

BRUM GROUP NEWS

March
1992

Issue
246

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

DAVID GEMMELL

will be addressing the BSFG on

Friday 20th March 1992

8.00pm for 8.15pm

Admittance: Members £1.75 Visitors £2.75

David A Gemmell was born in London on the 1st of August 1948, he attended Faraday Comprehensive School and went on to work for Pepsi Cola, London. Since then he has worked as reporter and editor for *WESTMINSTER PRESS*, and editor on both the *HASTINGS OBSERVER* and the *FOLKESTONE HERALD*, before turning to full-time writing in 1986. He lives in Hastings with his wife, son and daughter.

Probably Britain's best-selling, living fantasy writer his work includes the acclaimed *DRENAI* fantasy series, comprising the novels *THE KING BEYOND THE GATE*, *WAYLANDER*, *LEGEND* and *QUEST FOR LOST HEROES* and the short story collection *DRENAI TALES*. His other major fantasy series, the *SIPSTRASSI*, includes the novels *WOLF IN SHADOW*, *GHOST KING* and *LAST SWORD OF POWER*. Two of his recent works, *LION OF MACEDON* and *DARK PRINCE* are set in Ancient Greece and feature real-life characters such as Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great, along with Gemmell's usual mixture of fantasy and magic. (Reviews of these appear on pages 6-7). Most recently Legend have released *MORNINGSTAR*, which recreates the medieval world of his earlier work *KNIGHTS OF DARK RENOWN*.

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 FAMOUS BLACK COUNTRY
BEER BUS TOUR**

will take place on the
evening of
Saturday 16th May

Price £7.50 per person
payment by 31st March to
MARTIN TUDOR
(address on the cover)
Deduct your £1 deposit if paid at the AGM.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

21 MARCH 1992: DAVID GEMMELL will be signing copies of his new novel *MORNINGSTAR* at Andromeda bookshop from noon.

24 MARCH 1992: ANNE McCAFFREY will be signing copies of her new book *DAMIA*, the sequel to *THE ROWAN*, at Andromeda from noon. Call (021) 643 1999 for further details.

10th APRIL 1992: JOHN JARROLD editor of Random Century's Legend imprint will be speaking to the Group. Please note that this is the regular meeting of the Group which is being held A WEEK EARLY because the customary 3rd Friday would clash with the national sf convention. (Details regarding the Eastercon are on the back cover).

6-8 NOV 1992: NOVACON 22 the Brum Group's own sf con returns to the Royal Angus hotel in the city centre. Guest of Honour Storm Constantine. £18 until end of Eastercon 1992, £20 until one month before con after which only on the door memberships available at £25. Details: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH, tel: 021 558 0997.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Aston University Fantasy and Science Fiction Society have challenged the BSFG to a debate at a special meeting at Aston Uni.

We choose the date they have proposed the motion: "This house believes that it is man's duty, as the most highly evolved living organism on this planet, to pursue the goals of evolution to their maximum."

If you are interested in taking part in this debate please tell TONY MORTON at this month's meeting.

LETTERS

STEVE GREEN,
33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ.

Vernon Brown's comments at the AGM regarding the financial difficulties encountered by Twentycon (as reported in the *minutes last issue*.) demand cautious consideration by the incoming BSFG committee.

As Vernon pointed out, both the 1981 anniversary party and 1986's Fifteencon were - in conception, if not inception - social events, whereas Twentycon was always seen as a fully-fledged convention. As such, it was, of course, placed in direct competition with Novacon 21, not the wisest move even were the fannish calender not already saturated with such medium-sized, regional gatherings (many might disagree with my grudging view of Novacon as a "regional" con, but historical precedent cannot be allowed to outweigh the wider reality).

Considering the low percentage of the BSFG actually prepared to work at such events, a kneejerk announcement now that Twentyfivecon would be run in parallel with Novacon 26 strikes me as premature, even foolhardy. A sensible compromise might be to celebrate the group's silver anniversary at Novacon 26, possibly by extending it over four days?

00000

The contents of this issue are copyright 1992 the BSFG, 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 RICHARD STANDAGE, STEVE GREEN and SALLY-ANN MELIA for taking the time to contribute to the newsletter, BERNIE EVANS for 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 BERRY for putting up with the WAVE photocopier and with me using his office. Information regarding David Gemmell is courtesy of the third edition of TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS, edited by Moelle Watson and Paul E Schellinger (published in Britain by St James Press, £75). The review of this excellent volume has been delayed until next issue. However, if you are currently a subscriber to CRITICAL WAVE it is worth noting that the latest issue #25, offers a £15 discount to readers.

The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 49th Jophan Report

THE FIRES WITHIN: VOLCANOES ON EARTH AND OTHER PLANETS by Birmingham's own Dave Hardy was published by Dragon's World at the end of 1991. All illustrations in the book are by Dave, from double-spread oil paintings down to cutaway diagrams of the Earth; there are no photographs.

Of special interest to space and sf fans are the reconstructions of historic eruptions such as Krakatoa, Pompeii, Atlantis and the volcanoes on Mars, Venus, Io and the Triton geysers. The text is by leading vulcanologist Dr John Murray of the Open University. Although there is no US edition as yet, a French translation entitled *LES VOLCANS* is available.

Andromeda Bookshop has refused to stock the second and third issues of the new UK science fiction magazine *FAR POINT* because both carry advertisements for such activities as spiritualism and palm reading. Rog Peyton tells me he has since received an apology from editor Charlie Rigby, who had now dismissed the booking agency responsible; Andromeda will be stocking *FAR POINT* from issue four onwards.

Following the contretemps last year over Tony Todd's allegedly "Hardyesque" cover on *FARPOINT* #2, (if you're interested compare the cover with that of either *INTERZONE* #31 or #39 - reports vary,) *FARPOINT* #3 featured a Dave Hardy cover. The original of the cover, "Discovery on Dione", is currently being exhibited, at the Hayden Planetarium of the Museum of Natural History in New York, along with the work of other US and European space artists. Meanwhile, Dave has been appointed Art Director of *FARPOINT*, and will be responsible for allocating artists to the stories for which their style is most suited. He has even had a short story accepted! "Melinda's Mission", subtitled "A Romance of the Space Age".

Lynn Cochrane is the latest member of the Brum Group to join the ranks of the

"filthy pros", with a fiction sale to *FAR POINT*. She reports that editor Charlie Rigby is looking for stories of about 6,000 words with an sf or fantasy theme, but not horror or supernatural fiction. Contact Charlie through Victoria Publications, PO Box 47, Grantham, Lincs., NG31 8RJ.

Little, Brown, the Boston based subsidiary of Time Warner, are to buy Macdonald publishing *in toto*, dispelling fears that this major British publishing house would be broken up with the rest of Robert Maxwell's fast-disappearing empire.

As this newsletter went to press, the three-week period of "due diligence", during which representatives of Little, Brown have scrutinized the company, was ending. The Macdonald press office informed me that the final transfer was "imminent", adding that the sale included the whole of Macdonald's operation, with the exception of its leisure lines Noddy and Queen Anne Press. I was also told that although it seems likely that the Sphere and Futura lines will merge and that Macdonald hardbacks will be renamed Little, Brown, the company's specialist sf and fantasy line, Orbit, will remain unchanged.

Little, Brown has assured the staff at Macdonald that, as far as possible, it intends to preserve the integrity of the company, and it is hoped that there will be only minimal job losses. Unfortunately, this apparent reprieve has come too late to save the 36 people made redundant shortly after the initial period of receivership began. Nor does it help those who have lost their pensions, as the new owner is under no obligation to refund the monies previously "borrowed" from the company's pension fund.

Since September 1988, when it launched its UK subsidiary with a small staff, Little, Brown has been looking to build up a stronger publishing profile in the UK. Until now it has concentrated on publishing predominantly upmarket titles in the fields of fiction, biography, illustrated books, arts, home & leisure and children's books. Macdonald will add a more mass market flavour to this list, as well as bringing Little, Brown UK an established paperback operation and providing a potential platform for Time Warner's US mass-market list to enter Britain. In addition, it will offer the use of established warehousing facilities through Paulton Distribution.

These recent tribulations of Macdonald have delayed the previously announced publication of the revised *ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF*

SCIENCE FICTION. It is now scheduled for publication Easter 1993.

Deborah Beale, formerly in charge of Random Century's Legend list, has taken over as publishing director of Orion's new sf and fantasy imprint Millenium. Charon Wood has joined her as editor.

John Jarrold has replaced Deborah Beale at Legend, but as we went to press there is still no indication who will fill his position as editorial director of Macdonald's Orbit imprint. (Jarrold will be addressing the Group on Friday 10th April.)

THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF VAMPIRES, featuring original stories by Graham Masterton, Steve Rasnic Tem and Kim Newman, will be published by Robinson / Carrroll & Graf in the summer. Edited by Stephen Jones, the anthology will also feature reprinted tales from Clive Barker, Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell and Howard Waldrop amongst others.

Jones has also recently turned in *THE HELLRAISER CHRONICLES*, to Titan Books. A large-size photographic book covering all three *HELLRAISER* movies, and includes an introduction by Clive Barker. It is scheduled for publication this spring.

Jones, with Kim Newman, has also delivered a revised and updated edition of *HORROR: 100 BEST BOOKS* to New English Library. The Bram Stoker Award-winning book will be published in trade paperback in the summer.

Meanwhile, Jones and Clive Barker have contributed an original introduction and afterword, respectively, to *JAMES HERBERT: BY HORROR HAUNTED*, also edited by Jones, and which will be published in hardcover by New English Library in the summer.

Dave Sutton and (guess who?) Stephen Jones (busy guy Jones, isn't he?) have turned in *DARK VOICES 4: THE PAN BOOK OF HORROR*. Scheduled for October release this latest volume in the award-winning anthology series includes stories by John Brunner, Christopher Fowler, Stephen Gallagher, Peter James, Joe R Lansdale and Kim Newman.

Fleetway, Britain's longest established comics' publisher (a direct descendant of the company which published *COMIC CUTS* in 1890), has now been wholly taken over by the Danish company Gutenberghus Press. The takeover includes such renowned titles as *2000AD*, *EAGLE* and *ROY OF THE ROVERS*, as well as the Disney franchise, interests in the *DAN DARE* tv project and the *JUDGE DREDD* movie.

Towards the end of last year, ten days before the death of Robert Maxwell, Fleetway

merged with London Editions, which was owned by Gutenberghus Press. The 50/50 sharing of the newly named Fleetway Editions took effect from 1 January 1992. On the 16 January Gutenberghus took over the company.

Speaking on behalf of the newly formed Fleetway Editions Igor Goldkind told *COMIC COLLECTOR* that the new company was now "a fully comics-based company, publishing no other consumer magazines, which is a major step, certainly for *2000AD* and the other comics in the new group. With the merger with London Editions, Fleetway Editions now represents 60 to 70 per cent of the comics market in this country."

He added that "profits from the comics are no longer being used to subsidise other publications. *2000AD* and its related publications has always been a major money-spinner, so it will be good to see the comics keeping the money that Fleetway do make." Goldkind concluded by saying that he thought the main advantage of Gutenberghus Press was that it opened up the very difficult European market. He also categorically denied rumours that the company was in any financial difficulty.

Becon Publications has announced that *THE DRABBLE PROJECT*, its fund-raising anthology of 100-word stories, has now sold out; editors David Wake and Rob Meades wish to thank all Brum Group members who supported the venture, which raised £1548 for the RNIB Talking Book Fund. A limited number of the follow-up volume, *DRABBLE II*, is still available from Andromeda.

David Wake is currently working with David Howe on a third selection of "drabbles", all inspired by the tv series *DR WHO*; they have already contacted many former cast members, script-writers and authors associated with the series, but would be pleased to receive further submissions at 160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 1NY.

The British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) is currently looking for new editors for both its paperback review magazine, *PAPERBACK INFERNO*, and its newsletter, *MATRIX*.

If you're interested in either of these unpaid posts, or would like further details, please contact Kev McVeigh, 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF (tel: 05395 62883).

The latest issue of *MATRIX*, the newsletter of the British SF Association, hints that the BSFA is facing a financial difficulties. The editorial speaks of a

publications and urges people, members or otherwise, to attend the AGM at Illumination.

The AGM of the BSFA will be held in the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool from 4pm on Saturday 18 April.

Incidentally, I've been asked by the Eastercon committee to reassure members of this year's Eastercon, Illumination, that there are no problems with the con's hotel, the Norbreck. Members are advised to disregard recent reports in the press that the Norbreck Hotel's parent company, Principal Hotels, has gone into receivership.

According to the March edition of Dave Langford's *ANSIBLE* the reports are a garbled version of the truth, it was all "a business ploy - one day's voluntary liquidation while unwanted property investments were flogged off."

The Black Lodge, Birmingham's informal gathering of horror and dark fantasy fans, meets on the second Thursday of each month at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street; meetings will shift temporarily to the neighbouring Old Fox pub when the current venue is redecorated this summer.

Ken Lake is trying to locate poems, artwork, etc. by his son **Aron Lake**, who tragically committed suicide last November aged 27. Ken's aim is to compile a book to be published as a tribute to a wasted life. Photocopies or information are welcomed and will be acknowledged. He is also trying to track down a copy of *CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE*, (a small, privately published collection,) as well as personal letters and/or photographs (all will be speedily returned).

As "Aron B." he played with and wrote lyrics for a reggae band (of changing and unknown names); he was in the habit of handing out originals and photocopies of his poems and lyrics to friends and acquaintances; his artwork appeared in small publications (possibly reggae/local fanzines); some of it was politically left-wing. His work dates between 1981 & 1991, and includes song lyrics, cartoon strips, art layouts etc. During this period he lived in Stevenage, London and finally Coventry. His hobby was mountaineering, and he had friends all over the country. Most of the material is likely to be signed "Aron B.", which is a musical pun, his real name was Aron Lake.

Ken Lake is a fan of many years standing, his articles, book reviews and letters have appeared in many fanzines. He can be contacted at 115 Markhouse Avenue, London, E17 8AY, England (Tel: 081 520 2065).

TRUCKERS, the first book in Terry Pratchett's "Nomes" trilogy, has been adapted into an animated children's serial by Cosgrove Hall, previously responsible for the popular cartoons *DANGERMUSE* and *COUNT DUCKULA*; the 10-minute episodes are currently being screened by ITV on Friday afternoons, with a video compilation to follow on 13 April.

The 1992 race for the Get Under Fan Fund (GUFF) has been won by Czech candidate Eva Hauser. Winning this fannish race means that Eva will travel to the 1992 national Australian sf convention held over the Easter weekend this year in Sydney, Australia.

Of 84 votes cast, 51 went to Eva Hauser, 27 went to the British candidate Bridget Wilkinson and 6 voters had no preference or voted for miscellaneous write-in candidates.

Bruno Ogorelec wishes to remind people that "Yugoslavia" no longer exists. All mail to him should now be addressed to "Croatia", or it will inevitably be "thrown into the waste basket" in Belgrade.

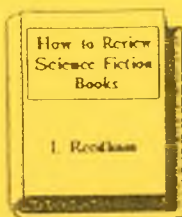
Are you a lucid dreamer? Are you aware while you dream that you are dreaming? Can you sometimes control what happens in your dreams? It is suspected, and there have been tests on the subject, that people can share lucid dreams. So this year Britain will host the first ever lucid dreamers' convention.

Everyone, anywhere in the world, can get together, through their dreams, on Tuesday, 5 May 1992 (the anniversary of the publication of *DREAMSIDE*) for Dreamcon. Guest of Honour will be Graham Joyce, the "venue" will be Stonehenge.

If you are interested in this experiment send £1.50 to Dreamcon, 60 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 1NY. Happy dreams.

□□□□

Thanks for the news this time goes, in the most part to CRITICAL WAVE, which remains Britain's only independent sf, fantasy and horror news and reviews magazine. Regular features include publishing news, 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. CRITICAL WAVE #25 is currently available for £1.95, or a six issue subscription costs only £7.50, cheques payable to "Critical Wave Publications" should be sent to Martin Tudor at the address on the cover of this newsletter.



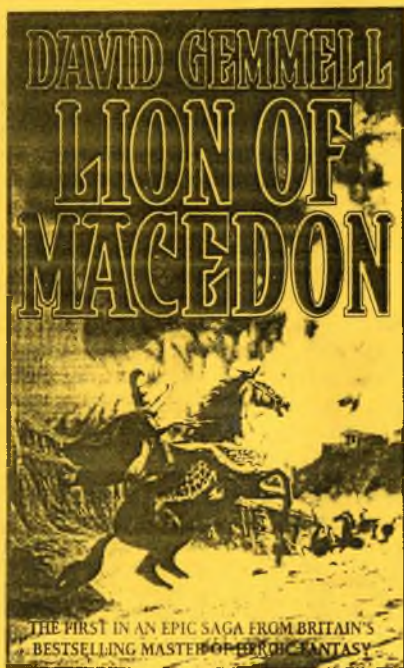
Book Reviews

THE LION OF MACEDON by David Gemmell
Legend, 416 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia.

That's it, I'm a convert. I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I didn't work, I didn't write, I just had to read it. David Gemmell's *LION OF MACEDON* is a masterpiece. A fantasy novel set in Ancient Greece and drawing on the full breadth of Ancient Greek wars and mythology, I recommend this novel to anyone.

In his foreword, David Gemmell explains how the battles detailed in *THE LION OF MACEDON* actually happened. However history has forgotten all but the name of the prime mover in these events: Parmenion of Macedonia, known to his friends as "the Lion of Macedon" and his enemies as "the Death of Nations".



LION OF MACEDON by David Gemmell, Legend, £4.99.

The novel tells his story grabbing you by the throat from the very first page with a character you care for and want to see succeed. Parmenion strides out of Greek verse to become a man who lives, laughs, loves, bleeds and weeps.

More, the fantasy element is new, fresh and interesting. Spirits and Goddesses of Good fight with the Dark One's ambassadors even as Parmenion passes unscathed through battles, ambushes, shipwrecks and night-time assassination attempts. While he survives, he will never be reunited with his true love, Derae. His story is one of never-ending heart-break hidden behind formidable success. I loved it.

The bibliography of 30 titles at the end of the book indicates a novel of historical accuracy, pains-takingly researched. Hence *LION OF MACEDON* is a powerful combination, a world of fact, masterly turned to fiction. Read it.

DARK PRINCE by David Gemmell
Legend, 451 pp, £8.99, 'C' format p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

I too read and enjoyed *LION OF MACEDON* - in the form of a review copy for *CRITICAL WAVE*. In fact I enjoyed it so much I bought the sequel.

Now this is a pretty rare event these days, me buying a book that is, ask Rog Peyton, he'll no doubt confirm this at length. After all there's not much point wasting good beer money when I get such a large and regular supply of review copies through reviewing books not only for the *BRUM GROUP NEWS*, but also for *CRITICAL WAVE* and *GAMESMAN* magazines.

However, when I finished reading *LION OF MACEDON* I was well and truly hooked. I fought it for a few days, nine quid is a lot of dosh, especially when I knew that if I was patient I was bound to get a review copy from somewhere - even if it meant waiting until the standard paperback version came out... But the thought of waiting six months or more was unbearable, so I gave in and slipped Holmes a tenner (and after some initial confusion he reluctantly sold me the book instead).

I wasn't disappointed. I had already gathered, from the "teaser" at the end of *LION* (the first two chapters of the sequel appears as an afterword) that *DARK PRINCE* was a very different kind of novel. *LION* is a standard "muscular", heroic fantasy, very much in the tradition of Henry Treece, filling in the background and developing characters, but

still sticking fairly closely to historical fact. *DARK PRINCE*, however, goes much further. The emphasis has shifted from physical action to metaphysical, and although there are still battles galore, and much of the framework of the novel still has as its basis the actual events of the period, we are now taken far deeper into more typical Gemmell territory.



DARK PRINCE by David Gemmell Legend, £8.99.

In Gemmell's Greece Aristotle is an immortal wizard of great power who uses the stones of the Sipstrassi to travel between the worlds; Alexander the Great is possessed by the Chaos Spirit and fights a continuing inner battle to subdue its malevolent influence; Parmenion, the *strategos*, one of the greatest generals of the age is also, secretly, Alexander's father.

A large, central section of the book takes place on an alternative Earth where centaurs, harpies, enchanted forests, the Minotaur, the Gorgon and other mythological creatures still exist - fighting a last ditch battle against the Chaos Spirit. But far from detracting from the main plot of Parmenion, Philip and Alexander and their conquest of the

known world, it adds yet another dimension to the tale.

As with all of the best historical novels there is a strong internal logic and integrity within these books, which when carefully woven into the fabric of the "facts" as we know them, combines to present a powerful and believable tale of the "Age of Heroes". If this is not *how* it happened it is certainly how it *should have* happened.

DREAM PARK: THE VOODOO GAME

by Larry Niven & Steven Barnes
Pan, 344 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Carol Morton

Cowles Industries, owners of Dream Park, have taken over an earthquake damaged building (bearing more than a passing resemblance to Todos Santos the archology in Niven and Pournelle's *OATH OF FEALTY*) with the aim of total renovation. But before the contractors move in the Dream Park personnel are going to run a game inside the building, called California Voodoo. This game will be notable for several reasons. The master of games masters, Richard Lopez, is dying, it will be his last game. Several players from the South Seas treasure game will be re-united, Holly Frost, Mary-em and more significantly Acacia Garcia will be taking part.

All seems to be moving along smoothly until a Cowles Industry security officer, Sharon Crayne, is killed. Someone bets a vast amount of money on one of the teams taking part and somehow data about either the building, its security system or the game itself is planned to be stolen. Alex Griffin, head, of Dream Park security, has to enter the game as a guide to discover just what is going on, just who the thief is and what he/she/they intend to steal.

DREAM PARK was good, *THE BARSOOM PROJECT* faltered because it moved, at times, too far away from the Dream Park scenario, but *THE VOODOO GAME* has hit a happy medium with the excellent - and at times horrific - game and the behind the scenes detective work to find out why Acacia Garcia has taken up with the master manipulator Nigel Bishop, what is he after and why? Excellent.

DARKER THAN THE STORM by Freda Warrington
NEL, 304 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

After an excellent diversion (in *THE RAINBOW GATE*) Freda has returned to the universe of her "Blackbird" fantasy series, though not to the world it was set on. Timewise, it is

placed between the two pairs of books. Silvren and Ashurek are settled on Ikonus, the world of sorcery where Silvren received her training. She now teaches sorcery while Ashurek retrains badly behaved horses. But Ashurek is restless. The High Master of Ikonus, Gregardreos, has been waiting for an excuse to dispose of Ashurek, partly from jealousy, partly due to distrust and when Ashurek opens a Way between worlds to Jhensit, Gregardreos seizes his opportunity. Ashurek is to travel to this world and observe it or be permanently exiled.

Jhensit is a world in trouble. Not only is it divided in itself, but it is gradually being eroded by the Maelstrom, a phenomenon which is gradually dissolving the land and casting it into a realm of chaos. In the high towers of Niankan-Siol the ruling class fears anything associated with the ground; worshipping the sky god Eyos and admiring flying things. Below, on the ground, in Niankan-Pel the population despise the followers of Eyos and worship Flaim, and are persecuted by those who live in the stilt-supported city above them. Shai Fea is a Siol. Her husband dies inexplicably, the latest in a series of strange murders. Her brother, the Hyalon (Niankan-Siol's ruler), accuses her of the deed and she flees to the lower city. There, she encounters Ashurek.

This book is satisfying in many respects. The plot has a number of strands to it, not all of which are apparent at the start but are gradually revealed as the situation is unravelled. Some parts are predictable but others provide unexpected twists. There are some dramatic sequences, the best of which are very vivid, while others could have been enhanced to the benefit of the book. It is an easy read but lacks the depth of Freda's previous book, *THE RAINBOW GATE*.

THE DRUID OF SHANNARA by Terry Brooks

Orbit, 423 pp, £13.95, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The Shade of Allanon gave Walker Boh a task, to find the Lost Druids' keep of Paranor, to return it to the world and to revive the Druidic order so that they could join in the fight against the Shadowen and the Foundation. The only problem is that Walker Boh does not believe in Druids or Allanon and only reluctantly agrees to do this. However his quest seems doomed from the start when, whilst he is searching for the black elfstone rumoured to be able to absorb and deflect magic, he is bitten by an Asphinx whose poison slowly turns its victim to stone. He

shatters what was his wrist to escape and is found by Cogline - one time associate of Allanon.

The King of the Silver River, seeing Walker's plight, creates an elemental, calls her Quickening and adopts her as his daughter. He gives her the task of aiding Walker. She cures him at the cost of his arm, and he follows her and her companions Pe Ell, Morgan and the old tracker Horner Dees to Eldwist where they must confront the Stone King. He has the Elfstone but to get to him they must evade the horrors that populate his city.

The novel starts off quite well and moves along quite nicely until the protagonists reach Eldwist, but then the story becomes protracted and slow and spoils the flow of what is a nice yarn. I do have to say though that Brooks has produced some nice characterisation in this novel. Walker Boh's reluctance for and final conversion to his task, the confusion of Pe Ell, the assassin who must kill Quickening, are excellently written. A pity about the overlong search of Eldwist, otherwise a good tale.

PACIFIC EDGE by Kim Stanley Robinson

Grafton, 280 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This is another of Robinson's speculations on a future Orange County (2065) and is in sharp contrast to his previous work *THE GOLD GOAST* which was very pessimistic. This by contrast is about as near to a utopia as one could realistically hope for, a world in which scientific progress is harnessed to the common good, the big corporations have been seen off and everything seems to be small and beautiful. Ecology rules. The aesthetic beauty of the old sailing ships is now harnessed to modern technology so if need be the captain can use computers to plot his course and call on the weather satellites to tell him if a storm is approaching. Cars seem at a minimum, though still used when needed.

The storyline revolves around Kevin Claiborne, newly elected local council member, who finds skulduggery afoot when plans arise to develop Rattlesnake Hill, one of the last pieces of wilderness in the area, by the mayor Alfredo. To antagonise things more Kevin and Alfredo are both in love with the same woman (Alfredo's wife Ramona). Robinson comes up with fine characters, none more so than the council's lawyer Oscar, a vastly overweight, outwardly comical man whose hobby is doubling as a professional wrestler.

I found this book uplifting and it would be nice to think things might turn out this

good, but there is an alternate thread running through the book as the scene occasionally switches to a young writer in an internment camp in Virginia watching the world slide to global disaster. Whether this is an alternate universe or a reminder of what will more likely be I'm not quite sure. An excellent sf novel from an intelligent and skilful writer.

CARNACKI THE GHOST-FINDER by William Hope Hodgson
Grafton, 270 pp, £3.50, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This book of supernatural stories is reprinted from 1910. Carnacki is a gentleman psychic investigator, and comes somewhat cheaper than the Ghostbusters. Some of the paraphernalia sounds rather quaint now, such as the ubiquitous "Electric Pentacle", which sets up a barrier in the ether no supernatural being can cross.

It is interesting that about half the stories are about how easy it is to fake the supernatural, and even how an experienced psychic investigator can fool himself. However, the atmosphere and tension in every story is very well handled, and even now the stories retain considerable charm.

There is a 23 page afterword by Ian Sinclair, in which he pours cold water on the whole book. Nevertheless not a book to read alone.

BY BIZARRE HANDS by Joe R Lansdale
New English Library, 242 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Clive Brookes.

BY BIZARRE HANDS is a collection of, mostly, horror short stories. The introduction to the book starts out with "Joe Lansdale scares the living shit out of some people" this is perhaps true but I found it more disturbing than scary. The stories are mostly about maniacs, killers and seriously disturbed people. To say that the stories are violent would be an understatement. Nearly all the stories contain very vivid descriptions of violence to say the least. So if you have a strong stomach and aren't easily offended then you can perhaps read the book.

Past all the violence and sick characters what have we got? Well actually quite a few good short stories. "Letter from the South, Two Moons West of Nacogdoches" is a letter from an indian in a world where different major paths have happened from ours. The American Indians are the main race in the world. John the Baptist is the person who Christians believe is the Son of God, as Jesus was knocked over by a cart and killed and so is

just a prophet. And it seems that women are the bosses. "Night They Missed The Horror Show" is about people in the southern backwaters of America. As in "Duck Hunt" most of the other stories are based in and around the same area.

"On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert" is an award winning novella which really makes the book worth getting. It shows a very dark view of the future. A virus has been released into the atmosphere which makes it impossible for people to die properly unless their brains are destroyed. "The Dead People" however wander around like zombies until they are killed or rot away to nothing. The story is described as "A story about the bad guys and the bad guys."

I would not recommend this book to weak stomached people but it is worth reading if you are not easily offended.

THE WORLD AT THE END OF TIME by Frederik Pohl
Grafton, 408 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by David T Cooper.

This is a story of the survival of two beings which ranges from the near future to the end of the universe. One of the beings is Wan-To, a hyper-intelligent energy being, whose preferred residence is a G-type star. Unfortunately he is at war with his children. One of his ploys accelerates close to light speed a group of stars, one of which is the sun of Newmankhome. This planet is the first colony of Earth and is the home of Viktor Sorricaine, the second being. We meet Viktor first on the colony ship, New Mayflower, after his having been awakened from the "freezer" on his way to Newmankhome. Through the course of the novel Viktor is frozen twice more, and we discover the societies that Newmankhome develops into over the centuries.

Their stories are told in alternate chapters, Wan-To then Viktor. The idea is ambitious but does not quite gell. It is hard to unite the stories of two beings who are so different. However, the story is told with Pohl's usual humour and is, on the whole, enjoyable. Not one of his best but not one of his worst either.

INDIGO VOL 6: AVATAR by Louise Cooper
Grafton, 299 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Indigo is on the trail of the fifth demon which leads her to the Dark Isle, which is covered with a tropical rainforest, where she becomes very ill with a tropical fever. But for her immortality she would die. Priest-

esses of The Ancestral Lady discover Indigo and cure her, but not through charity, they believe her to be the new Avatar or Oracle of the Lady. Indigo goes along with them as they seem to be travelling in the general direction of the demon. But once at the temple in the middle of the jungle Indigo discovers that the demon is Fear, and it has subverted the Ancestral Lady, and has perverted her religion until it is one of terror by revenge and torture. Indigo must confront the demon and destroy it before the rite of initiation, when the demon will become too powerful to stop. To do this she must face the Ancestral Lady or, as she is better known, Queen of the Underworld, in her Kingdom of the Dead where the living cannot go.

The two year gap between volumes four (*NOCTURNE*) and five (*TRIOKA*) seems to have revived this series, maybe the change of publisher helped as well, but this sixth volume is excellent. I especially like the way that Grimya the wolf is becoming more of a character in her own right not just an adjunct to Indigo. In addition, Indigo's discovery of the nature of Nemesis and how to defeat it, and the final acceptance of her lot, are wonderfully and movingly told.

ELVEN STAR by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman
Bantam, 387 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the Death Gate Cycle Volume II, so read the truly excellent *DRAGON WING* first. In this book Haplo the Patryn visits Pryan, the World of Fire, with the mission of fomenting chaos so the Lord of the Nexus can take over more easily. He finds himself playing a very different role, as the only man who can save civilisation from the Tytans, renegade giants with powerful magic.

This fantasy series is unusual in that so far the lines of 'good guys' and 'bad guys' remain undefined. Certainly Haplo thinks of himself as the villain, but has a noble side I feel will develop. The Lord of the Nexus, however, is a genuinely nasty piece of work.

Given the serious side of the story (the complete destruction of the lands of the elves, dwarves and humans,) the humorous elements jar. A recurrent flaw in all Weiss and Hickman's work is the apparently omnipotent guide, who points the characters in the direction of the plot. They also provide the comic element, sometimes successfully. In the "Dragonlance" books it was Fizban, while in the "Darksword" books it was Simkin. In this book it is the old wizard Zifnab (anagram puzzlers take note) and his servile dragon.

Even Haplo's dog seems to know more about what's going on than Haplo himself.

Nevertheless there is much about this book that is effective: the the Tytans are terrifying, the inability of the different races to co-operate in the face of destruction, and Haplo never seems to quite understand how he came to be organizing the rescue mission. As in the first book, the key to the whole puzzle lies in the peculiar nature of the World of Fire. Next Haplo is off to the World of Earth, and I will be interested in what he finds there.

THE ANTIPOPE by Robert Rankin

Corgi, 283 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia.

All right, all right, I'll admit it! I don't really understand Terry Pratchett novels! These words will be blasphemy, I'm sure, to many of you out there, but there's worse to come. The truth is I don't even "get" Douglas Adams's jokes. Hum. So what did I think of Robert Rankin's comic fantasy, set in coteremporary Brentford?

Well, forced to read it for this illustrious magazine, and given the aforementioned character defect, you'll be as surprised as I was that I liked it. I probably won't re-mortgage the semi' to rent a six metre square neon sign in Piccadilly saying "Read it"; but I will recommend it to you.

The plot is good, something like; What if the Devil came to Brentford? Would the drinking population of the Flying Swan be able to muster enough sobriety and purpose to do anything about it? Does anyone care? It all starts with a red-eyed tramp with slimy fingers, scaring Neville the part-time barman. Then Archroy's wife swapped his trusty Morris Minor for five magic beans... I could say more, but I won't, you'll have to read *THE ANTIPOPE* for yourself, and see.

To summarise, even for those of you who don't normally enjoy comic fantasy, take it from me this is a good book, read it!

"WAS..." by Geoff Ryman

Harper Collins, 356 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Welcome to the wonderful land of Was, cradled in the arms of Now. This realist fantasy is a fine example of Ryman's work, in every way the equal of *THE CHILD GARDEN*. In this presentation of an alternative America the realism is very much to the fore. For much of its length "WAS..." feels more like a mainstream novel about the genre than a genre

novel *per se*, much to its credit I must say.

As you gather quickly from the title and cover photograph "WAS. . . is about, and built around, L Frank Baum's *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*. This doesn't mean you need to have read Baum, having seen the film once (or even having heard of it will do). In this version Dorothy Gael is an abused, misunderstood child, shunted off to her Auntie Em when diphtheria strikes her parents. Baum appears as the substitute teacher who does understand, but is ignored. As the novel hops through time Dorothy's life is paralleled in that of Judy Garland, who plays her in the film. It is the film that links the rest of the characters together, marking turning points in their lives. Each character is a thread running through the network of the book, coming together to where it began in Manhattan Kansas.

After the story Ryman provides a reality check, in which he is modest about his research. He needn't be, this novel has a strong sense of history and I highly recommend it.

TIME IN MIND by Kathryn S Starbuck
Grafton, 319 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Paul Z.

The main part of this story is set in a future where people have gone back to the "old ways" (you know, getting closer to nature and all that manure) after civilisation has been destroyed by incurable diseases like the common cold. The people, over time, have developed powers of the mind through meditation and talking to their higher souls, to replace the need for technology, powers such as telepathy, empathy and of course telekinesis. Different people have different talents, but some are born Deaf-Mute, the name given to those who cannot speak in other minds or hear the voices of others in their minds, and so they are looked down upon as being inferior.

One such is Ian, the hero of the book. The history of the keep in which Ian lives is passed down by word of mouth from the elders to the children. The tales have of course been corrupted over the time they have been re-told and Ian, being a difficult if bright lad, despite his lack of powers, questions the authenticity of these histories. This doesn't go down well Drove Gardner, the evil, no good, low-down, sheep molesting Elder, in this tale of one boy's quest to find the truth (gag, choke, vomit). Of course Ian is not without help. His mother, who just happens to be a powerful empath, supports him and encourages

him as all good supporting characters should. Ian though is a pretty lousy choice of enemy, for he manages to get well and truly wedged up the nose of the strongest telepath in the community (Drove Gardner). This means getting his head smashed in at a hundred paces. His mum (the powerful empath) unfortunately is not as powerful as the evil, nasty Drove Gardner who of course, being the villain, plans to kill Ian. Ian's only course of escape is to travel through time, back to before the plagues destroyed the world, where the odious Mr Gardner cannot reach him. The story continues as you would expect it to.

The story is predictable, the characters shallow, the ideas are weird. Mind you, if you're into new age stuff (sad people) like finding yourself, meditating and talking to your spirit guides, you might enjoy it, but I doubt it. I found it took a real effort to finish this book, I suggest you go and read one a book by Starbuck's husband, Raymond E Feist, instead.

TEK LORDS by William Shatner
Corgi, 255 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Clive Brookes.

TEK LORDS is the sequel to *TEK WAR*, the book which surprised most people by being quite readable. William Shatner's style of writing is easy to read and so far his stories have been quite good. Not especially earth-shaking but better than a lot of science fiction and fantasy which somehow gets published.

In *TEK LORDS* Jake Cardigan once again gets involved with the illegal Tek Drugs. "Tek" is the name given to computer neural connections which provide the user with an induced feeling of bliss, ie. a drug. Tek unfortunately leaves the user with many after effects such as psychosis and other mental disorders and so it is outlawed. Jake is a former policeman who got framed for being a Tek runner in the first book and although he is now cleared everybody still holds it against him.

The story follows Jake's actions as a private investigator researching into the death of Kurt Winterguild, and thus uncovering a plot by the Tek Lords (drug barons) to hold the world to ransom by releasing a deadly virus into major cities. Only they have the antidote.

Although a lot of the ideas about neural drugs and massive corporations and space platforms have been done before by William Gibson the book is quite readable and a good sequel. Don't however expect a masterpiece of science fiction literature.

FOR SALE

ZENITH / ZENITH SPECULATION FOR SALE. Peter Weston's seminal critical review of sf. Contributors include Aldiss, Brunner, Harrison, Leiber, Moorcock, Niven, Offutt, Pohl, Priest, Silverberg, Stableford and many others. I have in good condition, issues 8-32 (1965-1973), a useful historical collection: £25 including postage. Contact David Sutton, 021 444 6188.



FANZINE COLLECTORS: 1970s British fanzine checklist now available, also the original Peter Robert's checklists for '30s to '50, '51 to '60 and '61 to '70, all at 80p each or £3 the lot, post-paid from Vince Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent, DA16 2BN.



FOR SALE: ROMEO 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), buyer must collect from Bristol. First offer around £70 will be accepted, but 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).



BSFG 20th ANNIVERSARY SOUVENIR BOOKS: Articles by BRIAN ALDISS, HARRY HARRISON and ANNE GAY. Only £1.95 (postpaid), cheques payable to "THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP", to MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.



BEYOND THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR ... TO THE ENCHANTED CONVENTION by Walt Willis and James White, sequel to the '54 allegorical fan classic, US edition now available at £3 postpaid or £8 collectors autographed edition, from Vince Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent DA16 2BN.



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 sf of those years.

Best offer over £30 secures. Call Peter Weston on 021 354 6059.



FOR SALE ... STAR TREK: Video tapes and books. 40 video tapes in perfect condition (most only watched a few times) and 32 *STAR TREK* novels (all in good condition). Also 14 *DOCTOR WHO* video tapes and 2 *DOCTOR WHO* novels, again all in excellent condition. Everything in excellent condition. Price new £642.00, ONLY ASKING £250.00 or near offer. Call Dave on (021) 558 3857.

**HELLO SF WRITERS,
WHOEVER YOU ARE
by Sally-Ann Melia.**

I have been asked to run a writer's workshop at this year's Eastercon. The idea is simple, a writer's workshop by SF writers for SF writers. I'm looking for enthusiastic support from Brum Group members.

Eastercon, as most of you will know, is the annual convention of the BSFA. This year it is calling itself Illumination, - "Because disparate times require disparate measures..." - and is to be held in Blackpool over the weekend 17th-20th of April. By the way, due to the recession and all that, this looks like being the only major sf & f convention to be held before Novacon 22.

As for the writer's workshop, well I've tried to speak to as many of you as possible, but having only little legs, I just can't get around that fast! It's very simple really, samples of work, novels, short stories, poetry, and plays, up to 1000 words, will be collected on the Friday night, photocopied and redistributed, for discussion on Sunday.

What it really needs is some interesting pieces of work to discuss and some not too shy people to come along and discuss them. So dig out that short story *INTERZONE* and ten others rejected! Dust off that poem your girlfriend didn't like! Make a date for Blackpool on the Easter weekend, there's always the bar afterwards!

Illumination, 17-20 April, Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool, for further information write to Illumination, 379 Mytle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. For details of the Illumination Writer's Workshop call me on 05646 2054 (evenings).