

August 1996

Issue 299

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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

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COME TO THIS MONTH'S MEETING WHERE THE STAFF WRITER FOR

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING SF MAGAZINE WILL REVEAL ALL ! *

**M. J. Simpson from SFX magazine
will address the BSFG on Friday 16 August,
7.45pm for 8pm, at the Prince Hotel,**

(on Station St., behind New St. Station, near the Electric Cinema and Bus Station, in the city centre). Admittance: Members: £2.50 (Waged), £2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £3.75 (Waged), £2.75 (Unwaged). (NB: Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.)

M. J. Simpson, better known perhaps as "Simo", burst on to the sf scene at the first Inconsequential convention where his off-beat humour and stand-up comedy routines both amused and appalled attendees. Prior to that he had edited TALES FROM THE BROKEN DRUM (the newsletter/fanzine of the sf/humour society Octarine) and MOSTLY HARMLESS (newsletter of ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha, THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY society). A collector of naff media memorabilia, he has produced several fanzines, stood for TAFF, worked on a number of convention committees and has been the Staff Writer for SFX since its launch. *[Thanks to Pam Wells and APPARATCHIK for much of the above material.]*

** AND IF YOU'VE EVER MET SIMO YOU KNOW THERE'S EVERY CHANCE OF THAT HAPPENING!*

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs function room of the Prince Hotel, Station Street in Birmingham city centre (formerly Stephenson's Hotel, between the Electric Cinema and the Bus Station). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 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, Sarah Freakley, c/o 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, B66 4SH. (E-mail should go via: bsgf@bortas.demon.co.uk) Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, Newsletter Editor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX.

Colophon

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Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for producing the address labels, supplying news from the Net and transferring files; THE BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL, WHAT'S ON, THE BIRMINGHAM VOICE, STEVE GREEN and CRITICAL WAVE for the other news in the Jophan Report and the Events listing.

Will "P. Phillips", who joined the Group in May, please send his address to: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

Forthcoming Events

10-11 AUGUST 1996: DELTA QUADRANT STAR TREK convention at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Attending membership £35.00 (6-14 year olds £25.00). Contact: Infinite Frontiers Conventions, PO Box 8966, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 5ST.

16 AUGUST 1996: M. J ("SIMO") SIMPSON, staff writer for SFX magazine, will address the BSFG, 7.45pm for 8pm, at the Prince Hotel, (on Station St., behind New St. Station, near the Electric Cinema and Bus Station, in the city centre).

29 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 1996: LACON III 54th World SF Convention, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim Hilton and Towers

and Anaheim Marriott, California, USA. Guests: James White, Roger Corman, Connie Willis (Toastermaster), Takumi and Sachiko Shibano (Fan Guests of Honour). Attending \$150.00 on the door, Supporting \$30.00. Contact: c/o SCIFI, PO Box 8442, Van Nuys, CA 91409, USA.

20 SEPTEMBER 1996: CHRISTOPHER PRIEST will address the BSFG, 7.45pm for 8pm, at the Prince Hotel, (on Station St., behind New St. Station, near the Electric Cinema and Bus Station, in the city centre).

21 SEPTEMBER 1996: KEN MACLEOD will be signing copies of his second novel, THE STONE CANAL, at Andromeda book shop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT. Call 0121-643-1999 for further details of this and other signings.

18 OCTOBER 1996: KEN MACLEOD, author of THE STAR FRACTION which was the runner-up in the Arthur C Clarke award, will address the BSFG, 7.45pm for 8pm, at the Prince Hotel, (on Station St., behind New St. Station, near the Electric Cinema and Bus Station, in the city centre).

18-20 OCTOBER 1996: MASQUE 4 "the fourth British Costume Convention for all creative people, fantasy, sf, historical... but above all lots of FUN. Talks, Shows, Competitions." The Moat House, West Bromwich, Junction 1 M5. Attending £30.00, Supporting £10.00, Day attendance £15.00. Contact: Alan Cash, 130 Hamstead Hall Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, B20 1JB.

8-10 NOVEMBER 1996: NOVACON 26 the Brum Group's own convention, Hotel Ibis, Ladywell Walk (off Hurst Street), Birmingham. Guest of Honour David Gemmell. Attending membership £27.00 until 30 September, £30.00 thereafter and on the door. Supporting £10.50. Progress Report #3 and hotel

booking forms now available.
Contact: Tony Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

15 NOVEMBER 1996: HARRY HARRISON, one of the Group's Honorary Presidents, creator of the Stainless Steel Rat, etc will address the BSFG, 7.45pm for 8pm, at the Prince Hotel, (on Station St., behind New St. Station, near the Electric Cinema and Bus Station, in the city centre).

16 NOVEMBER 1996: HARRY HARRISON will be signing at Andromeda book shop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT. Call 0121-643-1999 for further details of this and other signings.

23 NOVEMBER 1996: BUZZ ALDRIN will be signing from noon at Andromeda book shop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT. (NB: to be confirmed.) Call 0121-643-1999 for further details of this and other signings.

14-17 FEBRUARY 1997: ATTITUDE: THE CONVENTION at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Attending £23.00. Contact: First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1DW.

28-31 MARCH 1997: INTERVENTION the 48th UK National SF Convention, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Theme "communication". Guests Brian W Aldiss, David Langford, Jon Berg and Octavia Butler. Attending £25.00, supporting £15.00, cheques (payable to "Intervention") should be sent to: 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants., PO10 7TS.

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1997: LONESTARCON 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas, USA. Contact: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA.

27 DECEMBER 1999 - 2 JANUARY 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00

(£10.00) 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.

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we 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 about) please feel free to write a report or review and send it to the

The Jophan Report #96

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda include Christopher Priest, Graham Joyce, Michael Marshall Smith, Stephen Lawhead, Graham Edwards, Mike Jefferies and Ken MacLeod in September and Buzz Aldrin (to be confirmed) on 23 November. Call 0121-643-1999 for further details of this and other signings.

It is rumoured that Buzz Aldrin will be appearing at the Science Museum in Birmingham some time in November. Further details as they come in.

Bridget Wilkinson reports (in the FANS ACROSS THE WORLD NEWSLETTER) that the Eurocon Awards presented in Vilnius were as follows: Hall of Fame: Best Author Andrej Sapkowski (Poland); Best Artist Denis Martynets (Ukraine); Best Journal ALIEN

CONTACT (Germany); Best Publisher Eridanas (Lithuania); Best Promoter Gediminas Beresnevicius (Lithuania); Best Translator Aleksander Scherbakov (Russia); Best Fanzine SF-JOURNALEN edited by Ahrvid Engholm (Sweden). 'Encouragement Awards' (best new writer/artist) were awarded to: Marian & Sergei Diachenko (Ukraine); George Ceausu (Romania).

The 16th annual Canadian sf and fantasy awards (Prix Aurora Awards 1996) were presented at Con-Version XIII in Calgary, Alberta. The Aurora Awards honour Canadians in 10 different categories:

Best Long-Form Work in English THE TERMINAL EXPERIMENT, Robert J. Sawyer (serialized in Analog as "Hobson's Choice", this novel also won the Nebula Award earlier this year and has been nominated for the Hugo Award. Best Long-Form Work in French LES VOYAGEURS MALGRE EUX, Elisabeth Vonarburg (published in English in Canada as THE RELUCTANT VOYAGERS, Tesseract Books). Best Short-Form Work in English "The Perseids", Robert Charles Wilson (published in the anthology NORTHERN FRIGHTS 3 by Mosaic Press). Best Short-Form Work in French "Equinoxe", Yves Meynard (published by Le Passeur in the collection LA ROSE DU DESERT). Best Other Work in English REBOOT (an animated tv series produced by BLT Productions in Vancouver), producer Christopher Brough. Best Other Work in French SOLARIS (Canadian sf magazine) edited by Joel Champetier, published by Les Compagnons a temps perdu. Artistic Achievement Jean-Pierre Normand (a Montreal artist whose work has appeared on magazines & books published in Canada, France and the United States). Fan Achievement (Fanzine) UNDER THE OZONE HOLE edited and published by Karl Johanson & John Herbert (winning for the fourth year). Fan Achievement (Organizational)

Jean-Louis Trudel (for work on SF/SF BOREAL and the Prix Boreal. Fan Achievement (Other) Larry Stewart.

The winners of this year's Eisner Awards are as follows: Best Single Issue KURT BUSIEK'S ASTRO CITY #4 "Safeguards," by Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson (Jukebox Productions/Image); Best Short Story "The Eltingville Comic-Book, Science-Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, and Role-Playing Club in Bring Me the Head of Boba Fett" by Evan Dorkin, in INSTANT PIANO #3 (Dark Horse); Best Serialized Story STRANGERS IN PARADISE #1-8, by Terry Moore (Abstract Studios); Best Continuing Series ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY, by Chris Ware (Fantagraphics); Best Title for Younger Readers BATMAN & ROBIN ADVENTURES by Paul Dini, Ty Templeton and Rick Burchett (DC); Best Limited Series SIN CITY: THE BIG FAT KILL by Frank Miller (Dark Horse/Legend); Best New Series KURT BUSIEK'S ASTRO CITY by Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson (Jukebox Productions/Image); Best Anthology THE BIG BOOK OF CONSPIRACIES edited by Bronwyn Taggart (Paradox Press); Best Graphic Album-New STUCK RUBBER BABY by Howard Cruse (Paradox Press); Best Graphic Album-Reprint THE TALE OF ONE BAD RAT by Bryan Talbot (Dark Horse); Best Archival Collection THE COMPLETE CRUMB COMICS, VOL. 11 by R. Crumb (Fantagraphics); Best Humor Publication MILK & CHEESE #666 by Evan Dorkin (Slave Labor); Best Writer Alan Moore, FROM HELL (Kitchen Sink); Best Writer/Artist, Drama David Lapham, STRAY BULLETS (El Capitan); Best Writer/Artist, Humor, Sergio Aragones, GROO (Image); Best Painter John Bolton, BATMAN: MANBAT (DC); Best Penciller/Inker Geof Darrow, THE BIG GUY AND RUSTY THE BOY ROBOT (Dark Horse/Legend); Best Cover Artist Alex Ross, KURT BUSIEK'S ASTRO CITY (Jukebox)

Productions/Image); Best Coloring Chris Ware, THE ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY (Fantagraphics); Best Lettering Stan Sakai, GROO (Image), USAGI YOJIMBO (Mirage); Talent Deserving of Wider Recognition Stan Sakai (USAGI YOJIMBO); Best Editor [TIE] Stuart Moore, SWAMP THING, THE INVISIBLES, PREACHER (DC/Vertigo) and Bronwyn Taggart, THE BIG BOOK OF WEIRDOS, THE BIG BOOK OF CONSPIRACIES, BROOKLYN DREAMS, STUCK RUBBER BABY (Paradox Press).

Awards for Best Comics-Related Publications went to: Periodical THE COMICS JOURNAL (Fantagraphics); Book ALEX TOTH edited by Manuel Auad (Kitchen Sink).

Best Comics-Related Item comic strip stamps (U.S. Postal Service); Best Publication Design THE ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY designed by Chris Ware (Fantagraphics).

The Hall of Fame: Hal Foster, Bob Kane, Winsor McCay, Alex Raymond.

One-time BSGF committee member, Mick Evans, reports that his partnership has broken down and that he is now working on his own as a painter and decorator. He says he hopes to be able to quote more competitively with his new set-up, and is also now in a position to offer slightly preferential rates to fans. Call 0121-558-0997 for further details.

THE X-FILES was named the UK public's favourite tv series in April, winning the "people's vote" section of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards. The film director John Schlesinger, whose canon includes the 1987 voodoo thriller THE BELIEVERS, received a BAFTA Fellowship.

Jeremy Sinden, whose acting roles included Toad in last year's Old Vic revival of "The Wind in the Willows", died of cancer on 29 May, aged 35. The

son of actors Donald and Diana Sinden, he formed a touring company in 1989 with his actress-wife Delia Lindsay, staging Oscar Wilde's "An Ideal Husband" in the West End.

Dr Timothy Leary, acid guru, died on 31 May, aged 75; shortly before his death, which was broadcast on the Internet, he decided not to proceed with cryonic suspension and opted instead to be cremated, with his ashes to be launched into orbit. Leary had been among the scheduled guests for the Atlanta sf con DragonCon in June.

Sf author Whitley Strieber was one of four alleged victims of abduction by aliens featured in a Sunday Mirror survey on 14 April, timed to coincide with a special conference staged in Sheffield by the British UFO Research Association. Strieber was quoted as describing the visitors as "like bugs, only 50 times the size", speaking English "with no accent". He denied mental illness: "What's appalling is that my brain turned out [in psychological tests] to be horribly normal."

US author Kim Stanley Robinson addressed the University of Liverpool on 30 April as part of his promotional tour for the novel BLUE MARS. He also met with students taking the University's MA course in science fiction studies and checked out the sf Foundation's resident library.

Spending on books fell by 6.8 per cent in the final quarter of 1995, following the collapse of the Net Book Agreement; despite predictions by major publishers that the NBA was restricting growth, revenue figures reached their lowest point in six years. (There were soaring sales of video tapes and records during the same period.)

The director of the book trade's own research project into the collapse's effects, Frank Fishwick, said increased best-seller turnover appeared to have been at the expense of other sectors, meaning total sales overall were lower than if discounting were still prohibited. Whilst these were early days, he added, "the data will make some readers wonder whether the agreement should have been cast aside quite so hastily."

Philip K Dick's 1964 sf novel THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRICH, scheduled for a film adaptation by Francis Ford Coppola but out of print in the UK for four years, was reissued in a special £5.99 limited edition paperback by the bookshop chain Waterstones on 15 July. The new edition includes an introduction by Fay Weldon and is available at £3.99 to those buying one of the 10 sf and fantasy novels featured in Waterstones' tie-in promotion.

Victor Pelevin's OMON RA, short-listed for the Independent's foreign fiction award, was published as a £7.99 Faber & Faber paperback in July. The novel centres upon a Soviet cosmonaut whose lunar mission takes on an unexpected dimension.

Faber & Faber's August releases include Kevin Macdonald's EMERIC PRESSBURGER, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A SCREENWRITER, the biography of the enigmatic co-author of A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH, and Joseph McBride's FRANK CAPRA, THE CATASTROPHE OF SUCCESS, which grew from lengthy conversations with the director of IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE; both are £9.99 paperbacks. November sees the release of SPIKE, MIKE, SLACKERS AND DYKES, John Pierson's £11.99 overview of the past decade of independent American cinema.

Savoy released the fifth volume of its eight-book REVERB-STORM series in June; alternatively known as LORD HORROR #12, this latest instalment costs £3.50 and is set in an imaginary post-Holocaust Germany.

Beth Yahp's THE CROCODILE FURY was published as a £6.99 paperback by the Women's Press in July. A magical fantasy, the novel has already earned the Malaysian-born author (now living in Australia) the Premier's Literary Award, the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, the Talking Book of the Year Award and the Ethnic Affairs Commission Award.

SERIAL KILLER DAYS, the latest novel by THE UNNATURAL author David Prill, was released as a US\$20.95 hardback by St Martin's Press in June. The book has already been dubbed "the funniest book about the funeral business since Evelyn Waugh's THE LOVED ONE" by the New York Times.

Boxtree launched its series of novels spun off from White Wolf's "World of Darkness" role-playing systems in April, with four £5.99 paperbacks: WEREWOLF, CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION by Stewart Von Allmen; MAGE, SUCH PAIN by Don Bassingthwaite; VAMPIRE, NETHERWORLD by Richard Lee Byers; WRAITH, SINS OF THE FATHERS by Sam Chupp.

Stan Nicholls has sold a young adult sf novel to Scholastic's Point sf imprint; it's entitled THE PANDORA BOX and is scheduled for June 1997. Nicholls, who married fellow sf author Anne Gay in March, has also joined the London listings magazine TIME OUT as its regular sf/fantasy critic, succeeding Charles Shaar Murray.

Rodney Matthews' artwork was combined with Rick Wakeman's music for BETWEEN EARTH AND THE

END OF TIME, released as a £40.00 CD-ROM by Paper Tiger on 25 April.

Author J G Ballard has leapt to the defence of David Cronenberg's controversial adaptation of CRASH, writing to VARIETY to praise the film and condemn UK distributors reluctant to handle it: "Our producers have become so timid. They fear sex, violence and, most of all, seriousness."

ITV was deluged with complaints after its April screening of the movie ROBOCCP - but for the violence excised, rather than that left in. The network had removed a further five minutes from the heavily censored US television version.

Twentieth-Century Fox has signed director James Cameron to a five-movie deal, as well as agreeing to buy rights to TERMINATOR III and the long-planned SPIDERMAN from the bankrupt Carolco studio. The studio also reportedly commenced auditions in May for THE CLONE WARS, the first instalment in the prequel STAR WARS trilogy.

Despite the extensive damage suffered by Manchester's city centre on 15 June, the seventh Festival of Fantastic Films, scheduled for 20-22 September, should be unaffected; committee member Harry Nadler reports that Sacha's Hotel miraculously escaped without a single broken window. However, the Mitre Hotel, venue for Society of Fantastic Films meetings for eight years, is expected to be demolished.

Authors Colin Greenland and Gwyneth Jones join US editor Terri Windling for a five-day science fiction writing course organized by the Arvon Foundation in Devon on 26-31 August. The cost is £275.00, which includes food and accommodation; further

details from the Arvon Foundation, Totleigh Barton, Sheepwash, Devon, EX21 5NS (01409-231338).

Entries for the 1996 UPC Science Fiction Award, with a first prize of one million pesetas, must be received by the Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya no later than 10 September. Manuscripts of 25-40,000 words should be forwarded to the Consell Social de la UPC, Edifici Nexus, Gran Capita 2-4, 08034 Barcelona, Spain; stories can be in English, Catalan, Spanish or French, and the winning entry will be published in the UPC anthology NOVA CIENCIA FICCION.

Guy Madison, who died on 6 February at the age of 74, launched his film career during a seven-day leave from the US Navy, with a three-minute appearance in SINCE YOU WENT AWAY [1944]. Once demobbed, he swiftly became established as a Hollywood pin-up, later moving into television as the lead in WILD BILL HICKOCK.

As his good looks faded, so did his career, fighting Mexican dinosaurs in THE BEAST OF HOLLOW MOUNTAIN [1956] and making occasional tv cameos in the 1980s. Rory Calhoun, his hunting companion and Californian neighbour, said: "We shared a lot of camp-fires together. It is another empty saddle, and I will really miss him."

Barbara McLean, who died in her late 80s on 28 March, PRODUCED ON THE THRESHOLD OF SPACE for her husband, director Robert D Webb, but was a key figure in the early days of film editing, launching her career on THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HELEN OF TROY (1927).

Appraising her role for the US movie journal FILM COMMENT in the 1970s, she described editing as "telling the story with film. Good film editing is selecting

the best of the film. Great film editing occurs when you begin with great pictures."

Donald Cammell, who committed suicide on 24 April aged 62, never lived up to the promise shown in his 1968 directorial collaboration with Nic Roeg, *PERFORMANCE*. This searing portrait of 1960s London stunned Warner Brothers, who shelved its release for three years; Roeg went on to direct *WALKABOUT* (1970), but his colleague's career never recovered from the studio snub. Ironically, the manner of Cammell's death - an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound - echoes the final chapter of that controversial debut.

After taking a role in Kenneth Anger's ill-fated *LUCIFER RISING* and moving to Los Angeles, Cammell helmed the Oedipal sf thriller *DEMON SEED* (1977), wherein Julie Christie is raped by her scientist husband's AI creation; it did not fare well, the director himself admitting "the film may be shit, but I think her work in it is extraordinary". The warmer reception afforded the serial killer drama *WHITE OF THE EYE* (1986) failed to translate into a box office hit, and the recent *WILD SIDE* fared no better. Cammell's final years were spent drifting around Hollywood, together with second wife China King, living off option fees on unfilmed screenplays.

Saul Bass, director of the ill-received 1973 eco-chiller *PHASE IV*, died on 25 April, aged 74. Although his short film *WHY MAN CREATES* won an Academy Award, it was for his innovative graphic designs that Bass achieved fame.

Born in New York, he joined a Los Angeles advertising agency in 1946 and opened his own in 1950, creating corporate imagery for AT&T, Warner Communications, Quaker and several airlines. Through his first marriage, to

the daughter of film director Otto Preminger, Bass entered the movie industry with startling title sequences for *THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM* (1955) and *ANATOMY OF A MURDER* (1959).

Ironically, Bass's most famous project will forever be associated with another: the shower sequence in *PSYCHO* (1960), which he storyboarded and directed. It took decades for Alfred Hitchcock to finally admit he wasn't even on the set that day.

Those seeking the definitive edition of Ramsey Campbell's new novel, *THE HOUSE ON NAZARETH HILL*, should aim for Headline's hardback, published in July; Campbell warns the paperback release will be shorter by "several thousand words".

Stirling Silliphant, who won a screenwriting Academy Award for *IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT* (1967), died in Thailand on 26 April, aged 78; he is survived by his wife, the Vietnamese-American actress Tiana Alexandra Du Long.

Educated at the University of Southern California, Silliphant worked as a Walt Disney advertising executive before moving into television, producing scripts for such series as *NAKED CITY* and *ROUTE 66*. Beginning with *THE JOE LOUIS STORY* (1953), Silliphant's screenplays often explored the theme of outsiders within society, which made him a natural to adapt Daniel Keyes' "Flowers for Algernon"; *CHARLY* (1968) won an Academy Award for actor Cliff Robertson, whose plans for a sequel never saw fruit. With Wolf Rilla and George Barclay, he had earlier brought John Wyndham's *THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS* to the screen as *VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED* (1960).

Less memorable were his contributions to the "disaster movie" cycle of the mid-1970s: *THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE* (1972), *THE TOWERING INFERNO* (1974), *THE*

SWARM (1978) and WHEN TIME RAN OUT (1980). Indeed, the last two proved real-life disasters at the box office, effectively killing off the genre.

Joan Sterndale Bennett, who portrayed Queen Victoria in the loose 1967 film adaptation of Jules Verne's ROCKET TO THE MOON, died on 27 April; she was 82 and better known as the star of numerous musical stage comedies, before becoming a reclusive figure in her later years.

ADVERT

Ex-BSFG chairman, Bernie Evans, is still hoping to get her office services business off the ground. She does "the kind of bits and pieces bigger places won't or can't do" and says she'll have a go at anything: databases and envelope labels, typing, disk-swapping, photocopying (at the same rates as WAVE because she doesn't want to steal their customers!). She will also do mail-shots from your own lists, but refuses to sell-on her address file. She has been known to write to people herself on someone else's behalf, however. Call 0121-558-0997 for further details.

Book Reviews

STAR WARTZ by Patrick Tilley, Orbit, 409pp, £4.99, p/b,
Star Rating: ****
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

I must be one of the only sf fans who haven't read THE AMTRAK WARS, so didn't really know what to expect from this author. I still don't know if the style is totally different (perhaps I should find out), but this is a romping, fast-moving and very funny adventure in which Andrew Webber (no Lloyd-), would-be reporter, answers an advert for a Galactic Fax Directory and gets transported to a very different planetary system - the Rimworld - which consists of 476 (or

possibly 478) habitable planets spread in a ring around their orbit. A likely story, but suspend your disbelief and just enjoy! Andrew becomes Andiamo Cartahaynar, shortened to Andi Carta for convenience, and later metamorphoses again into Daniel Kinsharadeen, and captains a rust-bucket of a spaceship. On his travels he collects Kelly Mandell, or Kallee Mandragorian; in this book, you can't count on anyone to be who he or she at first claims to be. It is these twists which are one of its strengths. Another, if you like puns, is the names of places and characters, which reward some thought. "Admiral Treehausterhaus" is obvious enough, but "Hedjukhayteen Archipelago"? Think about it.... On the other hand, there are some which, if they have any significance, elude me.

This may be nit-picking, but I was slightly irritated by a few slips in the author's use of the English language. "In anyway" isn't correct in my book, but isn't just a typo. And he sometimes puts commas in where they aren't needed, but leaves them out where they should be. There are others which I can't recall now, but which made me falter in the pace of my reading; they should have been picked up by a sub-editor. And why call a planet "Libra"? Doesn't he know that's a constellation? But don't let that put you off. If you want a good, no-nonsense, fast-paced read, or need cheering up, this will do the job.

FOUR WAYS TO FORGIVENESS by Ursula K. LeGuin, Gollancz, 253pp, h/b, £15.99.
Star Rating: ***
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here are four linked stories in LeGuin's Hainish sequence, so they have at least slight connections with most of her other sf. As usual for LeGuin, the writing is subtle, with

excellent characterisation. There are touches of wit, warmth and even humour. Eventually each of the four becomes a love story with, as one could guess from the title, a happy ending. And yet these are not pleasant stories to read, nor are they satisfying.

One problem is that two of the stories, "Forgiveness Day" and "A Woman's Liberation", are too abbreviated. Each contains races of people who are different from us only in their social arrangements. This social anthropology is an area in which LeGuin excels, always coming up with fresh, convincing and fascinating details of custom and behaviour. In the past she has gone into too much detail (notably in ALWAYS COMING HOME) but here she could have profitably enlarged the stories into short, spare novels.

A second problem is that the feminist perspective is overdone. These are four political stories (sometimes too intensely political), intended to arouse a sense of outrage in all right-thinking readers. But LeGuin is preaching too much, rather than getting on with the story, and she is preaching to the converted, since there can be few serious advocates today of either slavery or female subservience to males. We've heard it all before, which means that the impact (although heightened through the contrived pulling of plotstrings) is greatly lessened.

So we're left with four reasonably enjoyable stories, each containing exceptional elements. But when you've just read one story of injustice tempered by a romantic ending, you probably, like me, won't want to read three more of the same straightaway. This is a book best dipped into occasionally.

OTHERLANDS by Jonathan Wylie, Orbit, £5.99, 360pp
ACROSS THE FLAME by Jonathan Wylie, Orbit, £16.99, 376pp

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

These two books are a change of direction for Mark and Julia Smith, the writers who are "Jonathan Wylie". They are fresh, well written and the best they have produced to date. Both have principally contemporary settings with fantasy elements.

OTHERLANDS begins in Norfolk. Zoe is a writer who has managed to escape from the shadow of a brutal husband and find happiness with Michael. Then Michael is hit by a car while out running and nothing can shift him from his coma. But a message appears on her answer machine, from Michael. And she senses a malevolent presence that seems to be searching for something. Aware that she is desperate to believe the messages are from Michael but that most people will dismiss them as her imagination in her distraught state she asks a hypnotherapist for help. When she is regressed she finds herself sharing the body of another woman in a similar situation to herself - the man she loves lies in a coma. The difference is that Emmony is still married to her husband and in her world there is no divorce. But there is magic. Only by using each other's skills to understand and resolve the situation can both their lovers minds be reunited with their bodies.

The characters are well handled and the story zips along at a good pace. It is only afterwards that there is time to ask the unresolved questions, like how did Michael communicate with Zoe, and where were his and his counterpart's minds during these events.

ACROSS THE FLAME has Dartmoor, the Scilly Isles and the Greek island of Paxos as backgrounds - these authors like islands. Anya is an artist. She shares her home with Luke, a Dartmoor ranger. Every few months, Anya has to escape and

spend time on her own. Luke doesn't like the arrangement but accepts it as part of loving Anya. Allesandro is a sorcerer whose spirit was trapped in a painting. He thinks he can use Anya to regain access to the real world. Anya is haunted, but she can't make anyone believe her. When she tries to escape by running away to her Greek Island retreat, Luke follows.

In both books, the contemporary settings are accurately realised - these are surroundings the authors are familiar and feel comfortable with. Both feature a woman who the outside world considers on the the verge of a breakdown and a resolution that requires co-operation between women who can never meet. There is also a fierce loyalty between the partners in both books. Intrigued? Go and read them for yourself.

THE LOST WORLD by Michael Crichton, Arrow, £5.99, 430pp, p/b. Star Rating: **
Reviewed by Chris Murphy.

THE LOST WORLD is a sequel to **JURASSIC PARK**. It borrows the title of an early sf classic, which though dated now was vivid and original in its time. This novel is neither.

The plot is straightforward. There is another island and there are more dinosaurs. Crichton revisits his favourite theme: people's willingness to ignore Murphy's Law, especially where complex technology is concerned. Two characters are brought forward from the earlier book, Ian Malcolm and Lewis Dodgson. Malcolm, the mathematician, entirely lacks the eccentric charm Jeff Goldblum gave him in the film. He has become a verbose bore, spouting page after page of scientific and philosophical theory which has little relevance to the story. Dodgson, an expert in corporate espionage, is promoted from his

minor role in **PARK** to lead villain.

New faces include an arrogant male palaeontologist, a tough female biologist and a couple of children. One of the kids is a black computer genius with wealthy parents who never make enough time for him, the other a clever, independent white girl with poor parents who never make any time for her. Occasionally this pair give the book the air of a juvenile novel, and they perpetrate one horrendous cliché which is worthy of the **Famous Five**.

Why did the author choose this particular combination of ages, races, talents and genders? Is he trying to counter the accusations of racism and sexism that were levelled, perhaps unfairly, in the wake of **RISING SUN** and **DISCLOSURE**? Maybe he is, but the main reason must be that the book is heavily overshadowed by the film it will become. Even if the movie turns out to have a different storyline, this is virtually a "novelisation" before the fact instead of afterwards. That is why there is so much focus on the children, why there is a cute baby tyrannosaurus with an injured leg, why there are Indiana Jones-style chases. It is probably also the reason why Malcolm talks so much. The plot is sufficient for 120 minutes on the screen, but not for a 400-page novel. The theories are padding.

Having commented on **THE LOST WORLD**'s defects, I must add that it is not all bad. Crichton's skills as a writer save it from becoming complete dross. There are touches of dry humour, as when Malcolm argues that human beings cannot be regarded as "sentient and aware". The confrontations with the dinosaurs are gripping, whether intended as the basis for filmed scenes or not. He even manages to turn a few of the weaknesses apparent in **JURASSIC PARK** into strengths

here. It seems there is a logical explanation for the laboratory sequence in PARK jumping from DNA to fertilised eggs with no real process in between, and effective use is made of the dubious idea that tyrannosaurus could only see moving objects.

This is a deeply flawed book with some redeeming virtues. I suspect that the author turned it out, hampered by Hollywood, with his mind on other and hopefully better projects.

ROSE MADDER by Stephen King, New English Library, 595pp, p/b, £6.99. Star Rating: ***
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The last King novel I read was the exceedingly boring GERALD'S GAME, which contained almost enough good material for a short story. ROSE MADDER is, I'm glad to say, a lot better than that. Not King at his original and page-turning best, but getting back towards it.

Rose Daniels is a battered wife who, after 14 years of nasty physical abuse, runs away to start a new life in another US city. Her husband Norman, a homicidal policeman, comes after her. While Rose is quite well portrayed, too many good things happen to her to her too easily to be believable - a supportive hostel, a discovered talent which leads to a good job, a dishy boyfriend who seems to be standing around waiting for her to come along. Norman, on the other hand, is a stunningly powerful creation, breathtaking in his arrogance and contempt, willing to maim or kill anybody who gets in his way and determined to torture and kill Rose for her "crime" of disloyalty. Yet he's also a clever and resourceful detective, and the ways in which he tracks her down are the best parts of the book.

There's a dreamlike supernatural strand here which

never quite convinced me, and the ending is disappointing. I felt that it was necessary for the newly confident Rose to free herself of Norman by personally disposing of him - but she doesn't. There's still enough of interest here for me to recommend the novel.

* * * * *

The ratings are:

* = Crap, beyond belief.
** = Crap, but readable.
*** = Not too bad, really.
**** = Pretty good actually.
***** = BUY IT!

Please remember that reviews of books should reach Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX, within ONE MONTH of your taking the book.

A number of people still owe reviews, a full list will appear in the next issue so please ensure that these, along with reviews of books picked up at the last meeting are passed/mailed to Martin Tudor at/by this month's meeting.

The September newsletter will be produced in August before I leave for the USA, so PLEASE get reviews to me by the August meeting! I will be mailing the issue on my return.

Will EVERYONE please note that you should PRINT your name in the box provided as well as signing for the review book(s) you pick up.

ADVERT

Vicky Nicholas (née Evans), ex-Novacon creche organiser, needs some help keeping a roof over her head since splitting up with husband Lee, and is offering someone a home. Your own bedroom and the run of the house, everything included except food and phone calls, for £50.00 a week. (When asked if this meant she'd do the washing she was heard to utter a Bernie-like expression, but said the machine was available for use.) Other details can be argued over as necessary. Call 0121-706-6236.