

BRUM GROUP NEWS

February 1993

Issue 257

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

GROUP CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, SECRETARY - HELENA BOWLES, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
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ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVAICON 23 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON.

This month's speaker is **STEPHEN BAXTER**

Friday 19th February 1993, 7.45pm for 8.00pm .

Admittance: Members £2.50 Visitors £3.75

Stephen Baxter was born in 1958 and raised in Liverpool, he has a mathematics degree from the University of Cambridge and a PH.D from Southampton. He works in information technology, is married and lives in Buckinghamshire.

He sold his first short stories to *INTERZONE* in 1986 and was a prizewinner in the Writers of the Future contest. His first novel, *RAFT*, was greeted with great acclaim in 1991 and his second, *TIMELIKE INFINITY*, was published in November 1992. He has taken part in the programme of an Eastercon and will be Guest of Honour at Novacon 23 this year. So if you have not yet signed up for Novacon (and why not?) this will be your chance to hear and meet a science fiction writer of whom Charles Sheffield said in reference to *RAFT* "if you wonder what happened to the 'S' in 'SF' you should read this book...". So for fans of 'hard SF' this should be a treat.

{Many thanks to Carol and Tony Morton for the above biography.}

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd 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 twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are £9.00 per person, or £12.00 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).

COLOPHON

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Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group.

All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise. This publication was printed on the WAVE photocopier.

Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for typing the Book Reviews, all of our reviewers, STEVE GREEN and *CRITICAL WAVE* for the news in the Jophan Report, CAROL and TONY MORTON for their biography of Stephen Baxter, AL JOHNSTON for his Phannish Fizzicks and TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

Congratulations to BERNIE EVANS on winning the Andromeda book tokens for her correct entry to Stan Eling's puzzle competition.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

14-21 FEBRUARY 1993: *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* acclaimed Disney animated feature will be showing at the Midlands Art Centre cinema, call 021 440 3838.

19 FEBRUARY 1993: STEPHEN BAXTER, author of the 'hard sf' novels *RAFT* and *TIMELIKE INFINITY* will be speaking to the BSFG at the White Lion, 7.45 for 8pm.

W/C 19 FEBRUARY 1993: *BLADE RUNNER: DIRECTOR'S CUT*, MGM Arcadian, Hurst Street, Birmingham. Now booking call 021 622 3323. If you are interested in seeing this film in the company of other BSFG members please contact HELENA BOWLES on 021 558 7591.

13 MARCH 1993: *COMIC MART* at the Hotel Arcade, Ladywell Walk, off Hurst Street, Birmingham. Doors open 11am, admission 50p. Contact: Peter Lennon, 15 Yew Tree Close, Batchley, Redditch, B97 6SO (0527 585036).

20 MARCH 1993: BOB SHAW will be signing copies of *HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION* (Alison & Busby, £6.99) at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 021 643 1999 for details of this and other signing sessions.

20-21 MARCH 1993: *THE COMPANY OF WOLVES* Neil Jordan's film of the late Angela Carter's classic story will be showing at the Midlands Art Centre cinema, call 021 440 3838.

26-28 MARCH 1993: *TREK DWARF*. Combined *STAR TREK / RED DWARF* con. NOTE: change of date. The venue is the Holiday Inn, Leicester. Guest of Honours (subject to other commitments): Mike Okuda, Richard Arnold, Guy Vardaman, Mike Butcher, Adrian Riglesford. Membership limit of 500, Attending £30.00. Contact: 47 Marsham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 5RN.

27 MARCH 1993: ANNE GAY will be signing copies of the paperback edition of *THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT* (£4.99) and her third book in hardcover *DANCING ON THE VOLCANO* (£14.99) at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 021 643 1999 for details of this and other signing sessions.

Can YOU eat a 'Desperate Dan

Pie' ? Find out at the

BEER & SKITTLES

EVENING AT THE

LITTLE KIPPER HOUSE

(Bradley Green, Hanbury to

Feckenham Road, B4090

out of Droitwich)

If you are interested call

HELENA BOWLES on 558 7591.

3 APRIL 1993: COMIC MART at the Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Doors open noon. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW.

8-12 APRIL 1993: HELICON 93, 44th British national sf con, combined with the 1993 Eurocon. Hotel de France, St Helier, Jersey. Guests of honour: John Brunner, George R R Martin, Fan guest of honour Larry van der Putte. Attending £28.00, Supporting and children's attending (age 8-14 years) both £14.00. Contact: 63 Drake Road, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ.

16-18 APRIL 1993: SMOFCON 10. First non-US venue for this annual relaxcon. Same site and contact address as Helicon, listed above, there may still be a discount if you join Smofcon and Helicon at the same time.

18 APRIL 1993: COMIC MART, YMCA, Granby Street, Leicester, opens noon. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW.

19-24 APRIL 1993: RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET will be showing at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton. Tickets £9.00-£18.50, call 0902 29212. If you are interested in seeing this production in the company of other BSFG members please contact HELENA BOWLES on 021 558 7591.

24 APRIL 1993: TERRY BROOKS will be signing copies of *THE TALISMANS OF SHANNARA* (Century, £14.99) and *THE ELF QUEEN OF SHANNARA* (Arrow, £4.99) at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 021 643 1999 for details of this and other signing sessions.

24-25 APRIL 1993: GLASGOW '93, comic art convention at the City Hall, Candleriggs. Guests include Jim Shooter, Archie Goodwin, Dougie Braithwaite, Jamie Delano, Sean Phillips, Steve Pugh & Paul Johnson. Attending (until 5 April) £10.00. Contact: Rusty Staples Ltd, PO Box 146, Glasgow, G1 1TR.

LATE APRIL 1993: TAD WILLIAMS will be signing copies of the long-awaited third volume of his trilogy - *TO THE GREEN TOWER* at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 021 643 1999 for details of this and other signing sessions.

30 APR - 3 MAY 1993: WARP ONE, 35th UK STAR TREK convention. Pontins Middleton Tower Holiday Centre, near Morecambe, Lancs. Guests of Honour to be announced. Contact: 69 Merlin Crescent, Edgware, Middlesex, HA8 6JB.

22 MAY 1993: COMIC MART with guest BRYAN TALBOT at the Hotel Arcade, Ladywell Walk, off Hurst Street, Birmingham. Doors open 11am, admission 50p. Contact: Peter Lennon, 15 Yew Tree Close, Batchley, Redditch, B97 6SO (0527 585036).

24 MAY - 5 JUNE: SHERLOCK HOLMES THE MUSICAL by Leslie Bricusses, starring Robert Powell and Roy Barraclough. Alexandra Theatre, Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Tickets £7.00-£19.50, Box Office 021 633 3325.

28-31 MAY 1993: MEXICON V. "Straight" science fiction con. St Nicholas Hotel, Scarborough. Featured guests include Ian McDonald and Ken Campbell. Attending £20.00, to: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, B66 4SH.

5 JUNE 1993: COMIC MART at the Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Doors open noon. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW.

?? ???? 1993: ORSON SCOTT CARD will be signing at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. WATCH THIS SPACE FOR DETAILS.

28 AUGUST 1993: COMIC MART at the Hotel Arcade, Ladywell Walk, off Hurst Street, Birmingham. Doors open 11am, admission 50p. Contact: Peter Lennon, 15 Yew Tree Close, Batchley, Redditch, B97 6SO (0527 585036).

3-6 SEPTEMBER 1993: CONFRANCISCO. 51st world science fiction convention at the San Francisco Marriott Moskone Convention Center. Guests of Honour: Larry Niven, Tom Digby, Alicia Austin, Jan Howard Finder. MC: Guy Gavriel Kay. Attending US\$110.00, Supporting \$25.00 until 31 March, then \$125.00, \$25.00 until 16 July, \$145 on the door. Contact British Agent: Chris O'Shea, 12 Stannard Road, London, E8 1DB.

1-3 OCTOBER 1993: FANTASYCON XVIII. Midland Hotel, Birmingham, Guests of Honour Peter James and Les Edwards. Contact: 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0TG.

5-7 NOVEMBER 1993: NOVACON 23 the Brum Group's own sf con, at the Royal Angus hotel in the city centre. Guest of honour Stephen Baxter. Attending membership costs £20 until Easter 1993, then £25 until 1st October and £30 on the door. Supporting membership is £8.00 (please note that this will NOT automatically reserve an attending place, but it WILL ensure receipt of all of the convention's publications

and entitle you to vote in the Novas). Although the hotel has agreed to increase the membership ceiling from 300 to 350 people the committee advises you to register early, as they will if necessary turn people away on the door. Further details from Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997).

11 NOVEMBER 1993: **COMIC MART** at the Hotel Arcade, Ladywell Walk, off Hurst Street, Birmingham. Doors open 11am, admission 50p. Contact: Peter Lennon, 15 Yew Tree Close, Batchley, Redditch, B97 6SO (0527 585036).

26-28 NOVEMBER 1993: **CON-YAK**, annual international Beneluxcon, venue probably Altea Hotel, just outside Amsterdam. Guests of honour to be announced. Contact Richard Vermaas, James Wattstraat 13, 1097 DJ Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

1-4 APRIL 1994: **SOU'WESTER**. 45th UK national sf con. Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Guests of honour: Diane Duane, Neil Gaiman, Barbara Hambly, Peter Morwood. Attending £25.00, Supporting £12.50, children 9-14 on 1 April 1994 £12.50. Contact: 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

? MAY 1994: **INCONCEIVABLE**, 2nd 'humour' con in Derby. Attending £15.00, contact 12 Crich Avenue, Littleover, Derby, DE23 6ES.

1-5 SEPTEMBER 1994: **CONADIAN**, 52nd world science fiction convention, at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. Guests of Honour Anne McCaffrey, George Barr, Barry B Longyear, Fan Guest of Honour Robert Runte. Attending US\$85.00, CAN\$95.00, Supporting US\$25.00, CAN\$30.00 until 6 September 1993. Contact British Agent: Helen McCarthy, 147 Francis Road, London, E10 6NT.

24-28 AUGUST 1995: **INTERSECTION**, 53rd worldcon, SECC, Glasgow. Guests of honour Samuel R Delany, Gerry Anderson. Attending £50.00, Supporting £15.00, please note that "Glasgow pre-support and friend benefits will expire on 30 April 1993 - pre-supporters will become non-members and Friends will become supporters." Contact: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, B66 4SH.

27 DECEMBER 1999 - 2 JANUARY 2000: **MILLENIUM**. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a Benelux country or UK). Attending £3.00 (f10.00) *per year*, to be deducted from eventual membership fee (to be announced before 1997). Contact: Malcolm

Reid, 2/R, 9 Airlie Street, Hyndland, Glasgow, G12 9RJ.

Although details are correct to the best of my knowledge, I advise readers to contact organizers prior to travelling.

Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses.

Please mention *the BRUM GROUP NEWS* when replying to listings or advertisements.

JOPHAN REPORT #59

by Martin Tudor

The American science fiction author Keith Laumer died on 23 January, aged 67, reportedly from complications arising from a stroke. Born John Keith Laumer in Syracuse, New York, he was educated at the University of Indiana in Bloomington (1943-44), the University of Stockholm (1947-48) and the University of Illinois in Urbana (1950). He joined the staff at Urbana in 1952, but also served in the United States Air Force from 1952-65, the last six years as a captain.

Laumer became a freelance writer in 1959, the year he sold his first story, also using the pseudonym Anthony Le Baron. His experiences in US Foreign Service inspired Laumer's most popular creation, the inter-planetary diplomat Jame Retief, recently introduced to a new generation through the Malibu comics group.

Of his short stories and approximately 60 novels, he once wrote: "I have been asked if my work is 'relevant', ie. political propaganda. It is not. I prefer to treat themes that have been important to man ever since he became man, and will continue to be important as long as humanity survives: strength and courage, truth and beauty, loyalty and justice, ethics and integrity, kindness and gentleness, and many others."

Roger Weddall, the popular Australian sf fan who attended the 1992 worldcon in Florida as winner of the Down Under Fan Fund, died of pneumonia on 3 December; he was 36 years old and had been undergoing treatment for cancer. Weddall entered fandom through the Melbourne University SF Association in the 1970s, taking over the editorship of the leading Australian newszine *THYME* in the mid-1980s; he and eventual co-editor Peter Burns received the Ditmar Award in 1987 in recognition of their efforts.

Described by Mark Linneman as "one of the great pranksters of Australian fandom", Weddall outraged certain elements in 1991 when he successfully moved to create a new Ditmar category, for "Best Fannish Cat"; others saw the humour in his suggestion, however, and Weddall's own cat Typo duly won. More than 100 fans joined the family at Weddall's funeral, a mark of his popularity. He is survived by his partner, Geoff Roderick, with whom he had lived since 1988.

Following Roger Weddall's death, Phillip Ware has been appointed DUFF administrator pro tem. DUFF donations should still be forwarded to Weddall's address, however (PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065, Australia). The 1993 race is between Dick and Leah Smith (joint platform), Richard Brandt and Charlotte Proctor; the result will be carried in the next edition

Jane Green, who died on 6 December (four days before her eighty-first birthday), may not have been an sf fan but was well known to members of the Solihull Group, MISFiTs and Brum Group.

Pan has bought Stephen Bowkett's first horror novel *THE COMMUNITY*; it will appear next spring under his pseudonym "Ben Leach", rather than his *PEEPING TOM* byline, "Louis P Garou".

The British *ALIENS* Fan Club will hold its first convention on 18 April, at Dunstable's Queensway Hall. Attendance costs £15.00 (£12.00 to club members), contact Post Office Box 11, Liskeard, Cornwall, PL14 6YL.

The legendary Filofax of Magic Labyrinth owner Dave Holmes was stolen shortly before Christmas, along with the telephone numbers of virtually everyone from L Ron Hubbard to Elvis Presley. Dave has requested any contacts whose telephone number would not ordinarily be available to get in touch in order that he can create a new Filofax.

2 March sees the release of *HIGHLANDER: THE GATHERING*, a video fix-up of two episodes from the American television spin-off. Christopher Lambert reprises the role of Connor MacLeod, shortly to return in *HIGHLANDER III: THE MAGICIAN*, although the series focusses on 400 years-old Duncan MacLeod (Adrian Paul).

Other genre releases include *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* (8 March), *THE ROLLER BLADE SEVEN* (10 March), *INTRUDERS* (8 February) and *DELIVER US FROM EVIL* (24 February).

PHANNISH FIZZICKS

by Al Johnston

All you ever wanted to know about Life, the Universe and Everything: Part 3.

So what is this tritanium stuff anyway? What is dilithium? Is it all some 23rd century affectation for putting numbers into the periodic table, or just that extra letters and syllables make it all sound that much more impressive? In which case one wonders why tribbles didn't become tribbles in their transformation from mundane wire frame drying racks in the paper industry to pesky balls of fur on the *ENTERPRISE*. Whatever the reasoning, Starfleet seems to operate with a different set of constituent elements to everyone else.

One probable reason is the presence of ~~smartarse~~ well-educated fans. You know the type: "Lithium doesn't come in pink crystals, burns on contact with water and couldn't power a starship anyway. Besides, if the *ENTERPRISE* were made of titanium, the walls would have to be twenty feet thick or it would crumple like a paper bag." This attempt is futile as these fans are not put off by such tricks; they just write articles like this one instead, also pointing out that with its engines where they are the original *ENTERPRISE* would spend its entire five year mission going round in circles.

Futility, however, has never stopped anyone, so if you must casually interfere with the entire foundation of the cosmos as we know it here's a handy guide:

Hydrogen So named because it gives water when burned, this stuff has such a simple atomic structure that even *ST:NG* couldn't muck about with it. Unless you really want a light gas that explodes frequently; avoid.

Aluminium Avoid. Its use in tinfoil makes it far too mundane. Jazzing it up with prefixes won't work; they've all been nabbed by the aerospace industry. One thing that might work - spell it with the 'i' for the US market; they probably won't recognise it.

Iron	Too boring. Ironically (<i>GRADAM!</i>) it is almost certain to be useful somewhere.	Beryllium	Does nasty things to your lungs, but this idea has already been used. Shame.
Praseodymium	Sounds exotic enough to use without further elaboration. Furthermore, if you talk about magnetism and/or superconductivity in the same sentence, people might even think you know what you're talking about.	Boron	<i>Sounds</i> boring, but is actually the basis for a number of fibre reinforced composite materials. A bit old hat now that Carbon is around.
Dysprosium	Similar comments apply here. Fairly safe to use, as even most metallurgists don't know that much about it.	Carbon	The base element of all polymers and plastics generally. Popular in sf as various super-strong monofilaments or single molecular fibres. Some knowledge of materials science is needed to do this convincingly.
Neodymium	Another one that sounds good. Mostly encountered in lighter flints, but can make magnets etc.	Californium	Chill out dudes.
Technetium	Due to its short half-life all stocks of this are made artificially. It is mostly used in medical applications, but with a few "Di's" or "Meta's" you can use it for just about anything.		So there we are, a brief tour of some of the elements. Materials scientists are currently busy with ceramics; but convincing the general public that it isn't just pottery will take some doing. Don't expect Stabilized Trizirconia warp nacelles much before the <i>Enterprise F</i> .
Bismuth	Do not use at all. Fantasy authors may use it as a name for a Germanic elf if they want to appear (a) humorous, (b) completely stupid. Was actually the middle name of a German Field-Marshal which only goes to show.		
Unnilenium	Apart from not appearing in Tom Lehrer's "Elements" this is (almost) famous for being the heaviest element made so far. Not much use, as its atoms don't hang about long enough to actually do anything.		
Molybdenum	With all those consonants stuck together this is a definite candidate for some extra syllables. A "Poly-" prefix gives a nice hi-tech sound without actually meaning much.		
Iridium	A metal with sound sf ancestry, most famous for positronic brains, but most commonly found in spark plugs. Whole new vistas for insulting robots come into view.		



A

WORD FROM
THE REVIEWS EDITOR

- Bernie Evans

Having helped to edit dozens of book reviews for the *BRUM GROUP NEWS* 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.

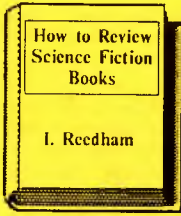
THEY KNOW WHAT BOOKS THEY GAVE ME; so I needn't bother heading the page with the title, author, publisher, price and page count, they already have all that information.

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!

OOOOO

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



Book Reviews

GENERATION WARRIORS by Anne McCaffrey & Elizabeth Moon
Orbit, 345 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia.

This is volume three of the "Planet Pirate" series. Having adored volume one, *SASSINAK*, I greedily pounced on this the moment I saw it. I haven't read volume two, *THE DEATH OF SLEEP*, but *GENERATION WARRIORS* ticks up at the end of Volume one.

The main characters are Commander Sassinak, the sophisticated and sexy 45 year old commander of a Fleet Cruiser, and Lunzie, her great-great-great grandmother, who survived 40 years in cold sleep to wake up younger than Sassinak. There are also a couple of shape changing Welfts and dozens of handsome young ensigns on call for our two heroines' pleasure, an intoxicating mix. They have all signed up to follow Sassinak in her single-minded mission to pursue and murder the Planet Pirates who destroyed her life and her family in volume one. She also wants to prove that the wealthy Paraden family are running a pan-galactic slavery and colony destruction racket. Neither of these aims are part of the normal operating procedures of a fleet officer and her cruiser, of course.

Her official mission is to protect a witness to a pirate ship's slave-snatch attempt. She also has to explain just how she happened to be in the right place at the right time to stop the pirates. All this means she has to hang around in space for three months waiting for the justice machinery to do its work, during which time all her companions go off having their own adventures, and almost getting killed. Sassinak is bored most of the time.

I can't summarise how all the threads of this complex tale mingle into a semi-coherent finale, suffice to say that it's complicated! I understand that McCaffrey writes the outlines, leaving the rest to her collaborator. My overall impression is that this was written in a hurry, as opposed to volume one, in which the prose had been lovingly honed, blue pencilled and re-written. Future volumes can only improve, they certainly can't be any worse!

JAGO by Kim Newman
Grafton, 665 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book contains everything - including, at one point - a kitchen sink. The result is a tapestry that is far too large to take in. Principally, the story takes place over a few days towards the end of a hot dry summer, in the small Somerset village of Alder. Anthony Jago leads the quasi-religious commune which goes under the name of Agapemone, The Abode of Love. Each year the group has run a pop festival in the grounds of the Manor house it occupies. Although the story centres around Jago there are a number of threads woven around him.

One of these concerns Paul Forrestier and his girlfriend Hazel, who are house-sitting for friends. Until now they have had little contact with Agapeone, but Hazel is invited to sell the pots she makes at the festival, and this sows the seeds for her being sucked into Jago's sphere of influence. Jago himself is a wild and powerful Talent and Hazel's arrival is the catalyst for mayhem to break loose. The body count is astronomical before order is duly restored.

If Newman had stuck to this one strand, the book would have been far more manageable. As it is, too many other characters are also pursued through the pages, each of which make excellent stories in themselves but, gathered together here, produce an unwieldy volume. Many of the scenes are short and sharp and would do very well in a visual format, but even then it would be very difficult to keep track of the huge number of players.

AFTER THE KING edited by Martin H Greenberg
Pan, 534 pp, £6.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Subtitled "Stories in Honour of J R R Tolkien", this is an anthology of fantasy short stories (completely unauthorised by the Tolkien estate, if you care). There is a foreward by Jane Yolen about the influence of Tolkien on fantasy fiction. Several of the stories have been recommended for the Hugo Award, according to *MATRIX*. They are "Faith" by Poul and Karen Anderson, "Silver or Gold" by Emma Bull, and "A Long Night's Vigil at the Temple" by Robert Silverberg. I would add "Reave the Just" by Stephen Donaldson, "In the Season of the Dressing of the Wells" by John Brunner, "The Conjure Man" by Charles de Lint, and "Death and the Lady" by Judith Tarr.

Discworld completists will of course buy the book just for Terry Pratchett's tale of

Cohen the Barbarian and the "Troll Bridge", (Why does Terry never seem to appear in the awards ? Maybe they have rules against people who sell too many books.) Other good humorous stories include "The Halfling House" by Dennis L McKiernan and "Revolt of the Sugar Plum Fairies" by Mike Resnick. By the way, I was amazed to find out from the list of contributors that Peter S Beagle wrote the screenplay for the ill-fated *LORD OF THE RINGS* film.

Unusually for an anthology of this sort there are no real turkey stories, the quality varies from good to excellent. It is well worth buying.

SONGS OF EARTH AND POWER by Greg Bear
Legend, 693 pp, £9.99 "C" format

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

THE INFINITY CONCERTO, which forms the first part of this book, was the first novel that Greg Bear ever wrote. In the afterword, he tells how it was rejected for publication and more than ten years passed before, now an established writer, he revised it extensively and it saw print at last. It was followed after a couple of years by a sequel, *THE SERPENT MAGE*, and the two are combined here into a single massive volume.

Like many before him, he chose to set his first foray into fantasy in the realm of Faerie. By doing so the aspiring author can free himself of the shackles of realism and allow his imagination free rein in any blend he may choose of "fact" - whatever has been written before - and "fiction" - whatever else he can dream up for himself. This effort starts well, if conventionally enough, with young Michael Perrin passing through a gateway between worlds and finding himself in as strange a place as was ever invented. The longer it goes on, however, the worse it gets, and matters were not helped for me by a printing fault which resulted in the omission of thirty two pages near the beginning. I just know that those pages contained vitally important information which would have helped to make sense of what followed. As it is the book just meandered on with no discernible sense of purpose. Michael Perrin undergoes training (What in ? What for ?), goes on a journey (Where to ? Why ?) and, without really trying, defeats the enemy whose shadow has been cast over the whole story. Nothing else is left but to use his new powers to find his way back through the dimensions and pick up the pieces of his old life.

I had hoped at first that *THE SERPENT MAGE* would be better. It seemed that it was

all going to be set in Los Angeles instead of the Realm, but Michael Perrin (the fool !) arranges a performance of the long-lost Infinity Concerto and soon all the barriers are coming down, the Realm is disintegrating and the peoples of Faerie are invading the Earth. His old enemy returns and has to be defeated all over again, so that harmony between the races can be established.

I thought I knew Greg Bear as a writer of excellent, if somewhat fanciful, hard sf. In reviving this earlier effort for publication he did himself (and us) no favour and it should have been allowed to remain in decent obscurity. I derived neither interest nor enjoyment from it and have rarely been so glad to read the last page of a book. I would not recommend it to anyone.

THE MASTER OF WHITESTORM by Janny Wurts
Grafton, 413 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

On the whole, this is a very enjoyable fantasy novel. It begins with the hero in an impossible situation, and carries on dropping him in it until virtually the last page. The novel is the story of a life, that of Korendir, and has the inherent problem of packing a long period of time into a manageable number of pages. Janny Wurts copes with this by focusing on the highlights, the times when Korendir is pursuing some goal, and by ignoring the quieter times between. This gives the volume the feel of a collection of stories instead of a continuous narrative. In some ways it is both.

The book opens on board the Mhurga galley, *NALLGA*. Haldeth, a smith, has been chained to an oar for seven years, ever since a raiding party slew his wife and daughters and captured him. The man beside him has not spoken in the three years they have shared a bench. Then Korendir declares his intention to escape - something that no-one has ever done before. This is the first of a number of seemingly impossible challenges that Korendir undertakes. His aim is to accumulate enough money to build an impregnable fortress. The dream is realised as Whitestorm, the castle on the cliffs over which an elemental once ruled, until Korendir challenged it. But the triumphs are not without cost.

Vast numbers of people die as a result of Korendir's actions. Some of them are innocent and he has to live with this burden. He is portrayed as haunted rather than callous, and most men would have gone insane if they had endured a tenth of what Korendir has. Why he doesn't is partially explained as his

heritage is revealed, and this is perhaps a small weakness in the book. He could perhaps have been driven even closer to the edge. The other fault with the book lies with the editing. In one adventure Korendir pits himself against were-leopards (savage carnivores which are cat in the day and human at night). It is marred by inconsistencies that could have been avoided by judicial proof-reading.

THE COUNT OF ELEVEN by Ramsey Campbell
Warner Books, 374 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

You wouldn't think that a pleasant, sympathetic character could be a serial killer, or that the story of his serial killings would involve a lot of humour, but here is just such a book. Jack Orchard is a family man with a good (though perhaps zany) sense of humour. He is odd, but perhaps no more so than most of us. He does, though, become obsessive about luck, good and bad, as anybody could. The most horrific thing about this non-supernatural horror novel is how one can believe in, and even justify, nearly all of Jack's actions, including multiple murder using a most dreadful and bizarre method. Campbell handles Jack Orchard and the whole novel beautifully up to the last chapter, when - but you wouldn't expect me to give away the ending, would you? Let's just say it's one of Campbell's best novels, with something new to say about serial killers, and with a disappointing ending. But for most of its length it's a terrific read, absorbing and entertaining.

THE FACE OF THE WATERS by Robert Silverberg
Grafton, 428 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter Day.

It is the year 2450. Humanity is scattered among the stars from an Earth destroyed 200 years ago. Hydros is an all-water world, its only solid footing the occasional floating islands built by the low-technology natives. Without the possibility of a space-port, any humans on the planet are permanently exiled there to eke out a marginal existence, barely tolerated by the natives.

After living there for several generations the human colony on Sorve Island is evicted. They must find somewhere else to live. Under the obsessed, unstable leadership of Delagard the ship-owner the flotilla sets out, only to discover that no other colony is willing to receive such a large influx of immigrants. And every bizarre life-form in the ocean seems to be out to destroy them.

Their only other possible destination is the mysterious, strictly taboo location known as the Face of the Waters. But no one wants to go there, and disention breaks out when it is discovered that this in fact was Delgard's original objective, and he has been navigating in that direction from the start. As they head out into unfrequented waters their troubles multiply.

This is good, solid workmanlike st of the sort we've come to expect from this author. Nothing outstandingly memorable, just a rugged adventure story in the best traditions of the genre. Recommended.

CHANGELING by Chris Robeck
Roc, 325 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a novel tie in to the *SHADOWRUN* role playing game. In spite of this, it is not at all bad. *CHANGELING* is set in the 21st century, with a cyberpunk background of bionic implants, powerful corporations and cyberspace netrunning. The twist is that Magic has returned to the world, so there are dwarven mechanics, elven netrunners, orkish streetgangs and 9-to 5 wizards. If you think this all sounds silly, you're not the only one.

Peter Clariss wakes up one day to find he is suffering from UGE (Unexplained Genetic Expression) into the "homo sapiens ingentis" form. What? It means he has just turned into a troll - nine foot tall, green, ugly and stupid. Since he started out as a human genius this still leaves him brighter than most humans, but no one treats him that way. He dedicates his life to reversing the cruel trick nature has played on him.

It is good to see life in the ghetto in the *SHADOWRUN* universe. Usually orks and trolls show up only to provide player characters with target practice. *CHANGELING* is about learning to be happy with what you are, not the most original of themes, but worth repeating. Otherwise it is just good solid action adventure fiction.

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC by Terry Pratchett
Corgi Graphic Novel, 128 pp, £6.99

THE YATTERING AND JACK by Clive Barker
Eclipse Graphic Novel, 96 pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

A long time ago - I think it was in *THE SPACE MERCHANTS* - a future was postulated in which the greatest works of literature were only available in comic books, complete with speech balloons and everything. Now the tip of the iceberg begins to show as well-known

sf and fantasy books and stories are re-published as graphic novels.

In the case of Terry Pratchett's first "Discworld" novel it just doesn't work. The problem is that Terry's humour is essentially verbal, his best jokes depending on witty asides, sly allusions and grotesque puns. This kind of thing simply does not translate into a visual format, and retaining any of it in the form of words rather defeats the whole purpose. A reader new to the story might get something out of it, but I am sure anyone familiar with it would agree that it is far from enhanced by this new presentation, which was illustrated by Steven Ross.

Not so the Clive Barker, illustrated by John Bolton and Hector Gomez. Here we have two stories from the "Books of Blood" with which he first made his name, and which in my opinion retain a far greater impact than much of his later work. The difference between Pratchett and Barker is, of course, that the latter's images are much more visual. More than that, his imaginings are so far beyond the capacity of any normal imagination that the average reader may have difficulty in doing them justice, however well written the stories may be. An artist sufficiently well in tune with the writer can therefore add a whole new dimension by helping the reader to form the required visualisation. This is excellently done in the title story which occupies the first two-thirds of the book, although the shorter story "How Spoilers Breed", which makes up the rest, is less dependent on the illustrative technique. I felt that this worked much better than *THE COLOUR OF MAGIC*.

On balance however, I must tend to the view that there is no place for this kind of thing in the world of proper reading. To an extent, it may be a matter of markets and audiences; perhaps these comic books will help the authors to reach a wider audience by appealing to readers who can't really read. Nevertheless, literature is literature, and reading is reading, and there can be no substitute for real books aimed at real readers, who can understand whole sentences.

IN THE REALM OF THE WOLF by David Gemmell
Legend, 296 pp, £9.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This is "Waylander" volume two, and is set some years after *WAYLANDER*. With his wife Danyal dead after a riding accident, Dakeyras (aka Waylander) is living in mourning with his daughter Miriel, and is totally unbothered by outside events. Dakeryas is suddenly plunged into action as bounty

hunters are seeking him out. There is a price on his head, and he must find out why, and who is paying.

Thrown once more into the role of Waylander, Dakeyras fights his way to the answers, only to find that different questions are being asked. Khesa Khan, the Nadir shaman, requests his assistance and, with the help of assorted aides, Waylander again accepts his destiny.

As one would expect, the enemy comes in the shape of an evil sorcerer, in this instance it is Zhu Chao, a repulsive power hungry dabbler in evil arts. He knows the threat Waylander presents, and attempts to kill him. The attempts prove futile as Waylander, helped on occasion by "The Thirty", proves his mettle.

A classic "good versus evil" plot is enlivened by the main characters being human, and by Waylander's dark side (even when he is fighting for good). It is further enlivened by such characteristics as Ekodas' reticence, Senta's egoism and so on. Gemmell plays the themes well by tying the numerous sub-plots into an elaborate whole that presents the reader with much to ponder and enjoy. Enjoyable it is, with a nice touch within the Epilogue once the tale is concluded. Fantasy writers take careful note - this is how it should be done.

VALIS by Philip K Dick
Grafton, 271 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter Day.

Normally I hate reviewing reissues of old books, and the only reason I took this on was because I've been trying to get hold of it for some time now. The trouble with reviewing any of the works of Philip K Dick is that anything that can be said about them has already been said, often more than once. It was his peculiar genius to be able, at his best, to write books that were at one and the same time profoundly metaphysical, irresistibly comic, and heartbreakingly tragic.

VALIS is one of Dick's more cryptic pieces of writing. In it, Horselover Fat, a crazy burnt-out victim of the drug culture, receives divine revelations from a mysterious cosmic source that calls itself Valis. But what is Valis? Is it, as one theory states, an alien satellite beaming information into his head? Or is it God? Or, perhaps, some sort of collective consciousness making itself felt? Or is it all just a mad delusion? A powerful and baffling book, this is a definite must for any Philip K Dick fans who do not already have a copy.

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