

BRUM GROUP NEWS

May 1992

Issue 248

The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss & Harry Harrison)

GROUP CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, SECRETARY - CAROL MORTON, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
TREASURER - RICHARD STANDAGE, REVIEWS EDITOR - BERNIE EVANS, PUBLICITY OFFICER - AL JOHNSTON,
ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVA CON 22 CHAIRMAN - HELENA BOWLES.

DR JACK COHEN

will be addressing the BSFG

on Friday 15th May 1992, 7.30pm for 7.45pm

Admittance: Members 1.25 Visitors 2.25

Dr Jack Cohen author of "The Privileged Ape" and (with Ian Stewart) "What is the Message of this Book" has spoken to the Brum Group on numerous occasions about such topics as "The Possibility of Life on Other Planets", "Why is Mickey Mouse?" and "Eggs, Embryos and Ethics".

As well as writing a number of fascinating and entertaining papers - "Speculations on the Evolutionary History of the Tribble" and "Here be Dragons" to name but two - he has advised such luminaries as Harry Harrison, Anne McCaffrey, Brian Aldiss, Larry Niven, David Gerrold and James White on the plausibility (or lack thereof) of the life forms which appear in their work.

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).

"Ah, yes, I
reminder it well..."
by Bernie Evans

OK, we know, it's your group, it's your money, it's your business how you spend it, BUT, you elected us to run it all for you, and we've decided enough is enough with the late renewals. We've decided to chop a month off the leeway we allow, so FROM NOW you'll only get one freebie newsletter after your renewal date, instead of the two at present.

This is only fair to those who renew on time, as they are in effect subsidising those who renew late. The list of such people is getting longer by the month, so this is where it stops.

We know how much you enjoy getting those carefully crafted renewal letters from us, so we'll still be sending three of those. A reminder the month BEFORE you are due, so you can't say you weren't warned; the proper renewal letter on the appropriate date; and then just ONE extra reminder afterwards. If you still fail to renew you'll be dropped from the mailing list, and be charged the non-members rate at the meetings.

We'd like to thank those members who DO always renew on time, and hope that the other members will join you real soon now.

LETTERS

COLIN GREENLAND

2a Ortygia House, 6 Lower Harrow Road,
Harrow, HA2 ODA

I should like to thank the dozens and dozens of people who sent me that beautiful Get Well card from Illumination at Easter. I should also like to thank everyone very much for voting me an Eastercon Award for *TAKE BACK PLENTY*. Never-the-less, I do feel I ought to point out that *TAKE BACK PLENTY* has now got three awards (the worthy one; the official one; and now one just for fun), which is plenty of awards, honestly - but there are plenty of other books out there, some of which haven't got *any awards at all* - so I think you should start voting for some of them now.

In case you're wondering, I've got M E (or post-viral fatigue syndrome, for short), which is absolutely bloody exhausting - I am getting better slowly, so most days I can work a little bit on revising *HARM'S WAY*, the

story of Sophie, orphan of the spaceship yards; but I think it'll be a long time before I'm in circulation again.

VACANCY: PUBLICITY OFFICER
"It's a tough job but someone's got to do it!"
by Al Johnston

The Brum Group needs a new Publicity Officer. A measure of the demands of the job is that the incumbent is bugging off to Newcastle rather than face the continuation of his onerous duties. Actually, that's not strictly true, the real story is that he was afraid that someone would rumble how easy it was, and so he fled before he could be unmasked.

Okay, apart from the first sentence, none of the above paragraph is true, well almost none of it. We do need a new Publicity Officer and I am moving to Newcastle (-upon-Tyne, not -under-Lyme). However, I'm going because I got a job there, and simple though doing the BSFG publicity is, it's rather tough doing it from 200 miles away.

Publicity Officer is a committee post and essentially involves doing three things:

- 1) Attending committee meetings. (Not essential, but useful for putting your oar in and deciding the Group's future!)
- 2) Publicising the BSFG, currently by posters and flyers in bookshops, but other avenues can be opened by the ambitious and/or hard-working.
- 3) Running the raffle. (Getting prizes, selling tickets etc.) Because no-one else will do it.

So, nothing too taxing there. How long you spend on it is up to you, but Martin produces the posters etc. the rest of the committee are helpful souls, and the Group is a constant source of suggestions. Added to which, it's only eight months to the AGM, when you can dump it all on someone else; unless by that time you're hooked of course...

Seriously, if you would like to take a more active role in the Group, get in touch with a committee member (Tony, Carol, Bernie, Mick, Richard, Helena or Martin) and make their day by volunteering. It's fun and WE NEED YOU!

□□□□

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 WAVE photocopier.

BLACK COUNTRY

BUS TRIP CANCELLED

Yes apathy has struck again - the latest attempt to involve members of the Brum Group in a social activity has gone the way of all recent attempts - nowhere.

The few (nineteen) people who actually parted with cash for the trip should find a cheque refunding their money with this newsletter. To them I can only apologize. To the ten others who expressed interest but failed (despite repeated reminders) to pay I say tough - it's too late now. To the other fifty or so members of our group, some of whom are amongst those who ask at every AGM "Why don't we have summer trips/bowling nights/special events like we used to in the good old days?" - you have your answer: **APATHY.**

Last year Vernon Brown attempted to organize a group trip to see the sf musical RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET - the response was pitiful (four people). The trip was scrapped. I thought I'd give it one more try - I don't know why I bothered. We only needed a minimum of 30 people (from a membership numbering 80-100) we got 19. I think, as far as the social side of the Brum Group goes, that says it all.

- Martin Tudor.

The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 51st Jophan Report

As part of this year's Birmingham Readers & Writers Festival Chris Morgan will be running a Horror Fiction Workshop. The results of the workshop will be presented on Wednesday 13 May at the Burbury Park Complex, off Wheeler Street, Lozells. Call Steve Goddard on 359 4314 for details.

Spring is getting expensive for Iain Banks, not only do his parents' wedding anniversary and Anne Blackburn's birthday fall in March, he's now got his own wedding anniversary to remember because Iain and Anne got married on March 20th this year!

Not chancing the vagaries of the weather during a British spring, they went to Hawaii, and wed in Honolulu's County Court, which has the unusual address 777 Punch Bowl Street. "Not quite the Number of the Beast", quoth Iain, "but close!". Congratulations to you both, and all the very best for the future.(BE)

The 1992 Eastercon Awards were presented at Illumination in Blackpool by Tim Illingworth. The award for Best Long Text went to *TAKE BACK PLENTY* by Colin Greenland - the award was collected on his behalf by Roger Robinson. Best Short Text *QUANTUM CHOC-O-DYNAMICS* by Sean Ellis and others, Best Graphic Work - the "Milton Keynes" t-shirt by Smitty and Dramatic Presentation went to *RED DWARF V*, and was collected by Nic Farey on behalf of the production team.

This year's British Science Fiction Association Awards were presented at Illumination by Dave Langford. The award for Best Novel went to *FALL OF HYPERION* by Dan Simmons, runner-up was *ETERNAL LIGHT* by Paul McAuley. Best Short Story was "Bad Timing" by Molly Brown (*INTERZONE #54*), runner-up was "Floating Dogs" by Ian McDonald (*NEW WAVE #1*). Best Dramatic Presentation went to *TERMINATOR II: JUDGMENT DAY*, runner up was *RED DWARF IV*. Best Artwork went to the cover of *INTERZONE #45* by Mark Harrison, runner-up was the cover of *INTERZONE #48* by Geoffrey Taylor.

The Ken McIntyre award was presented to Colin Johnson for the cover of Illumination Programme Book, and the Doc Weir award went to Roger Robinson.

Despite a remarkably poor showing in the above Awards Brum Group members really came into their own with the most important awards of the convention Anne Page's "Silly Awards". Four of the twelve awards going to BSFG members! The full results follow:

Most Promising Newcomer: D West
Most Active Fan: (at cons) Bernie Evans
Most Inactive Fan: Brian Davies
Most Fanciable Fan: Teddy
Most Talented Fan: Dave Mooring
Most Untalented Fan: Steve Green
Most Boring Fan: Nigel Richardson
Most Exciting Fan: Dave Lally (there was also a new category created here of Most Excitable Fan which went to the con's Fan GoH Pam Wells).
Fan Most Likely to Succeed: Bernie Evans
Fan Most Likely to Fail: (to produce another issue of his fanzine) Tony Berry
Most Chauvinistic Fan: Nic Farey
Best Bum in Fandom: Dave Mooring.

Ballot stuffing was encouraged and so many hundreds of ballots were cast, because of their popularity and the lack of animosity Anne hopes to repeat the "Silly Awards" at a future date..

Books based on the film industry continue to tempt our pockets in recent months. *THE FILMS OF NICOLAS ROEG* (Letts, £6.95) is a study of the man who gave us *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH*, just one amongst many thought provoking films. Still concentrating on the men who make the movies, *CRONENBERG ON CRONENBERG*, edited by Chris Rodley, (Faber, £12.99) is based on a series of interviews over the past eight years, and charts his career and his motivation, also revealing why he didn't direct *TOTAL RECALL*.

Looking at the actual films is *HOFFMAN'S GUIDE TO SF, HORROR AND FANTASY MOVIES*, (Corgi, £12.99), contains thumbnail guides to 3,500 films, from *HERBIE GOES BANANAS TO THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*. With not only US and UK films, but also many from Europe, with credits, synopsis, comments and a star rating, this volume could be of interest to a wide range of people, from those with a mere passing interest to those trying to put together a film programme for a convention.

Film tie-ins include *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY*, by J M Dillard (Granton, £3.99); *HOOK*, by Terry Brooks (Arrow, £9.99); *THE ADDAMS FAMILY*, by Elizabeth Saucher

(Penguin, £2.99) and *THE ADDAMS FAMILY ALBUM*, by Charles Addams (Hamish Hamilton, £10.99). Thanks to *FLICKS* magazine for all the above information. [BE]

Eric Bentcliffe, winner of TAFF in 1960 and a fanzine editor for over twenty years, died of cancer in late February.

Two German *STAR TREK* fans are suing Paramount Pictures, claiming that the studio stole ideas from a draft script they submitted, for use in *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY*.

According to *TREK NEWS NET*, the international newsletter published by the Star Trek Italian Club, Steffen Wietek and Vera Grupe submitted five copies of their screenplay in October 1990, as an alternative to the rumoured "Starfleet Academy" plotline.

Wietek and Grupe now claim the new movie uses key elements from their script and claim this is supported by four pieces of circumstantial evidence: a statement by studio spokesman Richard Arnold last April that the "academy days" storyline had been junked after receipt of "an interesting script by two unknown writers"; Sulu's promotion to captain, part of their script; a report in *PREVUE* regarding a secret weapon featured in the film, also used in their plotline; the title of the Klingon battle cruiser, identical to theirs.

Meanwhile the British networking of *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* continues to be plagued by BBC censorship. The latest victim, according to John Gullidge of *SAMHAIN*, is the episode "The High Ground", which has a terrorism theme and could (in the mind of BBC's controller Alan Yentob) be taken as an allegory for the war in Northern Ireland; unlike "Conspiracy", which suffered cuts, this instalment will be lost in total. The episode is, however, available as half of a sell-through cassette release. [SG]

Just before Easter I heard rumours from a number of normally reliable sources that Pegasus Publishing, the Birmingham based group responsible for *GAMESMAN*, *SIREN* and *ACADEMY* (inc. *FANTAZIA*), went into receivership on Thursday, 9 April.

Since then I have confirmed that the rumours were true and have heard that debts could be in six figures. Watch this space for further information as it comes.

The Book Inn, the London based store which incorporates Fantasy Inn, has been forced to close following a fire on Sunday, 5

April. Paul "Gamma" Gamble told me at Easter that it is believed that the fire started in the basement late on Sunday evening, although the exact cause is not yet known.

He added that when he last spoke to the shop's owner, Richard Waller, the full extent of the damage was not yet known, but Waller hoped that the shop would be able to re-open.

The Chris Evans signing session, featuring *CHIMERA*, which was to have been held at the Book Inn on 10 April, was hastily re-located to the Book Pedlar at the top of Charing Cross Road.

The psychological thriller *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* swept the boards at this year's Motion Picture Academy of American Awards in Hollywood, winning best film, best actor (Anthony Hopkins), best actress (Jodie Foster), best director (Jonathan Demme) and best screenplay (Ted Tally). Hopkins and Foster had already been named best actor and actress at the British Academy of Film and Television Awards ceremony on 22 March.

Hopkins and Foster look set to reprise their roles as the serial killer Hannibal Lecter and FBI agent Clarice Starling in a sequel; the novel is currently being written by Thomas Harris, whose earlier book *RED DRAGON* also features Lecter and reached the screen as *MANHUNTER*.

The BAFTA for best original screenplay was presented to Anthony Mingella's acclaimed *TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY*. Its star Alan Rickman was named best supporting actor for his outrageously camp portrayal of the evil Sheriff of Nottingham opposite Kevin Costner in *ROBIN HOOD: PRINCE OF THIEVES*. *TERMINATOR 2* scooped four of the MPA "Oscars", for best visual effects, best sound effects, best sound and best make-up effects. [SG]

□□□□

Thanks for the news this time goes to *BERNIE EVANS & STEVE GREEN* (where credited 'BE' or 'SG') but for the most part, to *CRITICAL WAVE*, which is still Europe'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.

ILLUMINATION

Blackpool, UK

17 - 21 April 1992

Report by Bernie Evans

I've been whinging for years about Eastercons being too big, too multi-stream, too much trying to be all things to all people, and yet I keep going to them, and enjoying them. This year's was no exception, well, it was, it was the most enjoyable for several years.

Yes, the hotel was big and rambling (lots of interesting nooks and crannies); and yes, the hotel ran out of beer (the Mild and Bitter completely, the draught Guinness lasted until the early hours of Monday morning but they got some more in pretty damned quick), but this added to the fun somehow. The "atmosphere" was good. There was plenty of space to hang around, with a main bar which was smallish but never over-crowded because of the long sun-lounge running the length of the front of the main hotel, which had a small bar and a coffee shop with cheap hot and cold food, and two other bars which between them were open almost all day. And the staff were great. For example, the electricians in the coffee shop blew, which meant no hot snacks for about 30 minutes, but they just joked the customers through it and everyone ended up not minding.

The main programming was tight, but other streams were kept "flexible", and this didn't necessarily work to either the participants', or the attendees', advantage. It became a little shambolic at times, especially the fan programme, with items being switched to different rooms, or different times, or both. It was a bit off-putting to find an audience of two for an item Martin Tudor and myself were on. Given that the two were our respective "moral support" we all gave up and went away, but worse was to come for the chap who followed us, in the same re-arranged room. At the time I popped in to have a look he had an audience of ONE. Then there were the "Silly Awards", part of the Fan programme, moved to the main programme and an hour later than advertised. Not so bad you may think, but the main participants had gone out to eat, didn't know about the change and had rushed their meal to be back on time. Perhaps it's a little unfair to complain about the programme since I don't go to a con just for that, and only saw a small sample, but three out of the eight items I saw is a large proportion.

Again probably picky, but the "Read Me" was thin on the information front, with details of what items were about, but nothing about who was on them. When one may have to choose between two or more items this can be important. I especially like to know who is going to be on a panel before I decide to go or not. I hope future organisers will take note.

On the organisational side, all I saw was Ops, on which I worked, and this was excellent, minor problems, easily identified and quickly solved. Very good communications, and people sticking to their jobs instead of running around dementedly. Ten out of ten for Mike Scott.

Convention Highspot: Pam Wells' reading from her own works, highly entertaining and the perfect illustration of why she deserved to be Fan Guest of Honour.

Convention Lowspot: taking a long thirsty mid-shift drink of what I expected to be draught Guinness on the Monday morning, with an apologetic gopher explaining he'd got me two bottles as they'd run out of draught.

As I always say when I do a conrep, this isn't intended to be anything other than a very personal view, no pretensions to being objective, we all go to our own con. The one I went to was good, fun, mostly well-organised, I'd go again.

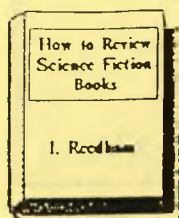
FORTHCOMING EVENTS

22-25 MAY 1992: **INCONSEQUENTIAL**. "Humour" theme, organized in conjunction with Octarine (the SF&F Humour Society). Aston Court Hotel, Derby. GoH: Robert Rankin. Att.£21/Supp.£5. Details: via 12 Crich Avenue, Littleover, Derby, DE3 6ES. "Inconsequential - be there or don't."

29 MAY 1992: **TERRY PRATCHETT** will be talking to the BSFG (usual time usual place) at the time of the publication of his new Discworld novel *SMALL GODS*.

30 MAY 1992: **TERRY PRATCHETT** will be signing copies of *SMALL GODS*, *REAPER MAN* and *THE CARPET PEOPLE* at Andromeda bookshop 10.30-noon.

6 JUNE 1992: **KATHARINE KERR** the best-selling author of the DeVerry series will be signing copies of *A TIME OF EXILE* (book one of the Westlands Cycle, pb £4.99) and *A TIME OF OMENS* (book two, 'C' fnt pb £8.99, hb £14.99) from 11am at Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk Street. (It is always advisable to call 643 1999 to confirm signings.)



Book Reviews

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND by Robert A Heinlein
NEL, 655 pp, £6.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The problem in re-reading old favourites or "classics" is that of it not standing the test of time. With *STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND* we have another, that of additional copy. This is the publication of the original version, some 220,000 words as opposed to the 160,000 word version of 1961.

On reading the preface I got the impression a controversial novel sat in wait. The impact I recall from reading the novel 20 years ago was of iconoclasm, of it suggesting ideas other than those accepted at the time. Would the extra wordage add to all this? Sadly, no.

The basic story of the Mars-born Smith coming to Earth with his skewed viewpoint, the father figure in Harshaw and the events leading up to the religious climax remain. What has been added, as far as I can tell, is extra background and data, making the story "flow" better. This does not in my opinion make it a better book, but this version does have more continuity, events and points in the plot hang together well, and are more easily followed.

In 1960 it might have seemed racy, particularly for an inhibition-bound race like the Americans of the time, although I cannot see the need for the excessive cuts requested by the publisher/editor. Prudes? I think so.

However, in the 1990s the book will not shock anyone - but the iconoclasm remains. For this alone I consider it worth re-reading (or is it such in this original form). Typical Heinlein? - the choice is yours.

THE FIRES WITHIN: VOLCANOES ON EARTH AND OTHER PLANETS

Text by John Murray, illustrated by David A Hardy
Dragons World, 189 pp, £19.95, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is really two books. There is David Hardy's portfolio of paintings depicting one of the more destructive aspects of this planet; then there is John Murray's explanation of the workings of such phenomena. Each

would be poorer without the contribution of the other. Both men are highly qualified in their respective fields - art and science - and both have a fascination for volcanoes. Here they have attempted to share their enthusiasm with those of us who have yet to experience, first hand, the drama of a volcanic eruption.

First the text. This is written to be understood by anyone with a modicum of intelligence. Yes, it is splattered with scientific terms but these are clearly defined. The various chapters introduce the reader to the destructive power of eruption, then go on to explain the nomenclature of volcano types and the lavas that pour from them. Then the mechanisms are discussed, simply and clearly, enhanced by David Hardy's diagrams, something he has always excelled at. For those less interested in the technical details there are descriptions of volcanic eruptions both recent and historical - Krakatoa and Vesuvius are there as well as Mount St Helens and Surtsey and a selection of lesser known but devastatingly destructive outpourings. The accounts are factual; there has been no attempt to dramatise them and there is no need to; the pictures do that. Living in a country that is geologically stable it is sometimes difficult for us to appreciate how much volcanic activity has shaped our world but this book emphasises the importance without making a song and dance about it.

In light of recent events on the slopes of Mount Etna it is interesting to see how humans have endeavoured to control forces that make even their largest bombs seem puny. In 1983 there were also attempts to divert the flow of lava from this volcano using barriers and explosives. Then, as now, there was some degree of success, though it did seem to be like trying to put out a forest fire by spitting at it.

The one real disappointment in this book is the very limited space given to non-terrestrial volcanic activity. True, there is much more data available on Earth's vulcanism and the mechanism must have a great deal in common but one small chapter goes no way towards satisfying my curiosity.

The second book within these covers is David Hardy's portfolio. By using the paint brush instead of the camera he has been able to give impressions of the events as they have happened. Despite the excellence of world news-gathering it is often very difficult to catch a mountain at the moment of eruption or a volcano in the process of birth - and live. Paintings in this instance can create what the camera cannot capture.

David Hardy has done this very well. The only quibbles I have are of the pictures of rock types. However accurate a painting is, there is a sense of the unrealistic about it - but that is probably the geologist in me complaining.

On the whole, if you want a good reference book about vulcanism, lavishly illustrated, this is it.

DAMIA by Anne McCaffrey
Bantam, 365 pp, £13.99, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the next episode in the saga of the Raven Women and is, in fact, an expansion of the short story "A Meeting of Minds", written in 1969 and printed in *FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION*. Both *THE ROWAN* and this its sequel are a continuation of the novels *TO RIDE PEGASUS* and *PEGASUS IN FLIGHT*, and concern the Primes, those people with extraordinarily powerful psionic powers. This volume tells the tale of Damia, the Rowan and Jeff raven's most talented and brilliant child, and Afra, Damia's eventual mate.

Opening with the story of Afra's childhood and youth on the planet Capella, it tells how his developing talent and his impetuosity make for friction on this very staid and conservative planet. Only by going over the heads of his family and applying to the Rowan herself does he manage to escape Capella's rigid society, and take up a job in Rowan's Callisto Tower. Afra becomes the closest thing to family the Rowan has, and a surrogate uncle to Jeff and Rowan's children, especially Damia.

Damia is a precocious and lonely child, and objects strongly when she is sent to Deneb, away from Afra and her father, when her mother is ill during her fourth pregnancy. She sees it as some sort of exile, and bitterly resents her mother. On Deneb, under the care of her grandmother Isthra, Damia grows and matures until she is ready to take over the new tower on Aurigae, the most remote in human space. During a rest period she makes contact with an alien mind, Sodan, and becomes infatuated with him. She is totally blind to the fact that he is only a mind controlling a ship, and whose mission is to destroy the Primes in order to open up human space for alien invasion and eventual colonisation. Only Afra, who has come to love Damia in a most un-avuncular way, realises this, and enlists the aid of the other primes to.....

I first read about the Raven ladies in the collection *GET OFF THE UNICORN*, but when

I asked Anne if she would be writing more about them she said "no". I am very glad she changed her mind, as this series is an excellent example of her work. I think it helps if you are a romantic as these are, to quote Anne, "unashamed love stories. That's what I do best....". I have to agree. They are pure escapism, strong on characterisation and storylines. Unlike the Dragon books, they won't win prizes, but they are another facet of Anne's story-telling abilities. Roll on the third generation of Ravens.

BARD V: FELIMID'S HOMECOMING by Keith Taylor

Headline, 304 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

The fifth and last (so far) in Keith Taylor's excellent *BARD* series. Felimid mac Fál was exiled from Ireland five years ago. He had many adventures wandering around Europe in the aftermath of the fall of the Roman Empire. After the death of his lover, Gudrun Blackhair, he decides to return home.

When Felimid reaches Ireland, he finds that many things have changed in his absence. Christianity is growing in popularity but, while banishing the magic from the land, is adapting to suit the local people. Even worse, the local berds and druids appear to have fallen under some unhealthy influence.

Dicuil the Fiery has ambitions to be the new Chief Bard. His followers abuse their Bardic privileges by compelling everyone to do their bidding with satires and curses. Felimid has two of the great Treasures of Ireland, which Dicuil would give anything to possess.

An impressive amount of research has gone into this book. Sixth century Ireland is quite authentic, even though the story and magic are quite fictional. This is a well above average fantasy series.

MORNINGSTAR by David Gemmell

Legend, 282 pp, £8.99, "C" format, £14.99 h/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

I am pleased to say Gemmell has returned to what is, for me, his forté. While the *LION & DARK PRINCE* brace of books about Parmenion and the rise of Alexander were entertaining, they lacked something. *MORNINGSTAR* has that something, and in abundance.

Always an excellent storyteller, Gemmell this time shows the men behind the myth. To quote the prologue, "The truth, you say? Now this is a novel. Why would you be interested in the truth? Of what use is that to a storyteller? Your listeners will

not want the truth. They want Heroes....". And he's right. Legends are always embellished, the hero always courageous and tall and handsome. But truth? Well this one is different, and told in that inimitable way Gemmell has.

Jarek Mace is "just" an ordinary man elevated through a series of events to become, to others, the Morningstar - their Saviour, Defender, Repeller of the Invader - you know the sort. Behind the scenes he is just a cunning moneyseeker. He rescues people from an enemy tower and it becomes a heroic deed, yet his intention was to relieve the castle of the gold he had heard was therein. The question follows, "Is this true of all heroes?". Behind every legend is a very different story, and this pulls away the light to let the reader see the dark corners hidden by the glare. Quintessentially, the message provides the story, and the obvious adage "Don't believe all you read" takes on a new meaning from this angle.

Essential reading, and a must for any serious reader.

QUESTION QUEST by Piers Anthony
NEL, 359 pp, £15.99, h/b, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This has to be the sorriest and lamest excuse for a story, even in the convoluted and over-extended *XANTH* series. It is just a re-telling of Xanthian history from the point of view of Humphrey, the Magician of Information.

Lacuna woke up one morning to find out she had become dull. To discover why she had changed from an impish young woman into a dull 34 year old she follows Humphrey into Hell. She listens to his life story whilst they wait for the demon X(a/n)th to release Humphrey's wife, Rose, from hell.

I know these stories are popular - with whom I don't know but *someone* buys them - but this one will strain even the most ardent fan's enthusiasm. It reworks old stories that are best left alone. In fact the whole *Xanth* series should be laid to rest. Enough is enough.

DAYWORLD BREAKUP by Philip José Farmer
Grafton, 336 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Last (?) in the *DAYWORLD* series. Caird (aka Duncal et al) in his many personae is on the run and causing serious damage to the Government-run world. A series of killings and sabotage causes him, along with his sidekick Snick, to hide out, and leads to

contact with an underground movement. Revealing the truth about the Dayworld structure to the downtrodden people they become sort of heroes (revolutionaries?), until the Government "moves the goalposts", accusing them of things they did not do.

The clever plan to reveal further truths backfires and all are arrested. Caird plunges into yet another persona in which other (childhood) truths are let out. He grows into a model citizen and is released back into society to help the changeover to day living. Later he disappears, and it transpires he is up to his old revolutionary tricks again.

A strangely disjointed story which closes (?) the series. I felt that elements had been removed or changed, altering the pace, and sense, of the story. Not one for the purists.

ALL THE WEYRS OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey
Bantam, 494 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

If you are a fan of Pern's dragons you may view this tale with something akin to dismay, as the whole thrust of the plot-line is the attempt to prevent thread falling on Pern.

The story follows on immediately after *RENEGADES OF PERN* with the discovery of AVIAS, the artificial intelligence computer that had been brought to Pern by the original colonists. After interrogation of the Pernese by AVIAS, the computer makes the startling announcement that thread could be destroyed, but only if the whole planet is willing to work towards this end. Also, an extensive programme of re-education must first be gone through before the Pernese have the knowledge to implement AVIAS' plans. As would be expected there are those who do not agree with the destruction of thread, and so use such tactics as vandalism, sabotage, kidnapping and attempted murder to prevent AVIAS from fulfilling its plans.

I found this novel so absorbing, moving and entertaining that I was hard pressed to put it down, although killing off my favourite character did not really help. For those of you who like the dragon tales as much as me, don't despair, it is not the end of the Dragons. Anne has assured me of this, and has said that another volume in the tales of the Dragons of Pern has been written. Entitled *RESCUE RUN*, I don't know when it is due out, but it cannot be soon enough for me.

DO YOU OWE US A REVIEW ?

A

WORD FROM
THE REVIEWS EDITOR

- Bernie Evans

Having helped to edit dozens of book reviews for the Brumgroup and Critical Wave, I think I've seen every trap a reviewer can fall into. I've fallen into a few of them myself! In an ideal world an editor can send stuff back with gentle explanations and requests for re-writes, but the fast turn-over world of book reviewing isn't ideal. Instead, here is a light-hearted look at some of the things I've done in the past to drive an editor mad.

THE PLOT GIVE-AWAY: Oh what an exciting story this is, and look how neatly the author ties it all in, and gosh, what a great ending. Oh dear, you needn't read it now!

THE NEST OF SENTENCES: I am enjoying writing this, one thought piles on top of another, they do that, you know, and then you slip in commas to separate all the different thoughts, which come out of nowhere, it happens when what you've just written triggers off something else (sometimes it gets so complicated that brackets become necessary) and you can't miss that thought - dashes make good separators as well - and I wonder if I can write a whole paragraph without a full stop, yes, I can, I did!

I'M TOO CLEVER BY HALF PART ONE: What a crap book this is. The author is a sexist misogynistic purveyor of such unadulterated drivel he doesn't deserve to have his moronic outpourings reviewed. I won't tell the reader why it's totally unreadable, I'll just go on at length and use as many multi-syllabic words as I can to show how much better a writer I am than he is.

I'M TOO CLEVER BY HALF PART TWO: What a fantastic book this is, such depth, such plotting, such characterisation. It's so reminiscent of Joe Barracuda's thirteenth century treatise on the mating habits of Icelandic nightingales. I'll just get carried away by how knowledgeable I

am and educate the readership. If they can't get all this esoteric detail from the library the least I can do is blah blah blah.

THAT'S A NICE WORD, I'LL USE IT AGAIN; This is a superb book. It's about a hero and his lady and has superb characterisation. The plot takes us to deepest Smethwick, and out to Oldbury in a superb twist at the end. As an example of this writer's superbly crafted work it's absolutely superb. (Next review I'll try "excellent")

OF COURSE MY WRITING'S LEGIBLE; and if it isn't the editor can tell from the context what the word should be. If they've never read this fantasy book and haven't come across these character names before, and can't tell a double "i" from a "u", or an "o" from an "a" it's not MY fault, I can read it perfectly well myself!

I CAN'T AFFORD A NEW RIBBON; but if the editor holds it at just such an angle, under a 5,000 watt arc light, and squints ALONG the page instead of trying to read it on his/her desk, it's quite readable.

THEY KNOW WHAT BOOKS THEY GAVE ME; so I needn't bother heading the page with the title, author, publisher, price and page count, they already have all that information.

THEY KNOW WHO THEY GAVE THE BOOKS TO; and in any case they've seen my writing before, or should recognise the fonts on my computer, or realise that my typewriter has that funny "e", they'll know it's me, I'll save time and energy by not putting my name on. Better still, I'll sign it, quicker after all, and they MUST recognise my signature, no-one else has a signature like mine.

Well, I hope you had fun reading it, I had fun writing it. Maybe I'll get more fun typing up the reviews in future!

0000

Prospective reviewers are reminded that reviews should be between 300 and 500 words long and must be received by Bernie or Mick Evans within one month of accepting the book or handed to them at the following month's meeting.

NOVACON 22

**from Friday 6th November
to Sunday 8th November 1992**

**at THE ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL
in Birmingham city centre.**

Guest of Honour

STORM CONSTANTINE

**author of the "Wraeththu" trilogy,
MONSTROUS REGIMENT, ALEPH,
HERMETECH & BURYING THE
SHADOW - amongst others.**

**Attending membership twenty pounds
until 12th October 1992
or twenty-five pounds on the door,
please note that postal applications
will NOT be accepted after the
12th of October 1992.**

**Cheques made payable to "NOVACON 22"
should be sent to:**

**Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick,
Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.**

Call Bernie on (021) 558 0997 for further details

BRUM GROUP NEWS

May 1992

Issue 248

The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss & Harry Harrison)

GROUP CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, SECRETARY - CAROL MORTON, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
TREASURER - RICHARD STANDAGE, REVIEWS EDITOR - BERNIE EVANS, PUBLICITY OFFICER - AL JOHNSTON,
ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVA CON 22 CHAIRMAN - HELENA BOWLES.

TERRY PRATCHETT

will be addressing the BSFG
on Friday 29th May 1992, 7.30pm for 7.45pm

Admittance: Members 1.75 Visitors 2.75

"Born in 1948 and still not dead, Terry Pratchett started work as a journalist one day in 1965 and saw his first corpse three hours later, work experience *meaning* something in those days. After doing just about every job it's possible to do in provincial journalism, except of course covering Saturday afternoon football, he joined the Central Electricity Generating Board and became press officer for four nuclear power stations. He'd write a book about his experiences if he thought anyone would believe it.

"All this came to an end in 1987 when it became obvious that the Discworld series was much more enjoyable than real work. Since then the books have reached double figures and have a regular place in the bestseller lists. He's also written three books for children (the *Truckers* trilogy). Occasionally he gets accused of literature.

"Terry Pratchett lives in Somerset with his wife Lyn and daughter Rhianna. He says writing is the most fun anyone can have by themselves."

Terry Pratchett will be signing copies of *SMALL GODS* (the latest Discworld novel, hardback, 13.99), *REAPER MAN* (a Discworld paperback, 3.99) and *THE CARPET PEOPLE* (an early juvenile in hardcover, 9.99) at Andromeda Bookshop from 10.30am until Noon on Saturday 30th of May. The blurb quoted above was stolen from the jacket of *WITCHES ABROAD* (hardback, 13.99).

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).