

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: FREE

Price: FREE

The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair-Yvonne Rowse, Secretary-Martin Tudor, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-vacant, Ordinary Members-Anne Woodford, William McCabe, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton, Novacon 30 Chair-Tony Berry.

JACK COHEN**will address the BSFG on****'The Science of Dicscworlds and
the Magic of Round Worlds'****Friday 12th February 1999, *****from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor, Britannia
Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union Passageway).****Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine level
and taken up to the Lichfield on the second floor.****Admittance: Members £3.00 (£2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £4.00
(£3.00 Unwaged). (*Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the
Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being
produced.*) (*VB: the second Friday of the month.)*****Forthcoming Meetings:******12 March – to be announced;******9 April – Simon Ings.******14 May – Simon Taylor (publisher)***

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified).

The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15.00 per person, or £20.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Mids, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk).

Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

Jack Cohen

Jack Cohen is an internationally known reproductive biologist, who consults for test-tube-baby and other infertility laboratories.

He was a university teacher for some thirty years, and has published nearly a hundred research papers. His present position, at Warwick University, bridges the Ecosystems Unit of the Biology Dept and the Mathematics Institute, and his brief includes bringing more science to more public awareness. His books include *Living Embryos* (Pergamon), a classic textbook whose three editions sold more than 100,000 copies; *Reproduction* (Butterworth's); *Spermatozoa, Antibodies and Infertility* (Blackwell); *The Privileged Ape* (Parthenon), a rather different look at human evolution. He now works with the mathematician Ian Stewart (*Does God Play Dice?* and the 1997-8 Royal Institution Christmas Lectures) with whom he has explored issues of complexity, chaos and simplicity, producing several joint papers. Their first joint book, *The Collapse of Chaos*, was published by Viking/Penguin ('94), and their *Figments of Reality: the evolution of the curious mind* (Cambridge University Press) was published September 97. Both have received very favourable reviews, from *Nature* and from the popular press.

He acts as a consultant to top science fiction authors (McCaffrey, Gerrold, Harrison, Niven, Pratchett) designing alien creatures and ecologies and helping them avoid scientific blunders (described in *New Scientist*, Xmas1991, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook 1994*).

He is frequently heard on BBC radio programmes, and has initiated and participated in the production of several TV programmes (e.g. BBC *Horizon: Genesis*; ITV series: *Take Another Look*; Channel 4 *Reality on the Rocks*; BBC Channel 2 series: *Fancy Fish* (for which he did much of the filming, especially time-lapse microscopy); and *The Natural History of an Alien*, for BBC2 on the 1997 Mars week-end).

His hobbies include boomerang-throwing and keeping strange animals (from Hydras to mantis-shrimps, and octopi to llamas).

Jack, Ian Stewart and Terry Pratchett have just put in the manuscript of "Science of DiscWorld", to be published June 3rd by Random House.

The New Committee

At the AGM on 8th of January Yvonne Rowse was elected Chair. Martin Tudor was elected as secretary, Alan Woodford as treasurer and Yvonne Rowse as newsletter editor. Anne Woodford and William McCabe were elected as ordinary members. Tim Stannard was re-elected as the legal officer.

An Open Letter

From Dave Hardy

Dave reviews the Neutronium Alchemist later in the newsletter. He prefaced his review with these comments and asked that I print them separately.

My first thought, when I started to write this review, was that it must surely already have been reviewed in hardcover, and I decided to take the unusual step of writing a rather subjective report of how *I* read this book. But first I went back over the last two years' BRUM GROUP NEWS – and discovered a few interesting things. . .

As far as I can see, it has NEVER been reviewed (please correct me if I'm wrong). I did note though that its predecessor, THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION, appeared for several months running in The List of Shame, under the heading of 'Steve Jones & Friends' -- along with ELEVEN other books allocated to them. Going back further, I found that Martin Tudor had reviewed THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION in hardcover back in February 1996; but it did lead me to ask, "Who are these 'friends' of Steve Jones? Are they even members of the Brum Group? If not, why do they have books from our Review pile, and why haven't they (CENSORED)-well reviewed them?"

Then in the November 1998 issue I came across a note, which I must have missed the first time, from our new Editor:

'We've stopped printing the List of Shame mainly because I find lists boring and anyway, I can't get my act together enough to know who I should be shaming. If you're one of the people who owes book reviews please send them to me as soon as possible - ed '

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

That's all very well, but it means that approximately 30 books have now effectively been 'written off'. Sent to us by publishers in good faith as review copies, they have become free gifts to people who may or may not be members.

May I suggest to the Committee that we recall all these books if they're not going to be reviewed, and sell them at our next AGM, or Novacon, or even Eastercon, to raise much-needed funds for our Group (eg. to replace those embezzled. . . but we needn't go into that here.)

So, what does the group think? I still think publishing a list of shame is not an exciting use of newsletter space but we could certainly read the list out at meetings! I would like to thank the people who review their books in the minimum time and send the reviews to me in plenty of time for the newsletter. I really appreciate it. However, there are a lot of outstanding reviews. I'd like them back real soon now. Please.

Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

27 Feb, noon: Freda Warrington, Stan Nicholls and Fangorn the wonderful cover artist, will be signing at Andromeda.

Signings in March, **Tom Holt and Eric Brown**. There is a possibility that **Kim Stanley Robinson** may do a signing session sometime in March. If you are interested ring Andromeda.

Rog Peyton would like to let you all know that he's sent back the Joanna Trollope novels sent instead and finally got the paperback edition of *Children of God*, the follow up novel to *The Sparrow*.

Forthcoming Events

25 January- 6 February 1999: MORT adapted for the stage by Stephen Briggs, from the original novel by some guy in a funny hat will be staged at the Main House of the Crescent Theatre, Sheepcote Street, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B16 8AE. Tickets £6.00 in advance, £7.00 on

the door, call the Box Office on 0121 643 5858.

12th FEBRUARY 1999: JACK COHEN will talk to the BSGF. His talk is 'The Science of Discworlds and the Magic of Round Worlds', the subject of the book just completed by Jack, Ian Stewart and Terry Pratchett. From 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

17 February 1999: LOST IN MONSTER WOOD by Tony Birch, presented by the All-Electric Puppet Theatre a puppet play with music. Featuring "the wicked Dr Dash, dinosaurs, an astronaut mouse, a giant rabbit and a lot of silly monsters and the recorded voices of Nicholas Parsons, David Jacobs and Sheila Steafel" at Bloxwich Library Theatre, Elmore Row at 11am and 2pm, tickets £4.00 (£3.00 concessions) call 01922-653183 for details.

19-21 February 1999: LIGHTSPEED '99 media con at the Hilton Hotel, Coventry. Further details from 16 Bramwell Street, Eastwood, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S65 1RZ.

26-28 February 1999: CHRONICLES '99 HIGHLANDER con at the Grand Moat House Hotel, Birmingham. Attending £45.00. Contact David Simons, 69 Merlin Crescent, Edgware, Middx., HA8 6JB; e-mail simonsd@msn.com or check out <http://members.aol.com/dsimons206/chronicles99.html>

26-28 February 1999: FAL TOR PAN, classic STAR TREK con at the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham. Non-commercial, profits to charity. For further details write to 26a Napier Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS1 1LZ. E-mail to ftpcon@aol.com

12 MARCH 1999: A meeting of the BSGF. Speaker to be announced. From 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

27-28 March 1999: MEMORABILIA. Europe's largest sf, film, cult tv, pop & comic collector's fair. The NEC, Birmingham. Organised by Made In Heaven, contact the NEC Box Office for details on 0121-767-4525

2-5 April 1999: RECONVENE, 50th National British Convention,

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. GoHs: Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon.
Attending £25.00 to Reconvene, 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6
6SZ.

9 APRIL 1999: SIMON INGS will address the BSFG following the
publication of his book, **HEADLONG** by Voyager (£5.99). From
7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New
Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

28-30 May: SECCON, in Stevenage. GoH Stephen Baxter. Attending
£23 until May 1st 1999. Cheques payable to 'Seccon' should be sent with
name and contact details to Seccon, c/o 92 Lichfield Road, Cambridge,
CB1 3TR.

13-15 August 1999: WINCON V, Unicon 1999, at King Alfred's College
Winchester. GoHs: John Barnes, Diana Wynne Jones, Warren Ellis.
Attending £20.00 to Wincon V, 53 Havant Rd, North End, Portsmouth,
Hants, PO2 7HH.

5-7 NOVEMBER 1999: NOVACON 29, at the Britannia Hotel, New
Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Ian Stewart. Attending
membership costs £28.00 until Easter. Contact: Carol Morton, 14
Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

*Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise
readers to contact organisers 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 (e-mail
yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).*

*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 editorial
address.*

The Jophan Report #119

By Martin Tudor

Steven Spielberg has signed up Tom Cruise for MINORITY REPORT and

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

announced that the cameras will start rolling "next autumn". At one time this film version of Philip K Dick's story was being touted as a sequel to TOTAL RECALL, and was being developed by SPEED director Jan De Bont - who will now co-produce. It will be interesting to see how Spielberg pulls off the promised special effects extravaganza with a mere \$80 million budget....

True Dick fans will of course remember that the story "The Minority Report" appeared in GALAXY magazine, January 1956. Fake fans, such as I, can check out the story in volume 4 of the collected stories of Philip K Dick, THE DAYS OF PERKY PAT (Grafton), which depicts a world where crime no longer exists because the Precrime Bureau monitors the forecasts of enslaved "precogs" and arrests and imprisons the "criminal" before he commits the crime! In Dick's version the Precrime Commissioner goes on the run when his name appears as a criminal who will murder a man he doesn't know. It is a fascinating tale dealing with alternate futures and the way in which prediction changes the future; but there is far less talk and far more action in the movie version.

Coming soon is a spin-off from the GODZILLA movie an all-action cartoon series featuring the adventures of the Heat team as they fight to rid the world of various menaces - Godzilla having turned out to be a misunderstood goody.

Lots of sf on tv this year - mostly for children of course. LAVENDER CASTLE is a new 26-part animation series from Gerry Anderson, set in outer space Captain Thrice (batwing ears, troll-like face and a nose with a big eye in it) battles to prevent his sworn enemy Dr Agon (blue fingers, yellow eyes) eradicating daylight by destroying Lavender Castle (home of all that is good). (Thursday, ITV, 4pm.)

(My kids like this one. Of course, I still hanker for the days when we played Stingray and the girls were in constant dispute to play Marina. I can't imagine giving up speech now, not even to breathe under water. We liked Thunderbirds but with only one boy it stretched our cast and the fight to be Lady Penelope would have been mortal. Ed)

Also on its way is an Australian "techno-drama" THE CRASH ZONE featuring five computer whizkids and an AI called Virgil who is "hyperactive, in your face and never shuts up". Can't wait.

Slightly more innovative is PROJECT UNDERWORLD (provisional title) an experimental Sunday morning computer contest, harnessing the WWW-negotiating skills of two studio teams, plus viewers participating from home via telephone and Internet. PROJECT UNDERWORLD is the brainchild of the BBC's new Media Unit and is due to be aired live in February. Producer Marc Goodchild promises "a mixture of CRYSTAL MAZE, GAMES MASTER and THE ADVENTURE GAME", set in an underground world where drinking water is running out - and the only way to ensure that life remains sustainable is to achieve success in the various games that will take place each week such as "Net Detective" - in which contestants sit in an isolation chamber and solve computer puzzles, sounds like riveting viewing eh?

A recently received Press Release from US fan Robert Lichtman announces that he has now completed his latest project FANORAMA: Walt Willis' Fan Columns from NEBULA Science Fiction. This publication is 100 pages including covers, \$10.00 postpaid (to anywhere) contact Robert Lichtman, P. O. Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA.

Published November 1998 in an edition of 150 copies, this volume collects all 40 columns from the '50s Scottish prozine, NEBULA, plus five more that appeared after NEBULA folded: one from Robert's own PSI-PHI and four from Pete Weston's ZENITH. Also included is a letter from Beryl Henley Mercer reacting to Walt's review of her fanzine in the penultimate "Fanorama" column: its republication was necessary to provide context for Walt's final column. Introduction by Robert Lichtman includes comments from Darroll Pardoe on how "Fanorama" paved the way for his eventual discovery of fandom.

(Thanks to Bill Bowers and the RADIO TIMES for much of the above news.)

Steve Green adds: Don Taylor, the actor-turned-writer/director and husband of 1950s British "scream queen" Hazel Court, died on 28 December, eight days after his seventy-eighth birthday. His work behind the camera included ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES (1971; thanks to its social satire, arguably the most interesting of the four sequels), THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU (1977, Burt Lancaster took the lead) DAMIEN - OMEN II (1978; it reunited him with old friend William Holden) and THE FINAL COUNTDOWN (1980; Taylor found producer/star Kirk Douglas "a pain in the ass"). Married three times, he is

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

survived by Court and two daughters.

(Naomi Mitchison died recently, aged 101. Her Memoirs of a Spacewoman was one of the first sf books by a woman that I read, a delightful novel. Ed)

An Occasional Guide to Fannish Jargon

By Martin Tudor

"APA" - an amateur press association where members produces their fanzines and send a designated number to the OE (Official Editor) or administrator who sends one copy of each member's fanzines to each member in a bundle at predetermined intervals.

"Apazine" - fanzine distributed mainly through an amateur press association, but with some copies usually available outside.

"BNF" - Big Name Fan, a well known fan - usually award or fund winner.

"Clubzine" - usually similar to a genzine but published by, and mainly for, members of a club or society.

"COA" - Change of address.

"Conrep" - convention report.

"Duplicated" - printed from a Gestetner or Roneo stencil (US = mimeographed).

"Eastercon" - the National British SF Convention held over the Easter weekend somewhere in the UK.

"Faned" - largely unused now - fanzine editor.

"Fanzine" - a magazine written by and published by a fan.

"Genzine" - a fanzine featuring a variety of topics from various contributors.

"Jophan" - 'Joe Fan' as in 'any old Joe' or the common man/fan. The spelling comes from Walt Willis and Bob Shaw's classic tale of Jophan's quest for THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR.

"Letterzine" - usually a short, personal update to friends, etc.

"LoC" - letter of comment to a fanzine (hence column is 'loccol').

"Mediacon" - usually refers to tv/film convention.

"Mimeographed" - American version of "duplicated".

"Neofan" - a new fan, usually someone who has yet to publish a fanzine or be published in a fanzine or run/work on a con.

"Newzine" - a fanzine dealing primarily with news items.

"Perzine" - a fanzine written solely by the editor.

"Relaxacon" - small convention with little or no formal programme of events.

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

"RPG" - Role Playing Game such as Warhammer, Dungeons & Dragons etc.

"RSN" - Real Soon Now, usually humorous reference to availability of delayed publications.

"Sercon" - shortform for 'serious and constructive', indicates a bias towards serious discussion of sf, fantasy etc.

"The Usual" - refers to the availability of fanzines normally for LoC, trade, return postage, not for sale unless otherwise stated.

"WAHF" - We Also Heard From, a namecheck for the writers of unused LoCs.

(The above published courtesy of CRITICAL WAVE with thanks to Steve Green. A far more comprehensive and better written dictionary of fanspeak can be viewed at <http://www.stilyagi.org/stilyagi/fanspeak.html>)

I asked Steve Green, 'Speaking of jargon, why colophon and roscoe?'
He replied:

Good grief, such innocence. Roscoe, who takes the form of a beaver, is one of the three fannish ghods (the others being Ghu and Foofoo). As for colophon, it's a magazine term for the "published by, etc" material which opens up most of the older fanzines

Really? Goodness, what a rich heritage for me to explore!

Book Reviews

THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST by Peter F. Hamilton; Pan Books, pb 1273 pages, £7.99. Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

Firstly, if you haven't read **THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION** there's little point in starting this, as you won't understand a word! Secondly, I really envy Dave Langford who was able to read what he calls 'all 1,951' but I make 2,498 pages of both books in just two days. I am able to read fiction only in bed. I read a few pages at night as long as I can keep my eyes open, and a few more pages while I drink a cup of tea in the morning. Which is why I've had this book for a couple of months or so (but there's no List of Shame, so that's OK).

Now these books, as you'll have gathered, are real doorstops -- 2 1/2 inches thick (6cm for the newer fellers). And it's getting on for two years since I read **THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION**, which I thoroughly

enjoyed, as I do all of Peter's books. But: the time interval makes it difficult to remember who everybody is, where they come from, what their job is. And in this volume we are introduced to new characters every few pages, it seems; and not only people but planets, asteroids, habitats, have strange names and often even personalities. There is a Cast of Characters at the back, but in order to look up a character you have to know where they're from. Unusually, since I'm a big advocate of the Printed Page, I found myself wishing I had it all on computer, so that I could run a Search (or, better, that I had a neural nanonics implant in my brain, like many of the characters, so that I could run an instant check on any name. . .)

A character will appear, do something, then disappear for 300 or 500 pages. When he/she/it reappears I think " Ah yes, I remember that name -- but who IS it? What did they DO?" and I have to go back and check.

Don't let this put you off. If you read quickly, or have a better memory than I (and I don't usually have many problems) do read both books, and wait with bated breath (whatever that is) for the final volume of the Night's Dawn trilogy. As for this one, it's worth the wait for the final ten pages, when the Alkad Mzu's Alchemist is finally used. What a finale! Those of you who were weaned on 'Doc' Smith and his ravenous fields of force and bursting flares of raw and violent energy corruscating in space -- forget it! Jack Kinnison has nothing on Joshua Calvert and his crew. Peter has produced a tour de force (of every kind) which places him at the peak of real space opera.

DARK AGES by John Pritchard, Voyager £6.99, 751 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It is easy to see where Prichard's reputation as a horror writer has come from. The prose is smoothly written, characterisation is good and there is an air of research well done. This, however is a hefty tome and some aspects are a little diffuse as apparently related events happen at opposite ends of the country simultaneously.

The story begins four years after Fran was involved in an accident on Salisbury Plain. She has decided that it is time to face her fears and come to terms with what happened (which included the death of a friend) by revisiting the past. As she retraces old paths, a different type of ghost reaches out for her. This is a man from the past. He and his kind have been summoned to take care of a threat to civilisation by another force, an old

enemy that they have battled with down the ages. As supernatural horror, there are a lot of deaths, some of which seem to be deliberately instigated to shock. The texture of the whole is gritty. Fran has to sleep out with Aehelgar and his Ravens, with all the discomfort of going unwashed for days and with no clean underwear.

There are too many disparate elements here and the cast is unwieldy. Too many historic events are salted in so the whole becomes unwieldy. The book would have been more successful if sections had been cut.

ICEFALCON'S QUEST by Barbara Hambly, Voyager £5.99, 307pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It is more than a decade since Hambly's Darwath Trilogy was published. Now she returns to that world. It matters little if readers memories have faded and the original characters a not remembered well but it helps understand the subtleties if the major characters are familiar.

This is several years after the ending of the trilogy's last volume (*The Armies of Daylight*) and although the Dark has been vanquished it is still remembered. The countryside has not yet had time to recover and travel is still dangerous. Icefalcon is an exile from his own lands but is one of the Guards at the Keep in the Vale of Renwith. When he rescues a girl and an old man from bandits, he doesn't realise that he has unwittingly fallen foul of a ruse to gain entry to the Keep and kidnap Prince Tir.

The boy is valuable because he has access to memories of times past. The wizard Bektis and the renegade General Vair need him to guide them to a lost Keep which has now been buried under an advancing ice sheet.

Icefalcon feels honour-bound to follow and rescue the boy. During the quest, Icefalcon discovers some truths about the circumstances that led to his exile and out more about himself.

Both Tir and Icefalcon grow during their experiences. Like all of Hambly's books, this is a joy to read. The characters are well developed, the plot tight and pacy and an fine example of how fantasy ought to be written.

A CLASH OF KINGS: Book Two of a Song of Fire and Ice by George R.R. Martin, Voyager £17.99, 741 pages. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a magnificently packaged fantasy novel with a sprawling plot (the

cover is by Jim Burns). Although it is the second volume of a trilogy, it is not essential to have read the first (*A Game of Thrones*) for, as with any skilful writer, enough can be gleaned from the text to enable the reader to feel comfortable with current events.

After the death of the king, the realm has disintegrated into petty fiefdoms with several claimants to the throne. There is Joffrey, a cruel thirteen year-old, who is acknowledged as the eldest son of the dead king. His uncles, Stannis and Renly, both claim the Iron Throne because (according to Stannis) Joffrey is a bastard - in both senses of the word. Stannis claims the throne should be his because he is older, Renly because he is more popular. In the north, Robb Stark has declared himself king of that region, while Balon Greyjoy, Lord of the Iron Islands, believes he has a claim on his part of the world. To complicate matters still further, the daughter of the original king of the Iron Throne is in exile and is determined to claim her inheritance.

The novel is packed with intrigue, double dealing and the misfortunes of war, all skilfully related. Unfortunately, this is such a huge canvas and the cast of players is enormous. It is difficult to keep track of all the principal players in the game, or even to know who is important. So many of them are flawed that it is also difficult to decide who to sympathise with. On the whole, though, this is a book that is fast and convincing. I will want to read the next volume.

THE CASTLE OF THE WINDS by Michael Scott Rohan, Orbit £6.99, 454 pages. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Set in the same world as his *Winter of the Worlds* trilogy, Rohan has produced another excellent fantasy novel. Like his protagonist in the earlier volumes, the central character is a smith. Here smiths work magic, imbuing their work with qualities that cannot be explained by pure metallurgy. Kunrad has spent years trying to perfect a suit of armour, searching out and eradicating all flaws. Just when he believes he is close to achieving his goal, the armour is stolen. As the perfecting of the armour has been an obsession, now the retrieval of it becomes so. Kunrad and his two apprentices follow the trail clearly left by the thief.

All novels with long journeys in have a tendency towards tedium relieved by events deliberately introduced to wake up the reader. This is better than many. Once the group have been captured by corsairs and spent weeks

escaping through swamps populated with weird monsters, the plot properly develops. Yes, there are familiar elements like damsels in distress who become the untouchable romantic element, crises to avert and problems to solve but much can be forgiven as the story unfolds with flair. As the pace increases, it is easy to get immersed with the characters. The descriptions of smithcraft are wholly absorbing and believable. This is a book worth keeping on the shelf.

DARK TERRORS 3, The Gollancz Book of Horror edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton, Vista, pb, 381pp, £6.99. Star rating **** (if you like horror). Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Just as this series reaches new heights of quality and originality, it seems that Gollancz (or whatever multinational conglomerate owns their souls these days) are probably going to drop it. Volume 4 is available in hardcover, but volume 5 hasn't been commissioned. A great shame, since there's no other professional market for short horror in Britain.

Dark Terrors 3 is a fat volume stuffed with a wonderful variety of supernatural fiction. The big names don't disappoint: Ray Bradbury returns with 'Free Dirt', an atmospheric graveyard story which is historical and nostalgic and could easily have been a Gary Larson Far Side cartoon; Poppy Z Brite offers a piece so excruciatingly nasty that I thought for a moment I was reading *American Psycho* again; there's a typically dark and threatening offering from Ramsey Campbell, who rabbits on about bizarre happenings in a village not too far from Birmingham.

I was very struck by Conrad Williams' totally believable feminist story, 'The Windmill', set in rural Norfolk, where people are peculiar, and by Chris Fowler's new Spanky tale. There are vivid, memorable contributions from Pat Cadigan (what if your childhood was the opposite of what you remember?) and Steve Rasnic Tem (just suppose there's a loony out there who enjoys cutting strangers to see the blood flow).

Best of all (and with apologies to all the terrific stories left unmentioned) is Michael Marshall Smith. His 'Walking Wounded', about a bloke and his girlfriend moving from one part of London to another and the amazing aftermath, is wonderfully crisp and polished, oozing with great throwaway lines and not a little blood. Tasty.

QUEEN CITY JAZZ, by Kathleen Ann Goonan, Voyager, pb, 465, £5.99. Star rating ****. Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

I really enjoyed this book. It's full of fascinating ideas, memorable characters, a woman's quest to save her man (so refreshing after a lifetime of the hunky sf guy saving the screaming and incompetent, not to mention scantily clad woman) and it's got a good cover too. Even more, the blurb writer has read the book! Goodness!

The ubiquitous nanotech is integral to the story. I occasionally wonder how all this nanotech is actually going to be introduced into our society, once it becomes more than fantasy. This author tells us. Broadcasting becomes impossible due to a pulsar, or was it a quasar? I'm a little hazy on that. All our information technology became redundant almost overnight. No radio, TV, mobile phones. Nanotech took over. Information is transmitted by biological nanotech instead.

Cincinnati, the city at the centre of this story, Converted in 2032 into a Queen City. This was one of the fascinating ideas. The buildings are topped by giant flowers which open in the warmth to allow human sized information bees to harvest it's changing nanotechnology. Cincinnati is a sick city. Nanotech plagues were released at some time in the past and on top of this, Cincinnati has been corrupted by the personality saved. The bees are addicted to the pheromones released during performance and force the people to repeat and repeat.

Intertwined with this background the hero, Verity, travels from the rural retreat where she was raised towards Cincinnati in the hopes of finding a cure for Blaze and her dog, Cairo. As well as saving her friends she finds she is required to save the city itself.

The novel has a quite complex structure, the writing is vivid, occasionally poetic and the details give the whole structure depth. Although I think I would probably be out there in the country hiding from the nanotech takeover with the Shakers I can see the lure of the city. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be Billie Holiday for a short while?

This is a novel that would repay rereading. Just as soon as I've read all the books I've got to review I'm going to read it again.

CAVALCADE, by Alison Sinclair, Millenium, hb, 299pp, £16.99
Star rating ****. Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Another excellent novel by Alison Sinclair. Her characters are solid and believable, the interactions between them complex and real. Alison Sinclair has gone on my 'must buy' list, even in hard back.

The book begins neatly at the beginning. A huge group of people have been transported, at their request, onto an alien ship. We join them as they regain consciousness. The first line is, 'Someone said, "I don't effin' believe it."' This sets the tone for the book. The practical realities of being transported to an alien environment, the fascinating details, override the sensawunda stuff and yet, altogether they combine to form a real and solid sense of wonder.

There must be many reasons why someone would take up the offer of an alien ship to leave Earth. A few are expanded on in the novel. Stan Morgan goes because he works for NASA, Stephen Cooper because he has murdered someone, Sophie Hemmingway because premature senility is waiting for her and she might find a way to avoid it, Hathaway Dene because she's a pregnant teenager who feels she has no role in her family. We see the action from the viewpoints of these four people, the way the community organises itself, the dangers and discoveries, their growing understanding of the alien vessel. It's a weird situation. The aliens have invited them aboard but there's no-one there. All the high technology carried by the voyagers turns to dust, with catastrophic effects for those with heart pacemakers. They are left with just the information in their heads, the non-technical weapons and as diverse a group of misfits as you are ever likely to find.

What happens is fascinating. Go buy the book and find out.

Colophon

The contents of this issue are copyright 1999 the BSFG, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the BSFG. Text by Yvonne Rowse except where stated otherwise.

Many thanks to: DAVE HARDY, PAULINE & CHRIS MORGAN for their book reviews; MARTIN TUDOR for his articles, WILLIAM Mc CABE, STEVE GREEN & MARTIN TUDOR for help with 'What's on' and ANNE and ALAN WOODFORD for the labels and envelopes.