacrifice, rather than by fighting).

All in all, if you enjoyed the Dragonlance Chronicles, then I strongly suggest you at least borrow this volume.

THE STRESS OF HER REGARD by Tim Powers
Harper Collins, 431 pp, £14.99 h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Byron, Shelley and Keats are romantic figures from an age that just preceded the Victorian period. They were poets touched by scandal who enjoyed a life-style that was probably secretly

envied by the contemporaries who condemned them. And they died young. This book is a speculation woven around their lives.

Michael Crawford is a thirty-five year-old physician haunted by the deaths of his brother and his first wife. He and two friends stop overnight at Wareham on the way to Crawford's second wedding. With all three of them a little the worse for drink there is a certain amount of sky-larking. At one point Crawford slips the wedding ring onto the finger of a statue for safekeeping. It is only after his new wife is found brutally murdered beside him in the marriage bed, his wife's twin sister tries to kill him and he flees to France, that he discovers that his thoughtless act in the inn's yard has effectively married him into a nephelim family. The nephelim were a sentient species around before mankind's ascendance, and now manifest themselves as vampires. The Romantic poets are all victims of the nephelim, the symptoms of their attentions often resembling those of consumption. Indeed, the inspiration for their poetry is a direct influence of nephelim predation but these creatures are jealous, killing the close family of those they prey on.

Crawford meets Byron and Shelley in Switzerland and his story is interwoven with their lives as he learns more about his condition and they try to rid themselves of their vampiric lovers.

Powers has immersed himself in the lives and work of the Romantic Poets to produce a skillful blend of fact and fiction. It could almost be true.

DARK VOICES 3 ed David Sutton & Stephen Jones
Pan, 317pp, £4.50 p/b

Reviewed by Lee Bohan.

At first glance, this book would seem a natural purchase for anyone who, like myself, is an ardent horror novel fan. Once the book is open however, things become less clear.

The final short story in the book, "Not From Around Here" by David J Schow, must almost be the longest in the history of short stories, running to some 60 pages. It reads like a novel which has been cut to fit into a short story collection. It seems to try too hard to be short, and in doing so loses the flow and description that would make the good plot into a well rounded and flowing piece of writing.

The highlight of the book is without doubt "Puss" written by a Danish author, Lene Kaaberol. This is a strong piece for two reasons: it has an excellent plot and maintains good descriptive writing and flow

which I feel is essential to good horror. Unfortunately, this is her first work in English, as all her previous work has been in her native language, but should she ever again turn her pen to the English language I for one would buy the result on the strength of this short story.

If strange fiction is your cup of tea, then it would be well worth checking out "Vision in a T-Bird" by Charles Wagner. For pure weird this story gets at least 11/10. It is all set in downtown LA one weekend, and is basically about how this is seen by a man, who is not exactly sane, and is convinced that an anorexic blonde woman is following him. Apart from just being strange though, this story seems to have little else going for it, since neither atmosphere nor flow are present in the writing.

It was a mistake, to my mind, to even consider including "5A Bedford Row" in such a book as *DARK VOICES 3*. The whole story seems just an excuse for the author to show his ability to describe in detail various sexual acts between two residents of a bed-sit type household. The paragraph and a half of what could loosely be termed horror at the end seems almost an afterthought by Graham Masterton to get the thing published. I must say that, when reading the contributors notes at the end of book, I was hardly surprised to find that he was an ex-editor of Penthouse magazine!

None of the other stories really stand out, it appears that many of the authors have just turned out something average. How *FEAR* magazine could ever find it "Engrossing in the nastiest possible ways" is quite beyond me, perhaps "ordinary in the most normal ways" would be a more accurate description of 90% of the book. The only redeeming feature that would make the book worth buying is "Puss". That story in itself would probably be enough to make me part with the money to buy it.

DARKNESS TELLS US by Richard Laymon

Headline, 312pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Clive Brookes.

DARKNESS TELLS US is one of those books which immediately gives away its standard and basic plot (what there is). The story revolves around an English literature class, their teacher and her long lost, deceased husband's brother, who fell in love with her and left her to live in the mountains (ever get that sinking feeling!). The story is told from Howard's (a member of her class) viewpoint. Unfortunately Howard has a very active mind concerning the female members of the group.

Laymon plays on this for a large percentage of the book.

The rest of the book is taken up by the sexual activities of the rest of the party, with a small proportion of the book given over to "the plot" and the antics of a Ouija board spirit who tells them to go on a treasure hunt. There are very few high points to this book, the best being when half of the party get killed (small mercy to mankind).

I could not recommend this book under any circumstances, and only finished it because I promised to review it. On the cover there were several good recommendations for Richard Laymon's work, not for this book however.

SHADOWS IN THE WATCHGATE by Mike Jefferies
Grafton, 368pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Lee Bohan.

The first thing I noticed about this book when I picked it up was the strikingly good illustration on the cover, so with the bad omens noted I read on. The novel is set, at some non-defined time between present day and the early sixties, in the old part of Norwich and centres mainly around what happens when a stranger moves into an old house just as a neighbour gets into some really weird black magic.

The prologue really sets a rapid pace, and covers a sizeable amount of the early plot, which would have been somewhat less than riveting if it had been explained in the same great depth as the rest of the novel. As the chapters progress the pace slackens. The first three or four chapters in particular are a complete waste of space, as they almost solely concentrate on the social interaction between Miss Tuppence Trilby, the newcomer in town and top American model, and her estate agent, although after this part of the story the man completely disappears.

By the time the story really progresses from the prologue, a good one third of the book, and about 180 large printed pages have elapsed. The first third of the book really destroys it for me, it almost put me off reading the whole thing, which would have been a shame, as I later found. When the story returns, it does so with a vengeance. The plot, though hardly the world's most intricate, is very well thought out and keeps things happening both at an action level and through the thoughts and fears of the major protagonists.

As the book approaches its well developed climax, things start to fall apart

little. The last few chapters really rush by far too fast for my liking, and so much potential is wasted (one begins to think that the author's advance from the publisher had run out). During this section, many slips in continuity become glaringly obvious, almost to a painful extent, and people are doing things that so far have been impossible for them and would indeed be beyond any mortal human (how does a man descend by parachute and fall through a solid stone roof, then fire a gun witherheld by someone he hasn't seen for several days, and who was captured and tied up elsewhere?).

All in all, *SHADOWS IN THE WATCHGATE* is a promising book which is spoilt by so many lapses in concentration by the author and also by the lack of an obvious style of story telling. It has moments when it is right up there with some of the finest horror novels produced, and others when an average fourteen year old would cringe at the poor writing. If a plot like this could have been combined with better story telling technique, and judgement of pace to go with the writer's obvious talent for description, then the book would have been excellent. As it is, it remains one of the faceless horror/action novels of which there are so many, and which you can take or leave. Perhaps for the real fan, or for someone who likes good cover illustrations, then it is worth buying, but otherwise the asking price of £8.99 for a paperback is, in my opinion, too much for the goods supplied.

THE BOY FROM THE BURREN by Sheila Gilluly
Headline, 343pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Iain Drewery.

Although for the most part this was an enjoyable book to read there were parts which were hard to understand. Events seemed to happen which had little relationship to the plot at the time. However, if you read it a second time you would probably be able to understand what was happening, since you would have the knowledge of future events.

The book is about a boy called Aengus, and a prophecy. Aengus is bought from his father by a mysterious man called Bruchan who is in fact a Master of the Brotherhood of the Wolf and a descendant of royal lineage. Bruchan knows that Aengus is a born painter, so he has the ability to capture images created in a storyteller's tale. The prophecy is that a boy of the line of Colin should take the rainbow in his hand and open the way for the Powers to come to the earth. He would be a king maker here in the Burren, and king in

Llyria, uniting the two lands in a friendship which will make them the strongest kingdoms in this corner of the earth, prosperous and well able to support their people in peace.

To fulfil the prophecy Aengus, who is actually the grandson of Bruchan, needs to obtain the colour pots and the ring of Colin Marinor, who is Bruchan's ancestor. Of course there is someone out to stop him fulfilling the prophecy, but you'll have to read the book to find out who it is and what happens.

This book is not to be put with classic fantasy books but I would recommend you to read it if you have nothing to do for a while.

THE SCIONS OF SHANNARA by Terry Brooks
Orbit, 501 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Iain Drewery.

This is an excellent fantasy, just as good as its predecessors *THE SWORD OF SHANNARA*, *THE ELFBSTONE OF SHANNARA* and *THE WISHSONG OF SHANNARA*. Knowledge of the previous books is not essential, although it may help readers to understand how characters relate to each other, especially to the enigma Allanon.

The story is set 300 years after *THE WISHSONG OF SHANNARA* and, to put it mildly, times have changed. The dwarves are enslaved, the elves have disappeared and the Federation is seeking out and destroying anyone who uses magic. The Druids are no more as Allanon died during *THE WISHSONG OF SHANNARA*, but the Shannara family still exist and three of its lineage have magical powers. Familiar names are found as the story unfolds, such as Coglino, Leah, Creel, Allanon and The King of the Silver River who were main characters in the Shannara trilogy.

A new type of evil threatens the land, the Shadowen. They feed by draining magic from other people, and are themselves magic. They exist by taking over the body of any creature for their own purposes. Rimmer Dail is the head of the "Seekers". The seekers are used by the Federation to seek out magic users and destroy them. He is actually a Shadowen although the Federation do not know/believe the Shadowen exist and are only interested in conserving the world, or at least most of it.

As the story unfolds, Coglino takes the three Shannara children to the shade of Allanon at Hadesthorn, who tells them that Par must find the Sword of Shannara, Wren must find the Elves and return them to the world of men and Walker Boh must search out Paranor and restore it to the Druids. This book mainly concentrates on Par's efforts to find the Sword of Shannara and although he seems

to find it, the Sword appears to be a normal sword. Is it really The Sword of Shannara ?

THE SCIONS OF SHANNARA is the first in a series of four books, collectively known as The Heritage of Shannara. The second book, *THE DRUID OF SHANNARA* has already been published while the third book, *ELF QUEEN OF SHANNARA* has not yet been released. The only problem with this book is that as it is one of a series of four it will probably be a few years before the fourth is published so we will have to wait till then to find out what will happen. My advice is to read this as you will enjoy it.

ROBOT ADEPT by Piers Anthony
NEL, 296 pp, £6.95, p/b

Reviewed by Mark Fox.

"*ROBOT ADEPT* takes readers on an ever more thrilling journey..." quotes the blurb on the back cover. In contrast I found the book to be a rather pedestrian and predictable account, following on faithfully from *OUT OF PHAZE* but with little innovation.

A large proportion of the book is given over to repetition of the story from different points of view, even to the extent of reiterating specific conversations (innaccurately at that) leaving the reader with a distinct sense of "but I've read all this before" and destroying any potential suspense before it can build up to detectable levels. This is reinforced by the annoying tendency to explain insignificant points which have already been dealt with in previous books (or even previous chapters).

The reasons for the book's existence are also questionable. After the magnificent conclusion to a refreshingly different trilogy found in *JUXTAPOSITION*, the follow-up series is unnecessary and a pale imitation of its forerunner. Overall I cannot help feeling that the Phaze trilogy owes more to financial pressure than to literary considerations.

THE CHRONICLES OF GALEN SWORD BOOK ONE: SHIFTER
by Judith & Garfield Reeve-Stevens
Roc, 284 pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Dave Durant.

Galen Sword is lost. Exiled from his own world while still a young child for exhibiting no magical powers, he is stranded on the world of humans. His past erased from his mind, his only contact with the old world is killed soon after he regains his memory in a car crash.

Desperate to find out any information about his past he searches for any stories of

a magical nature, especially stories of werewolves. He collects around him a strange team including a young telepath, a sceptical engineer, a brilliant crippled scientist and an invisible cat. He eventually discovers that he is heir to Clan Pendragon. A powerful clan of elementals in the First World. Each clan has one inherent form of magic. His enemies, Clan Arkady, are shapeshifters, Werewolves for example.

This book starts off quite slowly with nothing new for those of us with a varied fantasy background. The pace picks up some in the middle, enough to keep the reader wanting to continue. Unfortunately the ending is not really worth waiting for, especially the demise of one of the major characters which occurs in a most unpleasant fashion. A pleasant way to pass the time while waiting in the launderette perhaps but I won't be on the lookout for the next in the series.

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

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Don't be deceived by this book. What starts as a straight-forward fantasy/horror begins to writhe with a life of its own. When Susan and Richard Whitlock adopt Michael they do not expect a haunting to come with him. At first Susan believes that it is Michael's natural mother that is throwing dirt over him, though they cannot work out how she is getting into the house to do it, or what her motives might be. Then the baby is almost killed when a massive mud-slide appears in his bedroom. Richard realises that somehow the child is responsible for these events.

The boy grows up feeling that he is invisible - his parent's affections seem to be centred on his sister Carol, the natural child they thought they couldn't have - and because he is adopted, believes he has forfeited his soul. Desperate to be loved, to have stories told to him, like Carol does, Michael begins to fetch home presents. At first his parents think he has found a cache of treasure hidden in the old chalk quarry he haunts. The gifts appear to be brilliant replicas of ancient artifacts. Psychic archaeologist Francoise Jeury suggests that Michael's talent is apportation - he is able to fetch things from the past. Michael describes his ability as fetching. He fetches the pretty things that his friend Chalk Boy shows him. A "fetch" is also a ghost or apparition of a living person. To the people in the past who see Michael when he reaches through to grasp the object he must indeed have seemed like a ghost.

Chalk Boy is initially seen as an imaginary playmate such as many children have but at times he almost seems to be Michael's alter ego, taking over the boy's personality. As the novel progresses Chalk Boy becomes more and more sinister.

When Michael's talent appears to fade further undercurrents surface, bringing all kinds of unpleasantnesses to light. The affection Michael thinks he has bought with his gifts evaporates as the presents dry up. His father, Richard, has been selling them and has overstretched himself with promises and faces not only bankruptcy but threats to his family. This part of the book with its Mafia-like thugs lurking in the background is less convincing, as Richard's slow slide into difficulty is only sketchily drawn.

Holdstock dips again into the well of Celtic symbolism to provide a gripping tale. *THE FETCH* perhaps lacks some of the imaginative intensity of earlier works like *MYTHAGO WOOD* and *LAVONDYSS*, possibly because it is set more firmly in the present without the veil of mysticism which has to be peeled away to appreciate the other two books. Nevertheless, *THE FETCH* is well worth reading, and would make a very good film.

THE SHINING FALCON by Josepha Sherman
Corgi, 341 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Small.

This is Josepha Sherman's first novel, and her first work for an adult readership. As a first novel it stands up quite well. The central characters are fleshed out quite well, and the author never allows characters to contradict themselves. But the characters themselves are rather clichéd, and have been in many fantasy novels before.

The story concerns two cities, Kirtesk and Stargorod, one ruled by a shape-shifting master of magic named Prince Finist, and the other by Svyatoslav a hater of all things magical. The other two central characters are Ljuba a cousin of Finist who covets the throne and power it entails, and Maria Daniloslav, daughter of a boyar in Starogods court. The evil cousin Ljuba furtively plans to gain the throne, and Finist falls in love with Maria after falling in a storm while in falcon form. The meat of the story concerns these two plots, along with other neatly interwoven sub-plots.

The problem with this novel lies not with the way it is written, it is very competent for one so early in her career, but with the ideas in it, which are nothing new. The evil enchantress plotting for the throne,

the good prince who only wants to find true love, and so forth. Furthermore, the novel has very little bite, it hasn't any truly bad characters, and no one meets a particularly bad end. This is perhaps no bad thing, but even the sorceress is forgiven, because she had a difficult childhood. Even the climax does not generate the level of tension it should. Perhaps the author has not quite yet crossed over to true "adult" fiction, if the definition were to include a more subtle plot, and perhaps even a sprinkling of sex. The author seems to shy away from this area quite deliberately, even going so far as to refer to sex as "bed-sport" throughout the book! Even so this a competent first novel which perhaps will not rise over others of the genre because of its "soft" plot and lack of originality.

THE UNWILLING WARLORD by Lawrence Watt-Evans
Grafton, 349 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Clive Brookes.

THE UNWILLING WARLORD is slightly different from most fantasy books around at the moment. The hero Sterren is not a super hard slayer of evil or a magician of supernatural powers, he is a "son of a merchant's brat" who is unerringly good at playing dice. He gets carried away from a large town called Ethshar of the Spices to a small kingdom called Semma, where he becomes the next Warlord of Semma, due to his lineage from his grandma who ran off in her youth.

After learning the language he is told that two neighbouring kingdoms are about to invade Semma, and that it is entirely up to him to save the day. This as you might guess comes as quite surprise to him, especially as he finds out the losing Warlord is usually hanged.

The book takes a very light hearted view and is not all death and glory, a nice change. There is a lot of magic involved in the story (usually by very "novice" magicians, witches and warlocks) whose antics liven up the book. The book is well worth a read and I can recommend it.

EDITOR'S NOTES: This month we welcome several new names to these pages, all members of the affiliated Aston University Group. See Bernie at the REGULAR February meeting on Friday 21st if you want to swell the ranks still further. Prospective reviewers are reminded that reviews should be between 300 and 500 words long and must be handed to Bernie or Mick Evans within one month of receiving the book.

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

February 1992 Issue 245

The monthly newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1992 Committee:

Group Chairman - Tony Morton Secretary - Carol Morton Treasurer - Richard Standage
Reviews Editor - Bernie Evans Publicity Officer - Al Johnston Ordinary Member - Mick
Evans Novacon 22 Chairman - Helena Bowles Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor

Chris Morgan

will be interviewing

JOHN BRUNNER

*at the BSFG on Friday
21st February 1992
7.45pm for 8.00pm*

Admittance: Members £1.75 Visitors £2.75

John Kilian Houston Brunner was born in Preston Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire on the 24th September 1934. He was educated at Cheltenham College and served in the Royal Air Force from 1953 to 1955 before working as a technical abstractor for the Industrial Diamond Information Bureau in London and becoming editor of Spring Books from 1956 to 1958. He was Writer-in-Residence at the University of Kansas in 1972. Founder of the Martin Luther King Memorial Prize, in 1968, he has also been chairman of the British SF Association and received the British Fantasy Award in 1965, a Hugo Award in 1969 and the BSFA Award in 1970 and 1971. In addition he has been a recipient of the Prix Apollo (France, 1973), Cometa d'Argento (Italy, 1976, 1978) and the Europa Award (1980).

Although renowned for his "literate space opera" he is probably best known for his dystopian novels THE JAGGED ORBIT, THE SHEEP LOOK UP, THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN and THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER. This is the first time that he has appeared at a BSFG meeting.

(For the above information I have to thank the third edition of TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCIENCE-FICTION WRITERS, edited by Moelle Watson and Paul E Schellinger (published in Britain by St James Press). A review of this excellent volume will appear next issue.)

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs function room of the WHITE LION, corner of Thorp Street and Horsefair/Bristol Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include a copy of this monthly newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are nine pounds per person, or twelve pounds for two members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the Treasurer RICHARD STANDAGE at meetings or by post c/o BERNIE EVANS (address below). Book reviews should be sent to the Reviews Editor BERNIE EVANS at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries regarding the BRUM GROUP NEWS to MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).