

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

December 1994

Issue 279

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

GROUP CHAIRMAN - BERNIE EVANS, SECRETARY - RICHARD STANDAGE, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,  
TREASURER - HELENA BOWLES, PUBLICITY OFFICER - STEVE JONES, ORDINARY MEMBERS - MICK EVANS &  
DAVID HUNTER, NOVACON 24 CHAIRMAN - RICHARD STANDAGE, NOVACON 25 CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON.

**NB: There is no formal meeting this month, so unless you are going to the Beer & Skittles Evening on the 16 December (which you aren't unless you've already paid up as it SOLD OUT at the last meeting sorry!) we look forward to seeing you next at the AGM and Auction on, Friday 20 January 1995, 7.45 for 8.00pm, admittance: FREE.**

**Merry Christmas and  
a Happy New Year!**

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs Function Room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are £10.00 per person, or £13.50 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the treasurer Helena Bowles 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 CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. For details of WAVE's competitive prices contact:  
Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road,  
Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG,  
(tel: 021 327 3023.)

Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for typing the book reviews, STEVE GREEN, CRITICAL WAVE and WHAT'S ON for the news in the Jophan Report and Events listing, ROBERT SNEDDON for the conreports and TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The December BSFG Meeting  
16 December 1994  
BEER & SKITTLES EVENING  
at the Samson & Lion,  
Wordsley,  
SOLD OUT!

23, 28, 29 DECEMBER 1994: *SPEED* starring Keanu Reeves showing at the Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, at 1.30pm, 3.45pm, 8pm and 8.30pm. Call 021 643 7277 for further details.

20 JANUARY 1995: BSFG AGM & AUCTION, 7.45 for 8pm in the upstairs room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham city centre.

17 FEBRUARY 1995: DAVID GEMMELL (to be confirmed) will be addressing the BSFG, 7.45 for 8pm in the upstairs room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham city centre.

10-11 APRIL 1995: *BLADERUNNER - THE DIRECTOR'S CUT* showing at the Castle, Wellingborough from 7.30pm, tickets £2.00. Contact: The Castle, Castle Way, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1XA or phone the Box Office on 01933 270007.

14-17 APRIL 1995: *CONFABULATION* 46th UK National sf con at the Britannia International Hotel, London. GoHs Lois McMasters Bujold, Bob Shaw and Roger Robinson. Attending £20.00 before 31 December 1994, £25.00 from 1 January 1995 until 31 March 1995, supporting £10.00 until 31 March 1995. Contact: Confabulation, 3 York Street, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH.

17 APRIL 1995: *ALIEN, ALIENS* and *ALIEN 3* showing at the Castle, Wellingborough from 2pm, tickets £2.00 per film or £5.00 for all three. Contact: The Castle, Castle Way, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1XA or phone the Box Office on 01933 270007.

24-28 AUGUST 1995: *INTERSECTION*, 53rd world-con, Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, Glasgow. Guests of honour Samuel R Delany, Gerry Anderson, Vint Clarke. Attending £80.00. Contact: Admail 335, Glasgow, G2 1BR, Scotland.

3-5 NOVEMBER 1995: *NOVACON 25* the Brum Group's own science fiction convention at a new venue - the Chamberlain Hotel, Alcester Street, Birmingham. Guests of Honour: Brian W Aldiss, Harry Harrison and Bob Shaw, with Special Guest Iain Banks. Attending membership is £25.00 until Easter 1995. Supporting membership costs £8.50. Progress Report #1 and hotel booking forms are available, deadline for hotel bookings is 20th July 1995. Contact CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 25". Room rates are now only £17.50 per person per night in twin/double and £35.00 pppn in a single, prices include full English breakfast.

5-8 APRIL 1996: *EVOLUTION* 47th UK National Convention, the Radisson Edwardian Hotel at

Heathrow. Guests of honour: Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Jack Cohen. Attending £20.00, supporting £12.00 until 18th April 1995. Contact: 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

27 DEC 1999 - 2 JAN 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (fi0.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee (to be announced before 1997). Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

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*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.*

*If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor.*

*If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them of) please feel free to write a report/review and send it to the editorial address.*

**BIRMINGHAM  
SCIENCE FICTION  
GROUP:  
COMMITTEE POSTS  
1995**

by Bernie Evans

With the A.G.M. looming on the 20th of January 1995 it's time for all you enthusiastic members to send in your nominations for committee posts. You can, of course, nominate from the floor at the meeting if you wish, but if you KNOW you will be standing, send in your written nomination (and platform

of no more than 250 words) so it can be printed in the January edition of *BRUM GROUP NEWS* for everyone to see.

Written nominations must reach Martin Tudor by the 20th of December 1994. He can be contacted either at the Beer and Skittles Evening or by post to 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

So, what positions are there ?

#### **CHAIRMAN**

Will chair and keep order at all meetings, and will also hold regular committee meetings (currently on the Wednesday following the Brum Group meeting). Will contact speakers, arrange accommodation where necessary and ensure they get to the meeting on time.

#### **SECRETARY**

Should be able to type, attend all committee meetings and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee Members. Likewise the A.G.M. or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

#### **TREASURER**

If you don't know what a treasurer does, don't bother to apply !

#### **NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

Has to produce the newsletter every month. Access to a computer and desktop publishing software and/or a word processor is an advantage, but not a necessity, a typewriter and a pair of scissors will suffice. The ability to type AND meet a monthly deadline ARE a necessity, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

#### **PUBLICITY OFFICER**

Will produce A4 posters, A5 flyers, and so on for meetings, and arrange for them to be displayed in local shops, libraries, and as many other outlets as possible. Will also produce general publicity for the Group, and contact radio and tv if necessary. Enthusiasm and the ability to produce new IDEAS are an important factor.

In addition two other ORDINARY MEMBERS may be appointed by the Committee any time during the year at the discretion of the Committee.

So, that's who we need. Which do YOU want to do ?

## COMMITTEE POSTS: UPDATE

So far a few people have come forward. CAROL MORTON has expressed an interest in standing for CHAIRMAN, SARAH FREAKLEY for PUBLICITY OFFICER, STEVE JONES for TREASURER and I, MARTIN TUDOR, have confirmed I'll be standing for NEWSLETTER EDITOR. But that still leaves the post of SECRETARY and of course you are welcome to stand against any of the above. Please contact me as soon as possible and by the 20th December at the latest if you want to publish your platform in the January newsletter.

## CONVENTION REPORTS

Intercon 94,  
12-14 August 1994  
A report by Robert Sneddon

Another con, another country, this time sunny Norway. This was a change, the sun I mean; the last time I was in Oslo it rained steadily. The weather was confusing the natives, as well as causing unaccustomed cases of sunburn.

So how was Oslo, I hear you ask? The good news is that the country is stuffed full of beautiful busty girls with long blonde hair, all about five foot eight tall. The bad news is their boyfriends are all about six foot three and muscled like extras from a Kirk Douglas Viking movie. Ah well.

Intercon was something like a student-run Unicon. The site was a rather old and tacky University conference centre near Oslo city centre. The main program was held in a "village hall" type room, with an high stage at one end. British Guest of Honour Brian Aldiss used this to some effect, declaiming from on high about his experiences in Turkmenistan, an obscure bit of the old Soviet Union. American Guest of Honour C J Cherryh preferred to come down to our level when she spoke about the "Sense of Wonder" that led most of us into sf.

About half the program was in English - this was reflected in the half-price membership for those of us who couldn't speak any Scandinavian languages. The film program was via tv projector, which, as con tradition demanded, ran for about ten minutes before overheating and shutting down. There was a separate video program which ran in a room

behind the the main hall. The traditional TV and VCR and three-of-an-audience produced enough noise via a thin partition to annoy people attending program items next door. The gamers congregated in a glass booth off the main lounging-around area. Refreshments were provided by fans operating a waffle toaster, coffe percolator and varme polser (hot-dog) boiler in the concourse. The centre itself was teetotal, so the alcohol-seekers amongst us gravitated outside the con itself. The Blue Monk bar, round the corner served almost-cheap lager at £2.40 a pint (a bargain by Norwegian standards) but you had to put up with live bands every night.

Martin Hoare appeared with a Canadian friend, Jim (Neo) Fox, in tow. He spent most of his first convention behind the food counter - an odd way to start, perhaps, but I think he enjoyed himself. I spent some time with some German fans until one of them had their car broken into. Scandinavian SMOFs (Secret Masters of Fandom) are rare, perhaps, but even I had heard of Ahrvid Engholm, even if I couldn't spell his name properly. We spent some time discussing the sorry state of Fandom and how to fix it, but luckily for the rest of you, we didn't write anything down and forgot it all by the next day.

Britfandom was represented further by Paul Dornier, and on the Sunday night the infamous and irrepressible Nina Watson (her description, not mine) turned up. The total attendance was about 120, down on the last couple of Intercons, which are now being run on a three year schedule. Economies meant that the badges, ungainly slabs of thin plastic with printed stickers, had been recycled from the previous Intercon. Even so, the organisers had made an effort and brought over two foreign Guests of Honour, who entered into the spirit of the thing with some gusto.

The Dead Dog party was held on the Sunday night at Heidi Lyshol's flat a long bus-ride (or 15 minutes walk, depending on how you got there) from the con hall. There was food and drink and C J Cherryh working her merry way through the various flavours of alcohol available. It turned out she was fond of single malts and I tempted her with a description of the Pot Still pub in Glasgow, a bar famous for its collection of Scotch whiskies. Maybe she'll be over for Intersection...

So how was Intercon? Not so different as I had hoped. I got hold of some program books from previous cons - they talk of midnight tram parties and other strange goings on. Maybe next time...

Albacon '94,  
21-24 October 1994  
A report by Robert Sneddon

My home convention, back in the Central Hotel for the first time in three years. I noticed they still hadn't fixed the hinges on one of the doors as I watched the concom put together yet another Albacon. Okay what makes an Albacon an Albacon? Well, it's held in Glasgow, but so are other cons - Speculation in '91, Star Trek cons every year, even a Unicorn, but they aren't Albacons and it shows. It's not the Central Hotel, as the Star Trek people use it regularly. The guests - ah, there it starts to get interesting. The Albacons have always had (mostly American) big-name Guests of Honour such as Spinrad, Haldeman, Cherryh and even Howlin' Harlan, but other conventions have started bringing in far-flung guests (Wincon III invited Algis Budrys but the curse of King Alfred struck once more, Lunicon last year had Zelazny etc.) Is it the programming then? There are many different streams certainly, with gaming and a lot of video and film rooms, but there were only really two fixed streams carrying the regular mix of talks, quizzes, Masquerade etc. Perhaps the con bar holds the secret. Open till three in the morning, it was the centre of the con for most people. Some bright spark had brought in a couple of pinball machines (Star Trek and The Addams Family) which did a roaring trade. But other cons have bars and late licences, and games as well, and they certainly aren't Albacons. What's the secret? I don't know, but my memory keeps the flavour of Albacons in a special place. Perhaps it's the people.

As usual for an Albacon, there were a lot of local walk-ins and one-day memberships, pushing the total attendance above four hundred. The principal Guest of Honour was Robert Asprin, who now lives in the French Quarter of New Orleans. He was a morning person, sitting up till the bar closed, drinking Jamiesons over ice, talking to fans and fellow pros impartially. Chris Boyce listened avidly as Bob, an ex-accountant with Xerox, explained the art of war between the taxman and the self-employed author - "I always carry one of my books with me, so that when I'm in a bar and somebody asks me what do I do, I tell them 'I'm an author' and show them the book. That evening's now a business promotion and the bar tab is deductible." The 'local' GOH was children's author Douglas Hill. The artist GOH was Fangorn, although Don Maltz also came over from America with his wife, author Janny Wurtz and Jody Lyn Nye.

Local boys Chris Boyce and Ian M. Banks turned up, while Peter Morwood and Diane Duane dropped in from Ireland.

The most popular event by far was the chemical Son et Lumiere (trans: bang'n'flash) extravaganza by Prof. John Salthouse, demonstrating just how loud soap bubbles can be when they go 'pop' (when filled with a mixture of propane and oxygen). I had brought along a pair of ear defenders (which came in quite useful) and carefully stayed upwind of the fumes from the white phosphorus burning in a flask of oxygen. I picked up some useful tips, such as how to distil LOX using liquid nitrogen. The hotel manager was looking somewhat apprehensive as the chandeliers in the main hall rattled and jumped during the more exuberant demonstrations.

The Masquerade was a little bit light this year, with only eight entries but all good quality. The costumers seem to be saving their energies for next August at the Big Red Shed, so I suspect the 95 Eastercon will not see best efforts by the regulars. As an aside, the Intersection membership drive did well, as did their volunteer hunt. A site visit was organised on the Saturday. The dealers room was larger than usual for a convention away from the centre of Britain, with Ken and Joyce Slater, Fantasy Centre and Andromeda all making a welcome appearance north of the Border. The art show was a disappointment despite two attending pros, with a lot of blank display space visible.

Impressions - A four day con where I didn't get a lot of sleep and did get a lot of enjoyment. Plenty of people about with some new faces from the Glasgow area. Bob Asprin was very approachable, especially if you bought a drink for him. I spent a lot of time in the anime room with Harry Payne (recently married to weregopher Omega, and smiling a lot) watching some seriously silly stuff. The hotel staff were somewhat bemused by the backrub sessions organised in the bar, as people stepped over prone bodies being massaged by various members of rubeound fandom. I drove back home on Tuesday morning in zombie mode, listening to the car engine playing the Star Trek theme tune (bloody pinball machine!!!).

The committee said "Albacon 96!" Everybody said "Great idea!". The committee said "Help us run it!" Everybody said " ". See you all 35 million seconds after Intersection, same con, same station (Central, that is)...

*We are always interested in receiving con reports and film or theatre reviews, contact the editorial address. I*

## JOPHAN REPORT #81

"The lovely Jackie McRobert", to quote the lady herself, "who is now working for Inter-section (is there no end to her madness), requires the help of Fandom." Given the fact that she's been going out with Ian Sorensen for sometime now I thought it was psychiatric help she needed... "She is looking for information on all British fannish fan clubs. She is already in possession of a comprehensive list of media fan clubs. Ideally she is looking for time and place of meeting and, if possible, contact name for each." Please address your responses to: Jackie McRobert, 75 Balmalloch Road, Kilsyth, Glasgow, G65 9NS.

There were two surprises in the Nova Awards this year with Greg Pickersgill picking up the awards for both fan writer and fanzine, though no surprise in the fan artist category which was won by D West. The full breakdown follows, this year there were again just over fifty eligible ballots cast, the figure in brackets indicates the points scored.

**BEST FANZINE:** 1. RASTUS JOHNSON'S CAKEWALK ed Greg Pickersgill (137), 2. MORIARTY'S REVENGE ed Dave Hicks (44), 3. ATTITUDE ed Michael Abbott, John Dallman, Pam Wells (42), 4. DRIVEL & DROOL ed Mike D Siddall and EMPTIES ed Martin Tudor (both 31), 6. PLATYPUS ed Simon Ounsley (23), 7. ANSIBLE ed Dave Langford (21), 8. BOB ed Ian Sorensen (18), 9. ETRANGER ed Steve Glover (14), THINGUMYBOB ed Chuck Connor (11), 11. NEVER QUITE ARRIVING ed Christina Lake (10), 12. THE STARTLED BUNNY ed Jackie McRobert and OBSESSIONS ed Bridget Hardcastle (9), 14. THE OLAF ALTERNATIVE/OUTHOUSE ed Ken Cheslin (8), 15. THE WRONG LEGGINGS ed Lilian Edwards (7), 16. SLUBBERDEGULLION ed Nigel E Richardson and READING MATTERS ed Tibs (6), 18. EYEBALLS IN THE SKY ed Tony Berry, CYBERSPACE ed Keith Cosslett, CYBERER BUNNY ed Tara & Robert Glover, ORMOLU ed Ann Green (5), 22. DREAMBERRY WINE ed Mike Don and FTT ed Joseph Nicholas & Judith Hanna (4), 24. GAIJIN ed Steve Green and FANS ACROSS THE WORLD NEWSLETTER ed Bridget Wilkinson (3), 26. TASH ed Tommy Ferguson and ERG ed Terry Jeeves (1).

**BEST FANWRITER:** 1. GREG PICKERSGILL (104), 2. Dave Langford (52), 3. Mike D Siddall (45), 4. Simon Ounsley (40), 5. Ian Sorensen (28), 6. Dave Hicks (26), 7. Christina Lake (24), 8. Martin Tudor and Nigel E Richardson

(19), 10. Steve Glover (13), 11. Jackie McRobert (12), 12. Ann Green (11), 13. Tara & Robert Glover, 'Bug' (Bridget Hardcastle) and Lilian Edwards (6), 16. Mike Abbott and David Redd (5), 18. John Richards, Mike Dunn, D West and D M Sherwood (3), 22. Joseph Nicholas, Tibs, Catherine McAulay, Tony Berry, Jenny Glover, Judith Hanna, Graham Joyce, Steve Green and Chris Bell (1).

**BEST FANARTIST:** 1. D WEST (125), 2. Shep (David Kirkbride) (86), 3. Dave Mooring (56), 4. Tim Groome (32), 5. Dave Hicks (18), 6. Sue Mason (15), 7. Jim Barker and Steve Jeffery (7), 9. Jackie Duckworth (6), 10. Tom Abba (5), 11. Bridget Hardcastle, Ann Green, Harry Bell, Terry Jeeves and Dave Harwood (3), 16. Coreldraw, Teddy and Alan Hunter (1).

Birmingham based sf artist David A Hardy has instructed a firm of US attorneys to sue the sf magazine STARLOG for infringement of copyright following its alleged unauthorized release of trading cards featuring six of his paintings.

Hardy learned of the cards at Novacon 23 last year, when UK dealer David Holmes asked him to autograph the six bearing his artwork. The set, distributed for STARLOG by World Class Marketing of Rhode Island, also included illustrations by Ron Miller, Chesley Bonestall, Eddie Jones and others.

"The problem," Hardy told CRITICAL WAVE (in its latest issue available for just £1.95 from Martin Tudor at the BRUM GROUP NEWS editorial address), "was that none of the artists had been consulted in advance, or paid any reproduction fees!" An approach to STARLOG's Norman Jacobs failed to resolve matters, Jacobs claiming the cards were aimed to "try and help infuse some life into space art enthusiasts" and stating that he had spent "an amazing amount of money" promoting space art. The artists did not appreciate his efforts, he added, a response he found "annoying".

A US\$300 cheque was later received by Hardy, who declined to cash it and instead consulted Miller before placing the dispute in the hands of attorneys Rogers & Killeen, whose fees will be "a small percentage of a successful legal action."

## STOP PRESS

Congratulations to Brum Group Treasurer Helena Bowles and Novacon 24 Chairman Richard Standage on the birth of their son, Danesh Standage-Bowles. Weighing 8lb Danesh was born on Friday 9th December by Caesarian section, both mother and baby are healthy and well.

THE VERY EASY SF  
CHRISTMAS PUZZLE

by Stan Eling



Only use squares with letters in them.

Decide which square you must start at, write down the letter in that square then move to a square next to it, but not diagonally. (You are not permitted to move diagonally or into a square that you have already occupied) Write down the letter in the second square and move to a third, repeat this procedure until you have entered every square once only. If you have travelled through the squares by the correct route the chain of letters you have written down will split into words forming the titles of fourteen SF novels.

Please send your list of novels to the editor, Martin Tudor, at 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG, to arrive no later than the 6th of January 1994. The answers will be published in the January newsletter and winning entries will be put in 'a hat' and a winner drawn at the AGM on the 20th January 1995.

## BOOK REVIEWS

RAIDERS OF THE LOST CARPARK by Robert Rankin  
Corgi, 350 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

Two things saddened me about this book, firstly, that it wasn't up to the standard of the first Rankin book I read, and secondly, that I had read *that* one. This novel (if indeed there is any novelty about it) continues the story of Cornelius Murphy and his diminutive friend Tuppe as they explore the Forbidden Zones. When you try to mould a flat map of the world around a same scale globe there is too much paper - these are the Forbidden Zones.

Cornelius and Tuppe use an ice-cream van with special chimes to enter zones, and manage to release Hugo Rune, Cornelius' father. Together they encounter the minions of the Boss, a sinister figure who enjoys a quite wrong reputation in our world (well, not with me anyway - he drains money from parents by moral blackmail, and anually invades shopping centres and holds sway).

I feel that my review may make the book sound too interesting. Take my advice, don't bother with it, and note how well the words "Rankin" and "competence" fit together, especially if you say them quickly.

THE LIGHTLESS DOME: Book 1 in the Apotheosis Trilogy

by Douglas Hill

Pan, 304 pp, £4.99, p/b

THE LEAFLESS FOREST: Book 2 in the Apotheosis Trilogy

by Douglas Hill

Pan, 294 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Douglas Hill is an author with a large number of books to his credit, including non-fiction and childrens science fiction. These are his first full length fantasy novels for adults.

THE LIGHTLESS DOME begins promisingly. Red Cordell is a stuntman turned actor working as bit part player on the set of a second rate fantasy film. He finds a sword in the props room and while posing with it in front of the mirror (before going out to meet his latest girlfriend) he and it are whisked into another world. The sword has been summoned by Aurilia, one of the Circle of Nine who lead the Sisterhood of witches. This is

a world where magic works. Red and his new found friends embark on an expedition to rescue the princess from the wicked sorcerer, who is also kidnapping members of the sisterhood.

The second volume, THE LEAFLESS FOREST, is almost a continuation from the first. Having disposed of one evil sorcerer, Prince Phaedran feels the best way to deal with the next is by attacking him in his stronghold with as large an army as he can muster. Foolish, one might think, but the only alternative seems to be waiting for the sorcerer to emerge with enormous power and conquer the continent.

Although competently written, these are standard fantasy quest novels, the nucleus of the party encountering a series of perils while the body count mounts up around them. There is nothing that makes them stand out from others of the genre, but the series will probably be enjoyed by dyed-in-the-wool fantasy fans.

MEN AT ARMS by Terry Pratchett

Corgi, 381 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

Welcome again to Ankh-Morpork, city of a billion stenches and a river which hasn't quite set solid yet. Law and order in the city is dependent on the Thieves Guild, who viciously stamp out unfranchised crime, and the small city watches. The night watch, seen in GUARDS! GUARDS!, is facing an enlightened campaign for ethnic balance (dwarves and trolls welcome, but don't expect them to forget their enmity) and equal opportunity (this time they've gone too far - they've appointed a w----! You know *they* can't be counted on and are unpredictable at certain times of the month).

Captain Simes, corporal Carrot, sergeant Colon and Angus (whose physique demanded some heavy hammering of a breastplate by the armourer) also face a murderous thief who has dared to steal a secret weapon long suppressed by the Assassins Guild.

The action is frantic and the jokes in ready supply. I particularly enjoyed the dwarf-troll feud and the city landscape architect, Bloody Stupid Smith, whose creations astound. I have heard people say that this is below-par Pratchett, but he is so far ahead of his rivals that, even if true, this wouldn't matter. Pratchett at his best is hardly fair competition, even for himself!

Read it, enjoy it, and then go and queue to buy the next one.



clearly predictable from his first five lines), or too uneven - both Nick Royle's "The Trees" and J.L.Comeau's "Siren" include some excellent passages.

VIRTUAL LIGHT by William Gibson  
Penguin, 294 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

Chequette is a bicycle courier in future San Francisco, living in squats hung on the outside of a derelict Golden Gate bridge. One day, after making a delivery to a party, she is angered by a drunken eastern European and in a fit of pique she steals a pair of hi-tech sunglasses from him. Rydell is an ex-cop, now eking out a living as a hired security man following events which brought him brief fame in the video show *COP IN TROUBLE*. He becomes involved, along with Russian emigré cops and a particularly lethal hired killer, in the rush to recover the glasses. As their paths cross and mesh, Gibson treats us to his distinctive vision of a future in which the highest of high technology co-exists with streetlife and marginal existence. (dare I say that this particular viewpoint might be called seedy-eye)

The characters outside the main narrative are used much more to illustrate the fallen city of San Francisco than to add to the story, particularly Skinner, the crippled recluse living on the bridge, and the Japanese executive trying to understand what it all means. The result of this is an undeniably rich read, with Gibson demonstrating his skill at propelling readers headlong into the text, but at the same time a disappointment (though the story has an ending it seems strangely muted) where plot and drive fail to live up to your expectations.

Overall this is well worth reading, but is non-vintage Gibson.

ALIEN INFLUENCES by Kristine Kathryn Rusch  
Millennium, 424 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Although she comes with an impressive background - winner of a John W Campbell award, editor of *FANTASY & SF MAGAZINE*, etc etc - I have to admit that the name of Rusch was hitherto unknown to me. I therefore approached this book with no particular expectations and I was very pleasantly surprised.

It is the story of how a group of children on a minor colony planet fall under

SHADOW OF A DARK QUEEN by Raymond F Feist  
HarperCollins, 382 pp, £8.99, "C" format  
Reviewed by Steve Jones

This is volume one of "The Serpentwar Saga". It is set many years after the popular "Riftwar" series, so it is not necessary to have read these earlier books. It does follow immediately on *THE KING'S BUCCANEER*, so reading that first may provide some useful background, although I followed this one well enough without having read it.

The Pantathians, or Serpent Men, were bred long ago by the Valheru, Aimo-Lodoka, whom they worship as a goddess. They believe that if they can conquer the world, she will return to rule them. The Pantathians have tricked the Dinosaur Saaur into fighting the battle over Midkemis for them. Erik von Darkmoor kills his vicious half-brother and flees with his friend Roo. They are caught and sentenced to death, but will be reprieved if they will go on a spying mission against the Pantathians. They are not expected to survive.... The sorceress Miranda seeks the wizard Pug to find out why the Valheru are stirring, and how they can be stopped. But, for all their power, they cannot act, or the Pantathians will destroy them.

Give this a try, it is an exceptionally good read.

DARK VOICES 6 ed David Sutton & Stephen Jones  
Pan, 454 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Never mind the quality - feel the width... After a steady improvement over several years, this volume is mostly disappointing. It's the biggest yet in terms of pages and number of stories (19) yet it too often fails to deliver the originality or the surprises that it should. There is a notable exception: Kim Newman's "Where the Bodies Are Buried II: Sequel Hook" is a wonderfully audacious piece, almost seventy pages long, a sort of follow-up to his story about Rob Hackwill in *DARK VOICES 5*. This time we concentrate on a British horror writer, Allan Keyes, and his success with writing and directing Hollywood movies.

Elsewhere in the anthology, some worthy stories are offered by Mark Timlin (let's resurrect a few of rock's greatest dead musicians for one last great recording session), Hugh B.Cave, Norman Partridge and Daniel Fox. Other contributions suffer from being too long (Michael Marshall Smith's), too obvious (Tom Cullen's "twist" ending is

the influence of the planet's native race, the so-called Dancers, and the tragic consequences to which this alien influence leads. Frankly, the basic premise of the story is not really believable: we are expected to accept that, merely as a result of watching the natives, the children, admittedly lacking a proper human education and upbringing, not only learn the Dancer language but also acquire telepathy and other less well-defined mental powers, as well as absorbing enough of the Dancer culture for it to go some way towards supplanting their humanity.

There is in fact a fairly strong element of fantasy about the Dancers, and even more so about another alien race which is encountered briefly later in the story, though that encounter is of critical importance to the plot. However, it is set against a very sf background of spaceships, stations, planetary colonisation and so on, and the sf and fantasy are so seamlessly blended together that the distinction is of little or no real importance. Let's face it, all the alien races we come across are creations of fantasy to a greater or lesser degree, and we don't usually worry about acceptance either of them or of their superhuman powers!

The important thing is how easy the author makes it for us, and in this case it has been done 100%. The writing just flows along and carries the reader along with it, giving him (or her) neither reason nor opportunity to stop and question the rationale behind what is happening. All the characters, including the children, are drawn realistically, the aliens are very alien and the background id just right. Above all, the story is written with enough dramatic tension to keep you turning the pages to find out what will happen next and how it will all end.

A really excellent book, which I recommend whole-heartedly.

SORCERESS by Bridget Wood  
Headline, 600 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

All of Bridget Wood's novels have been centred around a mythical Ireland. In her first three books there are elements of time travel and science fiction, with people moving from the future to the past and vice versa. Here the narrative is contained only within Ireland's past. It is set at a time when Christianity is only beginning to make its mark but when the myths still have reality. The Aramantus are sorcerers and on the death of their patriarch they gather to choose his

successor. Everything goes wrong. Theodora is kidnapped by Lord Chaos and taken into Dark Ireland (a kind of underworld), Laigne is raped by a demon, some of the family stage a rebellion and the magic of the *sidh* is stolen. Rumour, the sorceress of the title, and a young monk journey into Dark Ireland in the attempt to rescue Theo while the *sidh* prince, Maelduin, comes in search of the lost magic.

While there are a lot of interesting ingredients in the book, the style is rather tiresome. Its casual flippancy detracts, making the characters seem more like caricatures than people. There is also great confusion in regards to the passing of time so that it is impossible to tell if events are simultaneous or separated by months or years. Wood has moved away from the exact retelling of myth that so many authors of this sub-genre try to do and has shaped an original fantasy world. Better than most, but unsatisfying.

THE GREATEST SHOW OFF EARTH by Robert Rankin  
Doubleday, 284 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

I begin this review with a *crap warning*. I fear even a review may be too much Rankin content, it's up to you.

Raymond and Simon are sitting on an allotment when Raymond is seized and taken to Venus in a flying saucer, ostensibly to represent prime human qualities. It later becomes clear these are flavour, texture and lack of gristly bits. He duly escapes the meat markets and finds his way to a Victorian steamship converted for space travel, and home to an amazing troupe of circus performers. There he learns a breathtaking secret - Earth is in fact a two-layer world. We live on the inner sphere, whilst politicians and royalty hide their knowledge of the outer shell by lies and illusion, in order to preserve their luxuries out there.

Meanwhile, Simon is mysteriously given a book, THE GREATEST SHOW OFF EARTH, which chronicles events in his and Raymond's future. Unfortunately he fails to make his knowledge count, partly because of his poor choice of times to stop reading and partly because of his encounter with a sinister sect led by the half-human half-chicken Sate-Hen (good grief!) Events proceed to a conclusion which is neither stimulating nor surprising (although I must say it *is* a relief), and my advice is - don't bother with this book.

Rankin even tries to get laughs by introducing a character off-stage by the name

of Bum-Poo. Come to think of it, that would make an ideal two-word review.

THE CHRONICLES OF PERN: FIRST FALL by Anne McCaffrey  
Corgi, 284 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Ever since *DRAGONFLIGHT* Anne McCaffrey has been under pressure to write more about Pern. Not all of them have had the finesse of that first book. This volume is comprised of five short stories from the early days of Pern's colonisation. The first, "The P.E.R.N. Survey", as the title suggests, covers the initial finding of the planet.

The next three are episodes set in the years after *DRAGONSDAWN*, as the colonists were beginning to cope with Threadfall and the population was expanding. The original landing site of the Southern Continent has to be abandoned as the neighbouring volcanoes erupt ("The Dolphins' Bell"). As more room is needed for the colonists they spread out, carving mountain fastnesses for their families ("The Ford of Red Hanrahan") and to protect the more widespread population and make room for the increasing numbers of dragons, new Weyrs need to be created ("The Second Weyr"). The last story, "Rescue Run", was stimulated by message capsule launched in *DRAGONSDAWN*. Fifty years after its reception, battle cruiser *Amhurst* is close enough to the Rukbat system to investigate. They find a handful of survivors on the Southern Continent but because there are no other lifesigns, due to the fact that everyone is living underground on the Northern Continent, there is an assumption that all others have perished.

The first and last stories, while being welcomed by Pern fans, would have been equally satisfactory using other settings. The other stories, need to be read in sequence, preferably soon after *DRAGONSDAWN*. They are not a starting point for new readers as there are a lot of names and references which would cause confusion.

EVERVILLE by Clive Barker  
HarperCollins, 640pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

A sequel to *THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW*, this sprawling fantasy-horror novel shows all of Barker's strengths and weaknesses. He was the most over-praised writer of the 1980s, yet there are touches of brilliance in all his books, including this one. Audacity has always been a major constituent of his work

and here he creates and combines scenes of staggering diversity.

We have a group of would-be settlers trying to cross Oregon during a bleak 19th century winter; they are gradually killed by cold, starvation, a fantasy creature and each other. We have a fantasy world, Quiddity, just a few steps away through a crack in space, where everything is different—except that it contains a solid, full-sized version of 19th century Liverpool. We have a small American city, Everville, preparing for its 1994 summer festival, and with none of its citizens being aware of the rocky, magical foundations upon which it stands. We have a spread-out group of demon-hunters left over from *THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW* (and if you want to understand who they are or what they're doing you need to have read that book first, because you won't find sufficient explanation here). We have some very nasty baddies, mostly unstoppable, including Owen Buddenbaum, a short man who bestrides the centuries, never aging. We have a body count higher than in *NATURAL BORN KILLERS*. We have a pair of lovers, Phoebe and Joe, who seek each other across two worlds and through reality and dream. And if we don't have a kitchen sink in here, too, it's only due to Barker's momentary oversight.

What more could any reader want? Well, less, actually. There are so many wonders in a single volume, and so many shifts of scene, that long before the end I was fatigued by it all. At one point I resolved that if any more characters were resurrected from the dead I would scream. And several plotlines (especially Phoebe and Joe's) are spun out to a far greater length than necessary, just adding to the fifty pages of anticlimax at the end of the book. Doesn't HarperCollins have any strong editors?

□□□□

Reviewers are reminded that reviews should be 300-500 words long and must be received within one month of accepting the book or handed in at the following month's meeting. As Bernie Evans does not intend to continue as Reviews Editor next year she would like to receive ALL overdue reviews by the 16th December at the latest. Any reviews completed after that date should be given to next year's Newsletter Editor.

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