

BRUM GROUP NEWS

February 1995

Issue 281

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

GROUP CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON, SECRETARY - ANNE WOODFORD, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
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NOVAACON 25 CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, NOVAACON 26 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON.

This month's speaker is:

DAVID GEMMELL

who will be addressing the Group

on Friday 17th February 1995, 7.45 for 8.00pm

Admittance: Members £2.50 Visitors £3.75
(half-price for 14-18 year olds on production of proof of age).

David A Gemmell was born in London on 1 August 1948. After attending Faraday Comprehensive School he went on to work for Pepsi Cola in London in 1965; as a reporter and editor for *Westminster Press*, 1966-72; editor of the *Hastings Observer*, 1976; editor of the *Folkestone Herald*, 1984 and since 1986 has been a full-time writer. His first fantasy series, 'the Drenai Saga', consists of *LEGEND* (1984), *THE KING BEYOND THE GATE* (1985), *WAYLANDER* (1986), *QUEST FOR LOST HEROES* (1990) and *THE FIRST CHRONICLES OF DRUSS THE LEGEND* (1994). His second series, the 'Sipstrassi' novels, are more *science fantasy* than *heroic fantasy* and include *WOLF IN SHADOW* (1987), *GHOST KING* (1988), *LAST SWORD OF POWER* (1988) and *THE LAST GUARDIAN* (1989). Gemmell's third series of books, the 'Macedon' sequence, set in the ancient Greece of an alternate-universe includes *LION OF MACEDON* (1991) and *DARK PRINCE* (1991). Other works feature parallel worlds (*KNIGHTS OF DARK RENOWN*, 1989) and necromancy and Vampire Kings (*MORNINGSTAR*). More recently *BLOODSTONE* (published in paperback by Legend this month price £4.99) continues the story of Jon Shannow in the Sipstrassi series, while *IRON HAND'S DAUGHTER* (also published by Legend this month, hardback £15.99) is the first in a new series. Gemmell has also collaborated with Stan Nicholls and Fangorn on two graphic novels - *LEGEND* and *WOLF IN SHADOW*.

[Thank you to 20th CENTURY SF WRITERS (St James Press) and THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF (ORBIT) for the above.]

The BSGF 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. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to the Treasurer, Steve Jones, at 307 Gillott Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 0RT. Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, Newsletter Editor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

EVOLUTION

THE NEXT STEP

Evolution is the 1996 British National Science Fiction Convention to be held 5-8th April 1996. It's no longer in the Brighton Metropole and we're pleased to announce our new site – the Radisson Edwardian at Heathrow.

THE VENUE

The Radisson is a 459-room 5 star hotel at Heathrow with excellent facilities, including an indoor swimming pool. Coaches run directly to Heathrow from all over the country, and it's 40 minutes from central London by tube. Room rates from £28 per person per night.

OUR GUESTS

VERNOR VINGE

Author of *Across Realtime*, *True Names* and *A Fire Upon The Deep*, his mix of space opera and hard SF explores the future evolution of man and machine in the fast approaching Singularity...This will be his first appearance at a UK convention.

JACK COHEN

Jack Cohen, scientist and fan, evolves alien ecologies for countless writers; his new book explores simplicity and complicity, concepts that could shape the future of science.

HOW TO JOIN

Membership is £20 attending, £12 supporting or child rate (between 5 and 14 on 5th April 1996 – children under 5 are free) – these rates are valid until 18th April 1995. Pre-supporting members get a £1 discount and supporting members can convert to attending for the difference in memberships at any time. Mascots and beasts of all kinds – £5. To join, or



BRYAN TALBOT

Artist and author of the alternative history graphic novel *Luther Arkwright*, he is famous for his victorian gothic art on *Nemesis* for *2000AD*. Recently he worked on *Sandman* and has just completed a graphic novel – *One Bad Rat* – on sale October 26th.

COLIN GREENLAND

Author of *Take Back Plenty* and *Harm's Way*, amongst other projects, he is working on a graphic novel with Dave McKean set in a Venice at the end of the world...

for more information, please send your name, address and details with your cheque (made payable to Evolution) to:

Evolution, 13 Lindfield Gardens,
Hampstead, London NW3 6PX, UK

Information via e-mail: bmh@ee.lc.ac.uk

Your details will be held on computer

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.

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Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road,
Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

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

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

17 FEBRUARY 1995: DAVID GEMMELL will be signing copies of the first novel in his new series, *IRONHAND'S DAUGHTER*, and the latest Jon Shannon book *BLOODSTONE*, from noon until 1pm at Andromeda book shop, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. For details of this and other signing sessions call (0121) 643 1999.

17 FEBRUARY 1995: DAVID GEMMELL 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.

18 FEBRUARY 1995: SIMON R GREEN will be signing copies of his new sf novel *DEATHSTALKEE* from 1pm-2pm at Andromeda book shop, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. For details of this and other signing sessions call (0121) 643 1999.

20-25 FEBRUARY 1995: RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon. Call 01789 295 623 for details.

25 FEBRUARY 1995: COMIC AND SCI-FI MART at Coventry University Students Union, from 11am, admission 50p. Call 0908 679845 for details.

28 FEBRUARY 1995: *THE SCIENCE OF GLASS* a lecture by H W Woodward, 1pm at the BMI, Margaret Street, Birmingham. Admission free, part of the Handford Science Lectures 1994-5. Call (0121) 236 3591.

2-5 MARCH 1995: TREK DWARF 3 convention at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. Registration £35.00, contact 47 Marsham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 0RB.

27 MARCH - 1 APRIL 1995: RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton. Call 01902 29212 for details.

UNTIL 2 APRIL 1995: THE HOLY GRAIL TAPESTRIES designed by Edward Burne-Jones and woven by Morris & Co. are on display at the Museum and Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham City Centre, call 0121 235 2834 for details.

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 £25.00 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.

23 MAY 1995: *THE NEMESIS THEORY* what killed the dinosaurs? The implications and consequences for the human race of living in an uncontrollable cosmos - a lecture by Derek Behrens, 1pm at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham. Admission free, part of the Handford Science Lectures 1994-5. Call (0121) 236 3591.

JOPHAN REPORT #83

Best wishes to Vernon Brown, one of the founder members of the BSFG and creators of Novacon, who is now at home recovering from open-heart surgery. We won't be seeing much of Vernon for a time as he has been advised to take it easy at home for six weeks or so. He has also been told to get plenty of exercise; apparently by the end of the six week period he is supposed to be walking three miles a day, Vernon adds he can't remember the last time he walked that far!

Simon Frith's fantasy short DEEP IN THE WOODS received the Society of Fantastic Films' Delta Award as best entry in its 1994 amateur movie competition, judged by horror director Norman J Warren and dealer Steve Ellison. Along with Nigel Barton's GET REAL!, it is was screened again as part of Novacon 24's own film programming.

Verna Smith Trestail, daughter of space opera veteran Edward E "Doc" Smith and a fan in her own right since the 1930s, died in March, aged 73. She was fiercely protective of her father's legacy and briefly instituted a lawsuit against Malibu Graphics' LENSMAN comicbook and the Japanese company whose anime had inspired it.

Jessica Tandy, who appeared alongside second husband Hume Cronyn in both 1985's COCOON and its 1988 sequel, COCOON II: THE RETURN, died on 11 September at the age of 85. Born in London, she was originally married to Jack Hawkins, but wed Cronyn in 1942, beginning a half-century partnership on stage and screen.

As well as appearances in THE BIRDS (1963) and DRIVING MISS DAISY (1989), winning an Academy Award for the latter, she had an impressive theatrical career which included the role of Blanche in the original production of Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire", opposite the young Marlon Brando.

Dave Hodson's tenure as editor of the British Science Fiction Association's newszine MATRIX, having begun inauspiciously with the non-appearance of his first issue in the BSFA's June/July mailing, promptly ceased with the non-appearance in the August/September mailing of his "second" issue. The committee subsequently requested his resignation.

The new editor is Chris Terran, who can

be reached at 9 Beechwood Court, Back Beechwood Grove, Burley, Leeds, West Yorkshire (0532-782388).

Egerton Press, the imprint set up by Nick Royle to produce his award-winning DARKLANDS anthologies, released Joel Lane's short story collection THE EARTH WIRE on 29 September. Copies cost £6.99 from 5 Windsor Court Court, 24 Avenue Road, London, N15 5JQ (081-809-0766).

Aids to writers continue to abound. THE WORD, subtitled "magazine of magazines", promises an extensive small press listing, reviews and guidelines; sample copies cost £1.95 from 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB6 2LB. Elsewhere, the Flair Network offers discounts on its own handbooks and residential writing weekends, a "free" monthly newsletter and, oddly, an introductory gift of the BT Yellow Pages of your choice (currently available to non-Flair members at £5.00 apiece); membership costs £7.50pa from Flair For Words, 5 Delavall Walk, Eastbourne, BN23 6ER.

Congratulations to Finnish editor Toni Jerrman and the T6HTIVAELTAJA crew - the magazine, whose title translates as "Star Rover", has just reached its fiftieth issue and marked the occasion by raising the page-count to 128.

Frank A J L James and J V Field discuss-ed "Frankenstein and the Spark of Being" in the September edition of HISTORY TODAY, analysing the factual scientific background which inspired the original novel. Yet another screen incarnation is released in the UK this month, with director Kenneth Branagh in the title role and Robert DeNiro as his creation.

VOICES FROM SHADOW celebrates the 20th anniversary of David Sutton's landmark small press title, with contributions from Ramsey Campbell, Mike Ashley, David A Riley, Eddy C Bertin, Brian J Frost, Stephen Jones and Martin Ricketts, as well as artwork by Alan Hunter, Dave Carson and Jim Pitts. Copies cost £4.25 from Sutton at 194 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7TE.

Bibliophile Books, the London-based mail order service, has launched a sf/fantasy section in its regular catalogues, with several novels at reduced prices. For a copy of the latest stocklist, write to 21 Jacob Street,

London, SE1 2BG (please mention BRUM GROUP NEWS if you do).

THE ZONE is a new magazine from STRANGE ADVENTURES' Tony Lee; issue one features poetry by Bruce Boston (introduced by John Francis Haines), a C J Cherryh interview, fiction by John Light and assorted reviews. Copies cost £2.00 from Lee at 13 Hazeley Combe, Arreton, Isle of Wight, PO30 3AJ.

THE WOMEN'S PRESS BOOK OF NEW MYTH AND MAGIC, edited by Helen Windrath, costs £7.99 and includes work by Jana Yolen, Sara Maitland, Fiona Cooper, Katherine V Forrest and Mary Wings.

Simon Pummell, director of the sf short ROSE RED, has joined with its producer, Janine Marmot, to form Hot Property, a company devoted to developing scripts by Pummell and the film's co-writer, author Simon Ings. Shown at Wincon III in July, ROSE RED received its London premiere at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on 17 November, one month after work began on their second collaboration, an animated film entitled BUTCHER'S HOOK.

Author Cecelia Holland has reportedly instituted legal action against William James over perceived similarities between several of her novels, principally UNTIL THE SUN FALLS, and his current trilogy, the third volume of which is entitled BEFORE THE SUN FALLS. Orbit, James' British publisher, has meanwhile declined to remove his books from distribution until Holland's claims are investigated.

Simon Maginn is currently working on his third novel, "set in the underworld of bikers and cult religions"; his first, SHEEP, was selected for the W H Smith "Fresh Talent" campaign, whilst VIRGINS AND MARTYRS, due out from Corgi on 2 February, is set in his current home in Hove.

All change again at Millennium: Sarah Yorke has replaced Sue Gilkes as the imprint's press officer.

Avedon Carol, whose NUDES, FRUDES AND ATTITUDES was published on 30 September appeared on the 14 October edition of Channel Four's EUROTRASH, discussing the career of ex-patriate porn star Sarah Young.

Daystar Books, the mail order service which attracted widespread complaints among horror fans, is back in business and paying

its debts, reports INVASION OF THE SAD MAN-EATING MUSHROOMS co-editor John Overall. Mark James has apparently taken over from owner Albert James, whose illness caused the problems, and is requesting creditors to contact him at 17 Byford Close, Stratford, London, E15 4HP.

The Flash Girls, aka fantasy author Emma Bull and Neil Gaiman's assistant Lorraine Garland, were interviewed for the October issue of FOLK ROOTS, following the release of their CD "The Return of Pansy Smith and Violet Jones", which features lyrics by Gaiman.

Author Keith Roberts is now resident at Salisbury District Hospital's Farley Ward following the amputation of both legs due to MS; letters from friends and fans are welcomed.

A Californian court has rejected a suit brought by Carl Sagan against the computer company Apple after claims that it had dubbed him a "Butt-Head Astronomer".

October saw the first intake of students for Liverpool University's new M.A. in Science Fiction Studies, believed to be the first postgraduate course in sf to be offered on a British campus. Further information can be obtained from Dr David Seed at the Department of English, University of Liverpool, PO Box 147, Liverpool, L69 3BX.

Midlands telefantasy fans are invited to attend meetings of the Video Search Club, first Saturday of the month at the Brownhills West Methodist Church, Severn Road, Brownhills. The group also produces a bimonthly newsletter; contact Nigel Webster on 0543-372142 for further details.

NO ESCAPE, the sf thriller starring Ray Liotta and set in a near-future penal colony, was trimmed by one second for its UK video release on 9 November. No doubt some trivia-obsessed fan is already trying to track down the missing frames.

A group of 80 Japanese animators has protested to Disney over its box office hit THE LION KING, claiming the "original" storyline borrows significantly from Osamu Tezuka's 1966 anim  series JUNGLE EMPEROR (aka KIMBA THE WHITE LION).

Both scripts focus upon a young lion (Simba in the Disney release, Kimba in the anim ) who seeks revenge for his father's

If I have any reservation at all, it is that the characteristic tone of doomed, masculine, roomantic pessimism can get a bit wearisome. There is delicious horrid humour in "The Black Clay Boy", and "The Exercise of Faith", and real tenderness in "Life of Buddha", but the general vision is bleak. Rich countries exploit poor ones, revolutions are corrupt from the word go, even the most loving of human relationships is governed by lies and manipulation. Several times I was reminded of Edgar Allan Poe's statement that he knew of no subject more poetical than the death of a beautiful woman. Like Conrad and Greene, Shepherd can sometimes be accused of presenting the evils of colonialism as inevitable and undefeatable. It seems no accident that the final story is called "Surrender".

A pity such cynicism sours an otherwise outstanding volume.

I SHUDDER AT YOUR TOUCH edited by Michele Slung
RoC, 379pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

This collection of 22 stories, both reprint and originals, takes the crossover themes of sex and horror, featuring big names like Stephen King, Ruth Rendell, Jonathan Carroll as well as older writers. The darker side of love and sexuality gives the collection a surprisingly broad feel for a themed anthology, and as well as the chillers, there is room for some humorous and light stories.

The Stephen King story "The Revelations of Becka Paulson" is a glimpse into a life in Castle Rock (perhaps a discarded scene from a novel) with Becka accidentally shooting herself through her head and then turning up at breakfast with a slight headache and an elastoplast covering her entry wound. Jesus starts to tell her the guilty secrets of her husband and neighbours with inevitable results. "Sea Lovers" by Valerie Martin gives an unsettling glimpse of a true mermaid (the habits and lifestyles of big fishes sit very uncomfortably with the only sexual act mermaids are anatomically compatible with). As well as these Christopher Fowler offers us a paranoid view on the dangers of hiring in a craftsman in "The Master Builder", Jonathan Carroll illustrates an obsessive creation of jealous love in "A Quqrter Past You" and vignettes of different disturbing visions of love come from Robert Aickman, Ronald Duncan and T L Parkinson.

These are the better stories of the

book, and provide a stimulating variety, and though the lighter stories don't work as well the idea works well.

FALLEN ANGELS by Niven, Pournelle and Flynn
Pan, 391pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

On reading the blurb on the back of the book one would be forgiven for thinking that this was just another run-of-the-mill Niven/Pournelle/A N Other collaboration. But if you are at all interested in fandom then you will love this book. Why? Read on.

The story is set some 80 years in the future where the Green Party has been in power worldwide for the majority of that time. Some people saw what was coming and managed to escape off planet and form an orbiting space station colony. The Green Party you see, has outlawed technology and has rid the atmosphere of polluting carbon dioxide to such an extent that there is little or no greenhouse effect, much free heat escapes the Earth's atmosphere and hence we find the planet in the grip of an Ice Age. The only problem with a space station is that it is not a closed system and over the years some atmosphere has leaked out into space. No problem you think hydroponics will produce the oxygen needed, but breathable air has nitrogen in it and the colony cannot produce that. So the colonists send scoop ships to the outer edges of Earth's atmosphere to scoop up (pinch) sufficient nitrogen to keep the colony going. As you can imagine, the Green Party does not look kindly on this and attacks any such ships with missiles - this smacks of double standards, they are quite willing to use technology to further their own ends, but will not allow the public the comforts that technology could bring. The latest scoop ship is shot down and lands on the tundra with both pilots alive but suffering from gravity far greater than they are used to.

One group of outlaws decide that the 'Angels' as they are being called must be saved and band together to do so. These outlaws? Science Fiction Fandom. Not only has technology been banned but science fiction is very much frowned upon and any known fans are watched and have no chance of getting a job, hence many fans have gone underground or forsworn fandom altogether. The irony is that SF is banned but Fantasy is positively encouraged (comments on this to the authors please, not me). The fans leave their Worldcon and travel over the ice to

death, alternately aided and distracted in this quest by wise monkeys, cunning hyenas, ebullient birds and scarred contenders for the feline throne. Disney, needless to say, claims all similarities are pure coincidence.

Following Michael Keaton's decision to quit *BATMAN RETURNS*, apparently following arguments with Warner Brothers over his wish for a cut of both the box office and merchandise returns, female lead Rene Russo may be the next casualty - at 40, she's a convenient two years younger than Keaton, but an uncomfortable six years older than replacement Val Kilmer. The only safe casting seems to be Jim Carrey's Riddler, particularly after the massive success of *THE MASK*.

Kenneth Branagh, fresh from directing Robert DeNiro in the latest *FRANKENSTEIN*, is rumoured to be considering the role of Obi Wan Kenobi in George Lucas's *STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS*. The new three-movie sequence predates the original *STAR WARS*, in which Sir Alec Guinness donned Kenobi's Jedi robes.

Rumoured front runners for the role in Steven Spielberg's planned *DR WHO* television pilot are Jim Dale, who has the advantage of familiarity on both sides of the Atlantic, and Dave McGann, whilst Ridley Scott and Leonard Nimoy are tipped for the director's chair. The action will open on Gallifrey, as the maverick Timelord launches his cosmos-saving career.

Scott, meanwhile, has teamed up with brother and fellow director Tony Scott, to buy Shepperton Studios for £20M. Recent projects at the site included the £25M *JUDGE DREDD* spin-off, starring Sylvester Stallone.

James Herbert's shaggy dog story *FLUCE* is in the pipeline, with Nancy Travis and Matthew Modine heading the cast. Let's hope this latest Herbert project, directed by Carlo Carlei, fares better than the misguided *THE SURVIVOR* and the hilariously naff *THE RATS*.

Director James Cameron, interviewed by *EMPIRE* as he winds down from *Bondage* on *TRUE LIES* and prepares to spin another web of deceit on *SPIDERMAN*: "More is more, and too much is never enough."

Mel Gibson is warming up for *FAHRENHEIT 451*, another version of the Ray Bradbury novel first lensed by Francois Truffaut back in 1967. Also jumping the decades is *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE*, a big-screen spin-off from the tv classic (several episodes of which were remade during the 1988 Writers Guild strike); *Brian De Palma* is set to direct, Tom Cruise to star.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH by Lucius Shepard
Millennium, 484pp, £5.99, 'C' format p/b

Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

It is a truism that good books are usually harder to review than bad. Certainly, confronted with this awesome collection of 14 substantial tales, each of which is worth reading at least twice, and a mere 500 words in which to comment on it, I feel somewhat at a loss.

Perhaps the most useful way to begin would be to say that only about a third of these pieces could really be defined as sf. The rest are, I suppose, 'dark fantasy', though surely never were genre labels more pernicious than in this case. Shepard's fiction is often exotic in setting, full of bizarre incident, occasionally mystical, and frequently political. It is also quite beautifully written, with a fresh, poetic feeling for pace, image, and atmosphere. This is one genre writer who really can compete as a stylist with the best of the mainstream!

Part of the measure of Shepard's artistry is that he is able to take very obvious horror ideas and develop them in mesmerising new ways. There is nothing terribly original, for instance, in the long opening title story's basic plot. Set in Belize, it concerns a group of demoralized expatriots, whose lives are taken over by a sinister ancient Mayan role-playing game. What makes it live in the memory is the care with which the author establishes and plays out the tensions between his characters. Here and in the powerful Vietnam story, "Delta Sly Honey", he skillfully treads a delicate tightrope between the rational and the supernatural. The mysterious figures haunting the fringes of the latter tale may be ghosts, or (in some ways more frighteningly) just your normal gang of murderous maverick vigilantes.

But please don't let me give the impression that Shepard's attitude towards genre is in any way half-hearted. "Bound For Glory" is an extraordinary horrific western, and "Woman's Land" (in which the last century or so of human history turns out to be the dream of intelligent spiders) astonishingly persuasive as it draws you into acceptance of a crazy sf premise. The superb "Aymara" mixes political thriller, romance, time-travel, and magic-realism to dizzying effect, whilst "The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter" is about the best thing I've ever read involving a dragon.

rescue the Angels. They are then faced with the tasks of hiding the Angels from the government and getting them back home, but where are you going to get a rocket from in a society that has outlawed technology? Just how they go about this shows how ingenious fans can be, more I won't say but it makes excellent and very entertaining reading.

You have to be an SF fan to understand some of the references in this story and I'm sure I even recognised some of the fans portrayed in the novel. A wonderful, wonderful story and one I highly recommend.

SHUDDER AGAIN edited by Michele Slung
RoC, 379pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

This follow up anthology delves again into the psyche and offers further snapshots from the hell of love and sex. Once more, original, reprint and archive stories are used with Arthur Conan Doyle, Harlan Ellison, Ray Bradbury and J G Ballard contributing - however this time the big names are outshone by lesser known writers - David Kuchls chooses a science fictional device to allow people to revisit "The First Time" and gives an uncomfortable reminder that whilst for most of us it is a pleasant or cherished memory there are those who have had very different experiences. Nancy Collins offers one man's quest for his ideal of slimmness in womanhood taken to and beyond madness in "Aphra", and Clement Wood gives us a peep into the early married life of a couple, providing genuine horror but *no* supernatural element in "Honeymoon".

Other stories of note include Ramsey Campbell's "Again", illustrating a disturbing encounter between a walker and the solitary homeowner he happens across, and the very poignant "On the Lake of Last Wishes" by Claudia O'Keefe in which the whole horror content is confined to reality and illness, whilst the supernatural offers release.

Overall, this wasn't as strong as the first anthology but still makes for interesting reading.

GOODLOW'S GHOSTS by T M Wright
Gollancz, 215pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

What can I say about this book? It really is as bland and forgettable as its title!

Written in short chapters divided into even shorter sections of very short para-

graphs, with few words of more than two syllables, it is clearly designed for people with limited attention spans. No scene is allowed to go on for longer than a couple of pages, the characters are little more than names, and there is virtually no sustained description, though lots and lots of perfectly indifferent dialogue.

The central figure is a rather boyish psychic investigator, called Ryerson Biergarten, and one is tempted to think that, having come up with his singular name, the author's powers of invention were quite exhausted. The plot, in which he helps the ghost of a private eye named Sam Goodlow to solve the mystery of his own murder could hardly be less involving. When being dead seems so much like being alive it is hard to care about any danger our hero finds himself in.

Not that the narrative is exactly action packed anyway. In fact nothing much happens at all. A sub-plot in which various Bostonians are dragged into Wright's drearily uninteresting spirit world is so silly and inconsequential it gets abandoned half way through. Such "horror" as there is would hardly disturb my mother, and the jokey tone soon irritates without jokes or wit to back it up. The would-be shocking climax simply bores.

Of course, not everything one reads has to be a challenging masterpiece, but surely popular fiction should be a little more demanding than this. Its competence is of the lowest level, with nothing to offend, but nothing else much either. Unimpressive.

FURIOUS GULF by Gregory Benford
Gollancz, 290pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

I think the first book of Greg Benford's that I read was *IN THE OCEAN OF NIGHT*, back in 1978. I've read a number since, including *ACROSS THE SEA OF SUNS*, in fact, he is one of my favourite hard sf authors. Even so, it came as quite a surprise to come across Nigel Waimley (hero of the two I mentioned) here as a wrinkled, nude dwarf. In fact, he plays only a bit part, but obviously I need to catch up on the previous two books in the author's "galactic" series.

If there is such a thing as hard science fantasy, then this must be it. A world composed of "timestone", in which past events can be unearthed (if that's the word)? Vast intelligencies existing in the plasma and magnetic fields surrounding the black hole at the centre of our galaxy? Science fiction has come a long way since Arthur C Clarke

alarmed the scientific establishment by writing about a solar lifeform in "Out of the Sun" (1959). Then Bob Forward wrote *DRAGON'S EGG* (1980) about life on a neutron star. It is difficult to see how anyone can take this concept further than Benford, but who knows?

Dr Gregory Benford is a professor of physics, and uses novels like this to try out ideas which he could not possibly advance as hypotheses in, say, *NATURE*. But the science behind the book is sound, and something extraordinary certainly is happening in the centre of our galaxy, where long, luminous strands twist in intense magnetic fields. His human (and alien) characterisations get better, too, so if you like your sf hard, read this one.

NEW WORLDS 4 Edited By David Garnett
Gollancz, 223pp, £6.99, digest size magazine
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Latest and possibly last anthology from New Worlds containing ten stories, a critique, an afterword and for me the highlight - the introduction. Garnett, in his inimitable way provokes the reader to make a stance and for my part I'm with him. By and large formula fiction doesn't interest me, though I reserve the right to make exceptions. I prefer the short story format. It provides an excellent 'taster' for this reader to catch up with unrecognised/not before read writers; each is an instant separate world in manageable portions and an anthology such as this provides comparison of writers styles and approaches to storytelling in one volume.

As to the stories they are diverse, have attitude and caused this reader to query some writers motives. It seems clear some authors have axes to grind and will use any medium to get their views across, more on this later.

The political undercurrent in "Legitimate Targets" from Ian McDonald highlights his story of an ex IRA informer in hiding with benign aliens. The whole fitting together well but, as with the end of the cold war, perhaps arriving too late? Still inventive and enjoyable. Kilworth's "Nerves of Steel" presents the problem of robots need to understand feelings and is well thought out and expertly handled. "The Fleshpots of Luna" by Matthew Dickens broaches the idea of overweight people emigrating to the moon as in the lower gravity they weigh less. It takes a marvellously wicked twist at its climax and is great fun. Peter F Hamilton surprised me with "Starlight Dreamer". Unlike his excellent SF novels this is fantasy, but

still an enjoyable escape. It concerns the mixing of a youth 'gang'on a run down estate and eives that have re-entered the world to see why the forest is returning and the clash of cultures. Rob Holdstock's story continues his mythago work. Here in "The Charisma Trees" he wittily explores the possibilities of gene manipulation on trees and mixes this with mysterious disappearances in Norfolk, all done as letters and ending with an even stranger mystery. Wonderful stuff.

While understanding the motivation of pressure groups, I sometimes despair at their methods. Hence two stories in the book took (for me) such a radical stance that they overshadow the story in a need to prove their righteousness to their cause. Both come over as feminist stories and I suppose I'll become unpopular for saying I disliked this stance, but the approach overpowered a very good story in "And The Poor Get Children" by Lisa Tuttle. The poor woman (Renate) being a downtrodden person who gets the bad end of life with no escape. The rich woman (Becky) getting all she wants but only living for hate. Not for me. The second, "The Last Phallic Symbol" by Elizabeth Sourbut comes over as pure hatred of men. Its gist being the male phallus is alien to the planet and we should all be female. A sort of *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT* scenario feminised to extinction. Why?

Langford's critique of, er, critics "Inside Outside" proves entertaining as only Langford can - and of course, he's right on the button. The anthology finishes with Moorcock's "The Final Word" precis the *NEW WORLDS* saga and its impact within the genre. It provides a fitting ending for this phase of the anthologies and I only hope there is more to come.

GREAT BIRDS OF THE GALAXY by Edward Gross and Mark Aitken
Boxtree, 144pp, £9.99, large soft-cover

Reviewed by Adrian Middleton.

Boxtree have chosen to print a British edition of a semiprofessional American book unsanctioned by Paramount. Worse, they have reproduced it wholesale, making little or no effort to edit, reset or even to convert the text from American English into English English. The original publishers had an excuse - they were fans producing a book to the best of their ability - but a so-called professional publishing house should know better.

Now, unaccustomed as I am to reading *STAR TREK* biographies, I found *GREAT BIRDS* to

be a mixed bag. I cannot tell how many anecdotes appearing in the book have been seen elsewhere, so I'll judge it as I see it.

The book is divided into eleven sections, with space devoted to those people whom the authors feel were "creators of Trek", with the pagecount of each being representative of the size of contribution made by each person, and related in the order of their involvement with the series.

First up was, of course, Gene Roddenberry. I learned a lot here - about the evolution of the series (and others) through his eyes, feeling sure that I was being given the measure of the man. In a very nice twist, this section moves away from just *STAR TREK* to things of interest to non-fans - probably to throw an original twist onto the Roddenberry biography. We learn of the true origins of the motion picture script (as a never-produced story for a series called Planet Earth) and of Roddenberry's involvement with a Tarzan TV series that eventually folded in favour of the Ron Ely version.

The one flaw - a precedent set here and followed up in subsequent sections - was the use of quotes. In some places typesetting was so poor that quotes got garbled, and the reader was left uncertain as to what Roddenberry - or others - had actually said. I only noticed this because one quote was used twice, in different parts of the book.

After Roddenberry the book moves on to Gene L Coon, convincing me that if Roddenberry was God, Coon was Moses. This was by far the most interesting insight into a Trek creator who seems to me to have been more responsible for the show's success than Roddenberry himself. The highlight of the section related to Harlan Ellison's Writer's Guild Award for "City on the Edge of Forever", which appears to have been rewritten by Coon, who was himself the only other candidate for the award!

Fred Freiberger comes next in an unsatisfactory chapter leaving readers with the impression that this man was only "technically" a creator of Trek, and didn't do much good for the series. It is the first of a string of shorter pieces covering Harve Bennett (telling of the failure of his pet project Starfleet Academy), Nicholas Meyer ("the guy who saved *STAR TREK*"), Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner (touching upon the death of Kirk in *Generations*). All interesting, but all quite restrained, suggesting that they were never meant to be the main focus of the book.

Then we launch into an even shorter set of chapters on the Great Birds of *THE NEXT*

GENERATION - Rick Berman, Maurice Hurley, Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor. Only Hurley seems to stand out in this bunch - his contributions are the most clear cut because the others are, perhaps, more political creators firmly entrenched in the 1990s.

Speaking of politics, the book thrives upon the conflict that existed amongst various people without being judgemental, and although the book focuses upon classic Trek, I get the feeling that this is because we haven't yet heard about the failings out that must have happened in *THE NEXT GENERATION* and its sequels. That said, the book is bang up to date, and does a good job of painting a picture of the creative battles that have been fought behind the scenes for the past thirty years.

HEAVY WEATHER By Bruce Sterling
Millennium, 280pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A two pronged plotline from Sterling has young Alex Unger, a rich kid debilitated by the illness caused by pollution, and his attempts to become 'normal' against the Storm Troupers who are a bunch of misfit techno freaks that chase storms(?). Opening with Alex's 'rescue' from an (illegal) hospital in Mexico by his sister Jane - a member of the Storm Troupers, the bulk of the story revolves around the Troupers camp and Alex's integration into the group. We are introduced to the various members of the Storm Troupers with a brief critique of each one's background and problems. This all helps the reader understand the motives and reactions of the characters very well as the plot develops.

The second string of the plot itself, that of the Troupers search for an F6 storm - or one "off the scale" (tornado's register as F4 or F5) shows the obsession of their leader Jerry Mulcahey. Mulcahey, a top mathematician and meteorologist, has predicted the possibility of an F6 and sets out to 'find' it, picking up the others of the group and thus forming the Storm Troupers. As can be expected the F6 occurs and causes chaos (as it would) but inexplicably dies out thus saving the US of A from total devastation.

If you detect a note of cynicism, correct. All too often we get the "and everything turned out ok in the end" scenario. Why? Even the ill (and dying Alex) is cured. This 'typical' US optimism mystifies me - does nothing go wrong over there? Is it reaction to guilt as major contributors of pollution and thereby the cause of Alex's (and by

inference all children's) illnesses and the continuing deterioration in world weather? We are all aware of the problems of industrialisation and the pollution problems on the environment, and an excellent and well researched basis for a novel it is; the whole scenario works well. But please no cop outs.

SCIENCE FICTION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by Edward James

Opus, 250pp, £7.99, p/b

Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

Even were it less good than it is, this excellent brief introduction to sf would be very welcome. Aldiss and Wingrove's *TRILLION YEAR SPREE* may offer more stimulating (and opinionated) criticism, but James' book is admirably clear, balanced, and enthusiastic, making it probably the best thing of its kind. Although I'm sure it will prove highly useful to students and teachers, it's style and tone are far from stiflingly academic. A fan from his early teens, the author is not concerned to establish league tables of sf writers and books, nor to argue the literary status of sf against that of the mainstream, but rather to provide a convincing picture of the genre as a whole.

For James, sf is a cultural, not just a literary phenomenon, and one whose influence extends to movies, tv, commerce, design, language, politics, pornography, and (in the form of Scientology) religion. It is also, he argues, in a fascinating chapter, distinctively of the Twentieth Century. In 1895, the year of Wells' *THE TIME MACHINE*, a good many books were published that we would now categorise as sf. However, the author who wrote about a manned spaceflight to Mars and the author who wrote about a future society governed by women would probably have thought of themselves as writing in completely separate genres. It was the achievement of the editors Gernsback and Campbell to draw related types of fiction together under a common umbrella and make them feed off each other.

James account of the genre's development, from the American 'Golden Age' of the Forties and Fifties, through Sixties 'New Wave' experimentalism, to post-modern Cyberpunk and beyond, is thoroughly entertaining, fair-minded, and informative, covering a lot of ground in remarkably little space. Unlike many serious critics of sf, he understands the extent and importance of fandom, devoting an entire chapter to its close and complex influence upon writers, publishers and the

field in general. The only area where things seem over compressed is in the analyses of specific texts, which don't get much beyond plot summary.

There are a few strange inclusions and omissions in the concluding reading list, and a few minor inaccuracies in the text itself, but these do not seriously detract from the book's value. There was plenty here that I did not know, and what I did could hardly have been much better presented.

OOOOO

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