

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

September 1992

Issue 252

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

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ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVA CON 22 CHAIRMAN - HELENA BOWLES.

## *THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER IS* **SIMON GREEN**

Friday 18th September 1992, 7.45pm for 8.00pm

Admittance: Members £2.00 Visitors £3.25

Simon Green first started trying to break into print in the 1970s; when he lost his job around four years ago he used his two years on the dole to polish his style and submit yet more work; to no avail, discouraged he finally found himself a new full-time job again. He had been working for less than a week when American publishers Ace contacted him offering him a six-book contract for his Haven series which features the intrepid duo of Hawk and Fisher - sword wielding peace officers of the magic filled town of Haven, (the US titles being *HAWK AND FISHER*, *WINNER TAKES ALL*, *THE GOD KILLER*, *WOLF IN THE FOLD*, *GUARD AGAINST DISHONOUR* and *THE BONES OF HAVEN*.) Then Avon called him (sorry!) to buy another fantasy novel which saw print both in the US and UK as *BLUE MOON RISING*. Shortly afterwards he heard from Richard Evans (who was then at Headline), who also wanted to buy the Haven series. (The UK titles which have so far appeared are *NO HAVEN FOR THE GUILTY*, *DEVIL TAKE THE HINDMOST*, *THE GOD KILLER* and *VENGEANCE FOR A LONELY MAN*.)

Having established a healthy reputation as a fantasy writer Green went on to make the *NEW YORK TIMES* bestseller list with his novelisation of the Kevin Costner film *ROBIN HOOD*. *PRINCE OF THIEVES*, wrote a second book in the world of *BLUE MOON RISING* entitled *BLOOD AND HONOUR* and most recently has branched into sf with the first volume of a planned trilogy, *MISTWORLD*.

*[Many thanks to Dave Holmes of Magic Labyrinth for the above information.]*

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless other-wise 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 twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are nine pounds per person, or twelve pounds for 2 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 and review copies should be sent to the reviews editor Bernie Evans, 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, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

18 SEPTEMBER 1992: SIMON GREEN will be speaking to the BSFG, details on front cover.

18 SEPTEMBER 1992: SHAUN HUTSON, one of Britain's bestselling horror writers will be signing from 5.30pm-7pm at Magic Labyrinth, 34-36 Rutland Street, Leicester. Call (0533) 518178 for further details of this and other signing sessions.

18 SEPTEMBER 1992: IAIN BANKS will be speaking to the Sheffield SF Group at the Novotel Hotel in Sheffield. Call Steve or Alice Lawson on 0742-728639 for further details.

23 SEPTEMBER - 3 NOVEMBER 1992: DRAGONS OF THE MIND. "Tolkien and Science Fantasy" - The Birmingham Centre for the Book celebrates the centenary of JRR Tolkien's birth by using his works as a centrepiece to explore the history of Science Fantasy and how it has developed into one of the most popular genres read today. The fantasy worlds of British and American writers will be used to illustrate the range of the genre. The Birmingham Centre for the Book, Central Library, Floor 1, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, B3 3HQ. Call (021) 235 4511 for further details.

25 SEPTEMBER 1992: KIM STANLEY ROBINSON will be signing at Andromeda Bookshop, call (021) 643 1999 for details of this and other signing sessions.

25 SEPTEMBER 1992: KIM STANLEY ROBINSON will be speaking to the BSFG in an extra meeting at the White Lion public house. See back cover for further details.

2-4 OCTOBER 1992: CONTANIME T Japanese animation convention at the New Cobden Hotel, Birmingham. Attending £16, Supporting £5, £20 on the door. Contact: Denzil Brown, 20 Field Ridge, Shaw, Newbury, Berks.

2-4 OCTOBER 1992: FANTASYCON XVII, Midland Hotel, Birmingham. GoH Lisa Tuttle. Attending £20. Contact 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DE.

2-4 OCTOBER 1992: MIDCON. STAR TREK, Holiday Inn, Leicester. Attending £35. Contact 8 Ennerdale Close, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 4TN.

9-11 OCTOBER 1992: MUSE. A filk based relaxa-con ("filk" is music by sf/fantasy fans), Strathallan Hotel, Hagley Road, Birmingham. Attending £10, price includes transport and entry to the Razing Arizona gig on Saturday evening. Alchemy are also playing on Friday lunchtime at the Josiah Mason Hall, near Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Contact Gytha North, 35 Iverley Road, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 3EP.

9-11 OCTOBER 1992: FESTIVAL OF FANTASTIC FILMS. "A celebration of nine decades of amazing movies", the Charterhouse Hotel, Manchester. GoHs include Peter Walker, David McGillivray, Robert Fuest, Caroline Munro, Tony Tenser and Norman J Warren will be judging an amateur sf/horror film competition. Attending £30, contact Society of Fantastic Films, 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN.

9-12 OCTOBER 1992: IFT CON. STAR TREK, Holiday Inn, Leicester. Send sae for further details to: 129 Westfield Road, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 3HN.

16 OCTOBER 1992: IAN WATSON will be speaking to the BSFG at the White Lion.

24 OCTOBER: CHRIS MORGAN will be talking about how to write fantasy, and conducting a workshop from 12.30-4.30pm (please bring pen and paper), as part of The Birmingham Centre for the Book's Tolkien celebrations. Call (021) 235 4511 for further details.

30 OCT - 1 NOV 1992: WHO'S SEVEN CON. Combined BLAKE'S 7 / DR WHO con at the Telford Moat House Hotel, Telford, Shropshire. Will include "guests, discussion panels, games, banquet, parties, discos," etc. Attending £25. Contact: 137 High Street, Plaistow Broadway, London, E13 9HH.

6-8 NOVEMBER 1992: NOVACON 22 the Brum Group's own sf con returns to the Royal Angus hotel in the city centre. GoH Storm Constantine. Attending membership costs £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.

13-15 NOVEMBER 1992: T'KON. STAR TREK, Arcade Hotel, Birmingham. GoH John Carrigan. On the door: Friday £5, Saturday £6, Sunday £3 or £12 all three days, no contact address.

20 NOVEMBER 1992: DEBATE against the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society, at White Lion.

*The above details are correct to the best of my knowledge, but I would advise readers to confirm with the organizers before travelling. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when contacting any of the above.*

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# The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

## The 55th Jophan Report

I am very sorry to have to open this issue's column with the following news, which reached me just as the newsletter went to press. Birmingham *STAR TREK* fan Alec Lewis collapsed and died at his home on 7 September.

Alec was well known in *TREK* circles and had attended the convention Rec-Con in Manchester over the weekend of 28-31 August.

Glasgow has won its bid to host the world science fiction convention in 1995 ; dubbed Intersection, the Scots committee has now named Samuel R Delany and Gerry Anderson as its guests of honour. The results of the bid ballot were announced at the 50th worldcon, Magicon, held in Florida over the weekend of 3-7 September.

In reportedly the narrowest site selection contest ever, with a record 2400 votes cast, the Scots bid beat Atlanta with a 150 margin. Atlanta then bid for the NASFiC, held whenever the worldcon leaves American shores, but faced stiff opposition from "95 in 95", a hoax bid which astoundingly forced Atlanta to a third ballot before the Georgians finally won 184-155 ; the Atlanta NASFiC will be held in July 1995, allowing sf fans to attend both that event and the Glasgow worldcon a month later.

Intersection's British agent is the Brum Group's very own (who else would admit to that?) Bernie Evans, who can be contacted at 121 Cape Hill, Smettwick, Warley, B66 4SH. Rates have yet to be announced.

Lois McMaster Bujold's *BARRAYAR*, initially serialized last summer in *ANALOG* and published by Baen Books, was named best novel at this year's Hugo ceremony, hosted by Magicon on 6 September. Nancy Kress' "Beggars in Spain", published both in *ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE* and by Axolotl Press, won the novella category ; Kress was also nominated for "And Wild For To Hold". Isaac Asimov, who died on 6 April,

was awarded a posthumous Hugo for his *ANALOG* novelette "Gold".

The sole British success was Dave Langford, who won his seventh Hugo in the fanwriter category. *INTERZONE* was yet again beaten in the semiprozine stakes by the American newszine *LOCUS*.

The rest of the awards were as follows:  
Best novel: *BARRAYAR*, Lois McMaster Bujold.  
Best novella: "Beggars in Spain", Nancy Kress.  
Best novelette: "Gold", Isaac Asimov. Best short story: "A Walk in The Sun", Geoffrey A Landis. Best original artwork: Michael Whelan, for the Warner Questar edition of *THE SUMMER QUEEN*.

Best non-fiction book: *THE WORLD OF CHARLES ADDAMS*, Charles Addams. Best dramatic presentation: *TERMINATOR 2*.

Best professional editor: Gardner Dozois. Best professional artist: Michael Whelan. Best semiprozine: *LOCUS*.

Best fanzine: *MIMOSA*, edited by Dick and Nicki Lynch. Best fan writer: David Langford. Best fan artist: Brad Foster.

John W Campbell Award: Ted Chiang. Gryphon Award: Eleanora Sabin. Honor Book: Terry McGarry.

(Special thanks to Bernie Evans, Steve Glover and Steve Green, for their help in collating these results.)

Dave Holmes' specialist bookshop Magic Labyrinth, which opened in Leicester on 1 August with a Terry Pratchett signing session, has scooped his rivals by arranging an appearance on 18 September by the reclusive Shaun Hutson, one of Britain's bestselling horror writers.

Hutson will sign copies of his new novel *HEATH* from 5.30pm till 7.00pm at Magic Labyrinth, 34-36 Rutland Street, Leicester. Full details of other guest signings can be obtained as available on 0533-518178.

Kim Stanley Robinson will sign copies of his new novel *RED MARS* at Birmingham's Andromeda Science Fiction Bookshop on 25 September and London's Forbidden Planet the following day.

Nancy Springer's non-sf novel *COLT* has received the Joan Fassler Memorial Book Award ; the US\$1000 prize was presented by the Association for the Care of Children's Health at a ceremony in Atlanta, Georgia. [SFC]

The Hugo-nominated *CLIVE BARKER'S SHADOWS IN EDEN*, edited by Stephen Jones and published in the US by Underwood-Miller, won the 1991 Bram Stoker Award's non-fiction category.

Presented by the Horror Writers of America at their annual awards banquet in New York on 20 June, the other prizes went to: *PRAYERS FROM BROKEN STONES* by Dan Simmons, best collection ; "Lady Madonna" by Nancy Holder, best short story, originally published in *OBSESSIONS* ; "The Beautiful Uncut Hair of Graves" by David Morrell, best novelette, originally published in *FINAL SHADOWS* ; *THE CIPHER* by Kathe Koja, *PRODIGAL* by Melanie Tem, tied for best first novel ; *BOY'S LIFE* by Robert R McCammon, best novel ; Gahan Wilson, life achievement award.

Van Ikin was presented with the first A Bertram Chandler Award for Outstanding Achievement in Australian Science Fiction at Syncon '92 by the Australian SF Foundation. Ikin is editor both of the anthology *AUSTRALIAN SF* and the magazine *SCIENCE FICTION*, and is a noted critic and reviewer. [ *SFC J* ]

Savoy Books is bracing itself for further legal battles after a court decided David Britton's novel *LORD HORROR* was not obscene. The verdict may be challenged at appeal, and police have yet to rescind a destruction order against 4,000 comics seized last September at the imprint's Manchester warehouse.

Company spokesman Robert Holland said a trial over the comics, which included *HARDCORE HORROR* and the controversial *MENG & ECKER*, is anticipated in early 1993 ; Geoffrey Robertson QC is expected to again appear for the defence, and it is likely Michael Moorcock will reappear on Savoy's behalf.

The case began three years ago, when Savoy's entire stock of David Britton's satirical novel *LORD HORROR* was seized under a warrant signed by Manchester stipendiary magistrate Derick Fairclough. Using Section Three of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, the novel was then placed before the very same magistrate and - unsurprisingly - judged to breach the Act ; at the heart of Savoy's appeal were the claim that the book had true literary merit and the court's refusal to stand by a 1964 government promise that all publishers charged under the Act would be able to opt for a jury trial.

Britton was hardly likely to have endeared himself to the local authorities, of course, by his appropriation of several public statements by former chief constable James Anderton ; in *LORD HORROR*, chief constable "Appleton" spouts the original's bigotry, with the word "Jews" substituted for "homosexuals". It was Savoy's opinion that use of the Obscene Publications Act was inappropriate,

since Anderton could bring suit for libel if he considered himself defamed, and that any charge relating to incitement of racial hatred could be considered under the Public Order Act 1986.

The case was reminiscent of Penguin Books' prosecution in the 1960s for publishing D H Lawrence's *LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER*, Holland added. "They're saying that comics are only for kids - they're completely oblivious to events of the past 10 years."

He doubted that Manchester police would take their defeat lightly, and fully expected the authorities to refuse to return the books but instead to lodge an appeal. Savoy would prefer to settle all the disputes at one trial, in order to limit legal court costs and maximise the effect of its witnesses. ( *Steve Green.* )

*DARKLANDS 2*, the sequel to Nicholas Royle's highly successful horror anthology, will be published on 2 October. The 23 contributors include Joel Lane, Graham Joyce, Simon Clark, Mark Morris, Kim Newman, Conrad Williams, Julie Akhurst and D F Lewis.

Although the first volume sold out and several stories were selected for "best of" anthologies, Royle will not consider editing a third because of the strain upon his own writing career.

*DARKLANDS 2* will cost £4.99 and can be ordered from Egerton Press, 5 Windsor Court, Avenue Road, London, N15 5JQ ; in addition, copies will be available at Forbidden Planet in London, Birmingham's Andromeda Bookshop, and Compendium in Camden Town.

The Ukrainian publishing house Daimon and the sf magazine *THE YOUTH AND FANTASY* wish to contact British sf and fantasy writers to discuss publishing translations of their work.

Further information can be obtained from Dmitry Belokurov at Flat 14, Karl Marx Prospect 42, Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine 320030, or from Ian Brooks at Flat 4, 311 Dickenson Road, Manchester, M13 0NR. [ *David Pringle* ]

Stephen Baxter's second novel, *TIMELIKE INFINITY*, is due out in hardback by HarperCollins in November. Baxter's first novel, *RAFT*, is now available in softback and he is currently working on a third, *TYRANNY OF HEAVEN*, which he expects to turn in time for publication next July.

Headline Books publishes the third of Bridget Wood's Celtic fantasies, *REBEL ANGEL*, in hardback in March ; the earlier books, *WOLF*



KING and *THE LOST PRINCE*, are both available in paperback.

*THE REVENGERS* and *BEYOND THE GRAVE*, the opening volumes in Laurence James' "Dark Future" sequence, were published by Bantam's children's division on 13 August. The series is set in the mid-21st century and follows a group of youngsters as they set out across an eco-wasteland in search of food and weapons.

Born in West Bromwich but now resident in Essex with his wife, the author Elizabeth Barrell, James worked in bookselling before writing full-time. Since 1973, 145 of his novels have been published, including 20 series and using 20 pseudonyms.

The final Elm Street bloodfest, *FREDDY'S DEAD*, was released by Guild Home Video on 7 September, complete with free 3-D spex for the 15-minute finale.

"While I've enjoyed developing Freddy's character to icon status, I think it's time to move on," confessed actor Robert Englund. "I am extremely pleased that so much effort has gone into *THE FINAL NIGHTMARE*, making it, I believe, the most outstanding instalment yet."

Audiences seem to have agreed. The movie took £3,289,583 at UK box offices, five times more than the series' previous top instalment, *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3*. And with this "final" chapter set in 2001, director Rachel Talalay may have left a loophole wide enough to set Freddy free once again.

Polygram releases *TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY* on sell-through on 12 October, price £12.99. The movie took £18 million at UK box offices and topped the British rental charts for three weeks in February. Arnold Schwarzenegger's co-star Linda Hamilton will visit Britain to support the re-release.

Zebra Books has withdrawn two novels by "Pauline Dunn" after the authors admitted plagiarizing Dean R Koontz's 1983 novel *PHANTOMS*. Dawn Pauline Dunn and her sister Susan Hartzell have since returned their advances, which were passed on to Koontz to offset his legal expenses.

The first book, *DEMONIC COLOR*, appeared in 1990, followed by *THE CRAWLING DARK* a year later. A third novel, *FLESH EATER*, is unaffected by the settlement.

Interviewed by the New York Times, Koontz said he was "more than a little astonished" by the affair, particularly as *PHANTOMS* has been reprinted more than 30 times. [SFC]

Having delayed publication of *NEW WORLDS* 2 until 6 August, Gollancz has advised me that the schedule is being cut back from two to one edition per year "for the time being".

Terry Pratchett has declined to become involved with plans to film *GOOD OMEN*s, telling *SF CHRONICLE* that co-author Neil Gaiman's "tolerance level for Hollywood stupidity is much, much higher than mine". Meanwhile, the mooted *MORT* movie has hit a stumbling block: audience research by the American studio apparently gave a thumbs-down to "the Death angle".

The BBC, which lost the fourth season of *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* to the satellite channel BSkyB, began screening the original 1960s series on 19 August, opening with "The Cage", Gene Roddenberry's rejected pilot starring Jeffrey Hunter.

Although the BBC previously banned the episode "Miri" after its initial airing in 1970 and refused to show a further three episodes ("Empath", "Plato's Stepfather", "Whom Gods Destroy"), all 79 will reportedly be screened on this occasion. However, there seems little chance that *TNG* episodes such as "Conspiracy" (cut), "Justice" (cut) and "The High Ground" (banned) will be screened uncut in the foreseeable future.

Gene Roddenberry's former collaborator, Jon Povill, is seeking a buyer for Roddenberry's semi-autobiographical screenplay *THE NINE*; the plot concerns a real-life paranormal research organization investigating the possibility of a visit by nine extraterrestrials. [EMPIRE]

Toho, the Japanese studio responsible for such champions of slum clearance as Godzilla and Rodan, has launched a new character with hopes of a series: Zeiram, a female bounty hunter who specializes in tracking aliens. [SFC]

The author Stephen King has initiated legal action against UK production company Allied Vision and American distributor New Line, demanding to have his name taken off the credits and advertising material for the movie *THE LAWNMOWER MAN*.

King alleges that the so-called adaptation "bears no meaningful resemblance" to his original short story, and claims "all profits attributable to the use of his name".

Ed Simons of Allied Vision plans to launch a countersuit if King's lawsuit continues.

The director Roger Vadim is reportedly working on a remake of *BARBARELLA*, with *TWIN PEAKS* star Sherilyn Fenn in the lead.

As this issue went to press, unconfirmed rumours reached me that IFT Con, due to be held at Leicester's Holiday Inn on 9-12 October, has hit difficulties, with all but one of the committee resigning. [ See page 2 for convention listings. ]

Fantasycon XVII, which returns to Birmingham's Midland Hotel on 2-4 October, has announced that its guests of honour will be David Schow and Lisa Tuttle, with Adrian Cole acting as master of ceremonies. Attending membership is set at £20.00, payable to 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DE ; progress report one had yet to be distributed by late August.

Lord Alexander Thynne, whose 1977 science fiction novel *THE KING IS DEAD* envisions a future Earth ruled by a decadent monarchy, became the seventh Marquess of Bath on 30 June, following the death of his father.

Lord Bath, who was 87, opened Longleat House to the public in 1946, later introducing the famous safari park. The family estate will now be administered by the former Lord Weymouth, a 60 years-old ex-hippie whose bohemian lifestyle has occasionally brought him to the attention of British tabloids.

The Small Press Group of Britain will hold its fifth annual fair at the Royal Horticultural Society Old Hall, Vincent Square, London, on 19 September. Doors open at 10.00 a.m. and admission is free ; the venue has wheelchair access and a modified WC.

Last year's fair attracted more than 120 exhibitors, ranging from desktop publishers and book-binders to magazine publishers and graphics designers. As at previous fairs, this year's will coincide with the SPG's publication of its annual yearbook, which will include details of more than 3,000 small presses in the UK.

Tables are £60.00 each (£30.00 for SPG members ; a special £45.00 rate is available, covering membership and a table), payable to the Group at BM Bozo, London, WC1N 3XX.

Stephen Payne has succeeded Andy Sawyer as editor of the British Science Fiction Association's review magazine *PAPERBACK INFERNO* ; the first issue under the new editor will be distributed in the BSFA's September/October mailing.

Sawyer had held the post for seven

years. "This is not necessarily goodbye," he added, "as I hope to be writing and reviewing on a freelance basis within the BSFA and whoever else will have me as and when the chance arises."

The new address for review material is: 24 Malvern Road, Stoneygate, Leicester, LE2 2BN.

The Black Lodge, the Birmingham-based informal meeting for horror and dark fantasy fans, has changed venue to the Old Fox, Hurst Street (opposite the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre), and now meets on the first Tuesday of each month.

Terry Brooks, who joined Legend's ranks on 9 July with *THE ELF QUEEN OF SHANNARA*, will visit Britain next spring. Further details, including signing sessions, when available.

Belated congratulations to this year's Novacon Guest of Honour Storm Constantine and Mark Hewkin, who were married on 1 May.

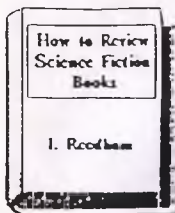
*CRITICAL WAVE's* interview with US fantasy author Katherine Kerr, scheduled for a future issue, had an air of farce about it.

Mishearing the surname for that of fellow author Katherine Kurtz (intriguingly, an error also made by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, which was offered her as a guest speaker but unfortunately could not arrange a venue at such short notice), Steve Green attempted to double-check by mentioning Kurtz's "Deryni" novels ; HarperCollins' Carole Jones presumably mistook this for Kerr's "Deverry" sequence, the confusion was only exposed I mentioned the BSFG's own misapprehension, fortunately before the meeting took place.

Dave Hodson, erstwhile editor of the BSFA newzine *MATRIX* and Mexican organizer, has opened his second White Light specialist bookshop in London.

Situated at 219 High Street, Walthamstow (081-503-7712), the new store will deal mainly in comics (both new imports and back issues), but will also stock trade paperbacks, t-shirts, model kits and World Wrestling Federation merchandise. Hodson's original White Light bookshop remains at 695 Seven Sisters Road, Tottenham, (081-880-2258).

All news courtesy of *CRITICAL WAVE* (unless stated otherwise), many thanks to STEVE GREEN for drafting much of the above.



# Book Reviews

A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA by Craig Shaw Gardner  
Headline, 372 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

A genial, not to mention djinni-al, fantasy drawing inspiration, not to mention plot and characters etc, from the Arabian Nights. *A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA* is a follow-up to *THE OTHER SINBAD*, which I haven't read, and sets the scene for *SCHEHERAZADE'S NIGHT OUT*, which I have. Judging by the variation in quality so far, *THE OTHER SINBAD* may well be the best of the three. I apologise for the opening pun, but it describes most succinctly the level of humour attained.

Stylistically, *ALI BABA* is more controlled than *SCHEHERAZADE*, with a tighter rein on the "Banana Splits" dialogue, if you comprehend my meaning. Oh most wise and incomparable of readers! With a bit of luck *SINBAD* won't contain any at all. The jokes also seem much fresher than those in the final volume and, as this one is narrated directly rather than as a story, there is no irritating string of inverted commas at the beginning of each chapter.

Plotwise, the book most closely follows the Ali Baba of Forty Thieves fame, with fair chunks of Aladdin thrown in at the middle for no particularly apparent reason. Mr Gardner must be paid by the word. Non-the-less, the book does manage to be entertaining and, in places, very funny.

A DANGEROUS ENERGY by John Whitbourn  
Gollancz, 317 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book won the BBC Bookshelf/Gollancz First Fantasy Novel Competition. The brief was that it could cover any kind of fantasy (including horror), the suggestion was that the common sword and sorcery quest was unlikely to win. In other words, the judges (including Terry Pratchett and Richard Evans) were looking for something different. This book fulfils the criteria. *A DANGEROUS ENERGY* is the biography of Tobias Oakwood and is set against the background of an alternate history.

Tobias is introduced as a boy of six

wandering out after dark. He meets some elves who tell him that they will teach him magic. So for the next seven years he meets the elfwoman, Joan, at each new moon. She doesn't actually teach him any spells but shapes his mind so that his natural talent can find a way through. The elves do this for selfish reasons of their own which are never actually explained. Since magic is the prerogative of the Church in Tobias' world he is sent for training at Southwark when his talents are discovered. The rest of the book follows his career within the Church until the end of his life.

Alternate histories are not new. This one is reminiscent of Keith Roberts' *PAVANE*. Queen Elizabeth died of smallpox in 1562, the Catholic Church is the most important force in the land (Protestantism was exterminated in Europe and "heretics" continue to be bloodily persecuted) and at the end of the twentieth century, steam power is the most advanced technology yet permitted. *PAVANE* is a much more gentle alternative to the one Whitbourn has created. Alternate histories always have problems as it is impossible to imagine all the repercussions that changing one event can have and there are always "experts" who will tell you that a particular scenario is impossible because... and list reasons, most of them correct. Whitbourn is brave to have tackled the problem. He has put considerable thought into the changes wrought by his deviations and found interesting ways of conveying them to the reader. He has perhaps been a little over-ambitious especially as there is more than one turning point (Jonbar hinge).

Not content with a different time line, this world is one where elves (nasty, vicious creatures if you believe the stories) lurk in the extant ancient forests. And there is magic. The Church had the foresight to incorporate thaumaturgy in its tenets in an attempt to control its usage. Tobias uses it for his own ends, sometimes calling up demons to do his dirty work for him, at others to persuade others to go along with his perversions. Tobias is not a nice person, and here lies one of the problems with the book. There is no way that anyone can sympathise with the "hero". He is thoroughly perverted, vicious and has no redeeming features. Coupled with the fact that the book covers over half a century there is no real opportunity to get to grips with him as a personality and the incidents related don't really show his development. Also the story does not really advance. Tobias may make some small impact on his own world by his studies of demonology but our understanding



of the world, or the purposes of the elves, is not enhanced. Perhaps this is intended as the tenets of the Church have effectively created a stagnant society and the majority of lives are insignificant anyway. To make the book become fully alive, something more is needed - a sense of hope for the future perhaps.

There are stylistic flaws in the book, like the shifting of viewpoint from paragraph to paragraph and the brief biographical asides about characters who have vanished from Tobias' life and will never cross his path again. The prosaic style of the book is irritating but within keeping for the kind of ambience that Whitbourn is trying to create. It is old fashioned for now but probably modern for his world.

I can see why this book was chosen as the winner. It has tried to be different. In some ways it is startling. It is certainly ambitious. For me, it doesn't quite work but as this is a first novel it can be hoped that Whitbourn will iron out the flaws in later books. Essential reading for anyone who wants to be a novelist - after all it is the prizewinner.

RED MARS by Kim Stanley Robinson  
Harper Collins, 501 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is an imaginative, highly entertaining novel beginning a trilogy about man's colonisation of Mars. This initial volume covers the first 40-odd years, from the landing by the "First Hundred", specialists to set up the colony, through subsequent events, culminating in a revolution sparked to gain sovereignty against the transnationals' greed and UN ineptitude. The planet is seen in different lights: to the transnationals as profit from minerals and ores exhausted on Earth, to the UN as a way to ease population growth through emigration to the new frontier. Elements within the First Hundred also have views: as a new beginning (Hiroko), as an architectural promised land (Ann), as a chance to demonstrate science through terraforming (Sax). A complex mix, causing friction and mounting tension, held loosely together by Boone and Chalmers. A powerful, compelling story of human endeavour against the odds emerges. The interaction between the characters sets up later confrontations and alliances, providing a pivot for the plot.

Conflict begins when Earth (UN) tries to move people onto an unready Mars, not yet able to sustain a large populace within the domes. The transnationals undermine the Treaty by moving their own people in to gain control

and speed up profit. Unprepared, the existing colony becomes increasingly fractious, with splinter groups calling for differing ends, all building up to an ill-conceived revolution. The main characters move through all this, each reacting differently to the crisis. The book ends with a reunion of some of the First Hundred, who aim to start afresh.

The substantial research Robinson must have done for this book pays off handsomely. Characterisation is splendidly done, having a depth that promotes interest in the individual and generates feeling for their plight. The Martian landscape and climatic conditions are excellently portrayed, each revelation indicating the problems the colonists will face. Technological advances in chemistry, biology, industrial processes and computers etc are all well thought out and expertly introduced into the storyline.

The mixture of these elements, along with the socio-economic by-play, produces a superb, excellently paced novel which will prove to be the definitive story of man's colonisation of another planet. Already I eagerly await the next episode.

LOST FUTURES by Lisa Tuttle  
Grafton, 208 pp, £4.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is one of those novels which is impossible to categorise, and gains strength from it. Initially it slides into the kind of mainstream fiction that deals with potential mental disintegration of someone who has locked away the memories that threaten the balance of their existence. This is Clare Beckett, an accountant who has walled herself into a comfortable niche where no-one can touch her. Then, for no apparent reason, the walls begin to crumble. The memories of her brother's death and the guilt she feels as a result well up like evil gases from a bog. Knocked off balance, she relives the past, creating gaps in her present life, alarming her colleagues. Then the memories become might-have-beens. The blanks are filled with the futures that she once created for herself in the way that many young people do. Yet it is almost as if she is in touch with these other selves, that the boundary between one possible future and the next is fragile. And if the futures exist surely the pasts are different too. Perhaps her brother didn't die, perhaps she could have saved him. Here, Clare's life crosses into fantasy or begins the descent into madness.

Then Clare awakes from her dream of reality to find herself staring at a blank



wall. She can remember her life perfectly, even the lapses in logic and the details of the fantasy futures, but finds herself trapped in a nightmare. Everything she thought was true is a lie. She is a deranged young woman attending therapy sessions at the local hospital, entirely dependent on her parents. She has no memory of this life. It is not a future that she ever envisaged but as there seems to be no escape she determines to manufacture one of her own. Then from horror, the story is turned upside down again and the theme is science fiction. And always has been. Or has it? So skillfully is this novel put together that the elements blend together in seamless delight. The reader feels for Clare's predicament at every step of her odyssey and in each of her incarnations, real and imagined, experiences the same confusion, disappointment and contentment as each facet of this jigsaw puzzle of a tale unfolds. Wonderful writing.

#### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE THIRD CHIMPANZEE -

(How Our Animal Heritage Affects The Way We Live)

by Jared Diamond

Vintage UK, 360 pp, £6.99, p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

One for the science buffs this, perhaps it might inspire those who claim the soft sciences are under represented in sf. It certainly knocks the stuffing out of most pre-historic settings, in both sf and fantasy. The author is also pessimistically wary about SETI, with good reason, given the evidence he presents.

But these are side issues. The third chimpanzee of the title is *homo sapiens*, us lot. Perhaps we ought to be *pan sapiens*, or else the common chimp could be *homo troglodytes* and the pygmy chimp *homo paniscus*. Anyway, Mr Diamond uses this book to explore what it is to be human, given that we share over 98% of our DNA with chimpanzees; a closer relationship than many almost identical pairs of species in the animal kingdom.

The book is divided into several parts, tracing the evolution of mankind, pointing up our close relationship with other species, examining those behaviours considered to be uniquely human and showing how these are not as special to us as we would like to think. The work also examines our impact on each other and our environment, with its implications for the future, demolishing the "Noble Savage" along the way.

At the heart of this work is an anthropological and archeological mystery. Why, when men were biologically indistinguishable from ourselves 100,000 years ago, did they

only start inventing art, culture and other "human" characteristics about 50-60,000 years ago? Answers on a postcard please... More answers are still being sought about mankind's sexual behaviour and anatomy: imagine having to explain that size isn't important - to a gorilla. When Mr Diamond knows the answer he explains it well, and when he, or science generally, doesn't, then he straightforwardly says so.

Other interesting chapters trace the development of language, and the various parallels in nature of all human behaviours, both good and bad: we aren't the only artists, nor are we the only genocides. The rise of agriculture, and its disastrous effect on average human health, is discussed, with reasons for its rise, given its pros and cons.

All in all this is a thorough survey of the human condition, especially for such a compact volume. A lengthy reading list directs the curious towards works of greater depth. As Mr Spock might say: "Fascinating, Captain".

CASTLEVIEW by Gene Wolfe

NEL, 279 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by David T Cooper.

I find Gene Wolfe very easy to read, less easy to understand. This novel is no different. The tale concerns the inhabitants of Castleview, particularly the newcomers (Will Shields and family), and their battle with a shadowy universe of myth and legend, of which the Castle is an occasional visible sign.

Wolfe expresses his interest in all things fortaean in this book - there are mirages of distant cities, sightings of mysterious beasts, strange disappearances and phantom hitch-hikers amongst other things - with elements of the Arthurian legends and an appearance by Odin thrown in.

The pace is fast, breathtaking, even bewildering at times. The novel is full of references, and I'm sure I missed a lot of them. It could be a re-working of ancient sagas, or Twin Peaks in Middle America, or both, or neither. Read it and make up your own mind - if you can.

THE GENOCIDAL HEALER by James White

Ballantine Del Rey, 219 pp, \$4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter Dunn.

When seeking true escapism the *SECTOR GENERAL* books never fail to please. But be warned, you will not find there the supposed escapism that so often pervades the genre. Absent are the intense power struggles fought out by diverse beings who scheme and slaughter through

space and time. No, *SECTOR GENERAL* is a much more alien cosmos to our own, and perhaps a much more desirable one. Here, politeness matters more than politics (unless you are a Kelgian of course !), first contact situations are handled by ambulances not warships, and the complete absence of bad guys means that everyone (particularly the nurses !) gets to wear a white hat.

This latest novel continues the charming story of the giant interspecies hospital station Sector General, from which the series takes its name, from the perspective of the newly-arrived ex-Surgeon General Lioren. He attained the status of ex-Surgeon General when he accidentally exterminated most of a newly contacted race while in the process of treating them (what one might call *SECTOR GENERAL*'s equivalent to a friendly fire incident). His self-loathing over the incident leads him to abandon his career and seek punishment (unlike two certain A10 pilots eh !), but he quickly comes up against Sector General's philosophy that everyone is important and has valuable talents that should be used. He rapidly finds himself dealing with one of the hospital's biggest problems, and one of its biggest patients. Lioren's problem solving process takes us through a gallery of Sector General's characters both familiar and new, and leads him to a solution that also resolves his personal problems, gaining him a surprise new permanent role on the hospital staff.

Another surprise in the book is James White's decision to take *SECTOR GENERAL* into the tricky area of theological debate to resolve part of the plot. It is, however, a gentle, generalised theology that reflects much of the gentlemanly qualities of James White. Though this is somewhat on the wishy washy side for an evangelical Christian such as myself it is after all, as I said earlier in the review - pure escapism.

DAYS OF ATONEMENT by Walter Jon Williams  
Grafton, 437 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia.

When this novel first appeared in hardback last year *INTERZONE* described it as a "tightly plotted, hugely complex but ultimately satisfying novel", and I have to agree on all counts. A time travel novel set 50 years in the future, *DAYS OF ATONEMENT* has a lot to recommend it, but before you rush out to buy it, please read on....

First a word of warning, *DAYS OF ATONEMENT* is principally a small-town America police story, where the family- and church-loving police chief solves most of the town's

crime with his fist, and safe combinations are posted up in locker rooms. Then someone gets murdered, and it's linked to the big self-contained scientific complex just out of town. In solving the murder the story will run through most American cop-show clichés: the honest whores, the show-down with the FBI, the old-timer in the coffee-house who spills the beans, the murder of the police chief's brother - "they have struck at my family", and the finally-enforced-holiday-on-full-pay the chief is obliged to take when he gets too close to solving the case. Free of his badge, in the tradition of all American Police Shows, the chief goes wild and kills everyone.

More interesting, Walter Jon Williams carefully describes a small town riven by rivalries rooted in religion, introduces a new form of terrorism, eco-terrorism, and carefully describes the science behind his time travelling corpse. But *DAYS OF ATONEMENT* is only 25% sf, to find these rare diamonds you have to trawl through the other 75% American Cop Story.

The novel is well-written, and I loved the intricacies of police life in small-town America. I was disappointed by the ending, I expected more science, less brawling. That said, there is a lot to discover between the covers of *DAYS OF ATONEMENT*. Try it and see !

THE DARKEST ROAD by Guy Gavriel Kay  
Grafton, 420 pp £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The concluding part of *THE FIONVAR TAPESTRY* trilogy brings together all the remaining celtic themes not previously used by this author. Each of the five people taken to Fionavar by Loren Silvercloak in *THE SUMMER TREE* play out their assigned roles, the end seeming inevitable as once again the Arthurian cycle draws to its conclusion. The one wild card is Darien, child of Jennifer and the evil Rakoth (against whom they are all fighting). It is Darien who may well decide whether good or evil wins. There are a lot of Tolkienian elements present within the trilogy but it is well written, intricately plotted and action packed. Those who have enjoyed the previous two volumes will not be disappointed.

THE JEWEL OF FIRE by Diana Paxon  
NEL, 309 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

After five volumes of the Chronicles of Westria, Book 6 has a feeling of inevitability about it. Julian, rightful heir of Westria, has had



to prove his legitimacy by finding and controlling the four jewels of power. He has got Earth, Air and Water (the contest for these is told in the previous four books). Only Fire has to be found and mastered. Meanwhile, the evil sorcerer, Caolin, is out to thwart him and steal the jewel. As Julian sets out he leaves behind Rana, the girl who has been one of his companions on several of his other expeditions and who, unknown to him is in love with him. Guess what happens.

Long series like this are very hard to sustain in originality and this is no exception to the standard fare. Although well written it has more than a little adolescent-style fantasy, the stuff that most of us are guilty of at some stage in our lives. Sometimes we grow out of it. I haven't so I expect the authors of the fantasies I read to surprise me. This doesn't which is a shame as Diana Paxon is capable of brilliant work.

THE CLAW by Ramsey Campbell  
Warner, 380pp, £4.50, p/b

WAKING NIGHTMARES by Ramsey Campbell  
Little Brown 273pp, £13.99, h/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

A thriller writer, Alan Knight, is visiting Nigeria to research his next book. He is persuaded by an anthropologist to take a strange claw-like artifact back to Britain. The anthropologist kills himself and before Knight can deliver the artifact to the London foundation to which it's addressed, bizarre events begin to occur. Knight lives on the Norfolk coast with his wife Liz and six-year-old daughter Anna. What gradually emerges is that the claw is a ritual object used by members of a Nigerian cult to kill their own children. And the claw seems to possess strong powers of compulsion. *THE CLAW* is a horror novel which was published pseudonymously in 1983. It is strangely patchy, containing moments of great tension alongside some amazingly inept bits of contrived plotting. The scenes set in Nigeria have great power and sense of place, despite the fact that Campbell researched them without visiting Nigeria. Unlike his character, he couldn't afford the fare, as he explains in a new Afterword.

Until the late 1980s, Campbell was more competent as a story writer than as a novelist. His latest collection, *WAKING NIGHTMARES*, contains 19 stories (or perhaps 18 stories and one true event) almost all from the 1980s and almost all well worth reading. Campbell is a subtle, atmospheric writer who achieves strong and entertaining

effects without overdoing the blood. Quite often his characters are unsympathetic outsiders, yet Campbell still makes you care about them. There is quite a range of stories here, from the slow build-up of "The Guide" (a homage to M R James) to the excruciatingly nasty "It Helps If You Sing". Great bedtime reading.

THE SILENT STARS GO BY by James White

Ballantine Del Rey, 441 pp, \$5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter Dunn.

Others may correct me but I believe this novel is an entirely new departure for James White, dealing as it does with the theme of alternate history. It is of course mere coincidence that Belfast born White decides to portray a universe where the Irish maintain a global hegemony and are on the verge of taking their Imperial ambitions beyond the confines of Earth. Despite this deliciously biased geographical setting the storyline is, as I have said, somewhat strange territory for White. The book is, however, littered with familiar references, which so clearly mark the novel out as a James White creation, that there is hardly any need for the declaration of his name on the cover. The first such familiar reference is White's choice of occupation for his hero and heroine - Healers Nolan and Dervla. Yes, that's right, both are space-faring medics, now where have we seen James use that plot device before?

The second, even more familiar reference, is the fact that every single character is continually falling over his, her or itself to be nice to everyone else in the book. Pages are spent resolving social faux pas as characters cast aside the lethal arcane hand weapons more often found in this genre, to duel with each other using ever more vicious compliments. Normally I find this one of the most attractive features of White's books, but this time I think he stretches that aspect just a little too far. For goodness sake, even the villains here are so polite and so well motivated that they could just as well be the heroes. The main villain, one Monsignor O'Riordan, actually apologises twice to hero Healer Nolan at the book's end, for all the wrong he has done (and is about to do!) him.

White packs everything he can into this book, alternate history, devious (but incredibly polite) court politics, a most unfortunate first contact situation and much more. I only wish the characters were just a little bit less perfect and a little more human - better still, I wish human beings behaved a lot more like James White's characters.

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

September 1992

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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,  
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## THIS MONTH'S EXTRA SPEAKER IS KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

Friday 25th September 1992, 7.45pm for 8.00pm

Admittance: Members £2.50 Visitors £3.75

Born in 1952, Kim Stanley Robinson attended the Clarion SF Writers Workshop in 1975 and founded his early reputation with a series of short stories for Damon Knight's ORBIT anthologies and Terry Carr's UNIVERSE series. Having won the World Fantasy Award in 1983 with "Black Air, Robinson made his debut as a novelist in 1984 with THE WILD SHORE, the first novel in Carr's resurrected "Ace Specials" imprint; it was nominated for a Nebula and won the Philip K Dick Special Award. Although the theme - a journey across post-holocaust California - was familiar, Robinson was acclaimed for the depth of characterization particularly the young heroes. This novel was followed by ICEHENGE in 1984, THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS 1985, THE PLANET ON THE TABLE (collection, 1986), THE BLIND GEOMETER 1989 and a work of criticism, THE NOVELS OF PHILIP K DICK 1984.

In 1988 he returned to the background of his first novel, completing the "Orange County" trilogy with THE GOLD COAST and, two years later, PACIFIC EDGE. Two further collections have meanwhile appeared, ESCAPE FROM KATHMANDU 1987 and REMAKING HISTORY 1991, as well as a novella-length fantasy book, A SHORT, SHARP SHOCK 1990.

His latest novel, RED MARS is intended to open a trilogy utilising the background of his 1988 novella "Green Mars", which was published back to back with Arthur C Clarke's "A Meeting with Medusa" and was nominated for both the Nebula and Hugo Awards. The concluding volumes will be entitled GREEN MARS and BLUE MARS.

*[Many thanks to Steve Green for the brief biography above.]*

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless other-wise 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 twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are nine pounds per person, or twelve pounds for 2 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 and review copies should be sent to the reviews editor Bernie Evans, 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, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).