

July 1999

Issue 334

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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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-William McCabe, Ordinary Member-Anne Woodford, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton, Novacon 30 Chair-Tony Berry.

ROBERT

RANKIN

**will talk to the Brum Group on
Friday 9th July 1999, *
from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge,
second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street,
(entrance in Union Passageway).**

Drinks and food 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.)

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, Trimpley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

Robert Rankin

I'm told that the first time Robert came to talk to the Brum Group in the late 70's was his first talk and so he could be forgiven for forgetting the slide projector. Anyway, who needs a projector when a bare bulb and a talent for speaking result in one of the most entertaining meetings we've ever had?

Rog tells me that Robert is designing his new book covers himself. He makes plasticene models and photographs them.

Robert's new hardcover book is *Snuff Fiction*. *Apocalypso* is now out in paperback.

Signing Sessions

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

10 July, noon: Robert Rankin signing *SNUFF FICTION* (Doubleday hardcover £16.99) and *APOCALYPSO* (Corgi pbk £5.99). **Simon Green** signs his paperback *DEATHSTALKER DESTINY* (Millennium £6.99). *Apparently, so Rog tells me proudly, this is the book featuring Rog Peyton and Dave Langford's grisly deaths* *Ed*.

Jim Burns signs his large format paperback, *TRANSLUMINAL; THE PAINTINGS OF JIM BURNS* published by Paper Tiger (£14.99).

Forthcoming Events

9 July: ROBERT RANKIN will address the BSFG. From 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

13 August: Brum Group meeting from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

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.

3 – 5 September 99: Festival of Fantastic Films. Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. Details from 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester, M7 3QP.

10 – 12 September 99: Masque 7. Costume Con. University of Wolverhampton. Reg £30 'til 1st August, then £35. Contact 130, Hampstead Hall Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, B20 1JB.

17-19 September 1999: FantasyCon XXIII, at The Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham GoHs: Raymond Feist, Robert Rankin, Louise Cooper, Graham Masterton, Mike Tucker + others TBA Art Show; Dealer Room; talks; signings; launches; Banquet; numerous attending professional writers, editors, publishers, artists etc. Attending membership cost £50.00 (£40.00 for BFS members) until 31st July, £55.00 (£45.00 for BFS members) from 1st August. Supporting membership £25.00 (£20.00 for BFS members). Daily rate £25.00 (£20.00 for BFS members). Contact: SAE to: FantasyCon XXIII, 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT or <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/6859/fconxx3.htm>

5-7 NOVEMBER 1998: NOVACON 29, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Ian Stewart. Attending membership costs £32.00 in advance or £35.00 on the door. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

13-14 NOVEMBER 1999: MEMORABILIA Europe's largest sf, film, cult tv, pop and comic collectors' fair. Hall 17, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Box Office on 0121 767 4555 for further details.

21-24 April 2000: 2Kon, Eastercon at the Central Hotel, Glasgow with guests Guy Gavriel Kay, Deborah Turner Harris and Katherine Kurtz. Reg £25, £20 unwaged; supp. £15. Contact 2Kon, 30 Woodburn Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 8BA. E-mail: 2kon@des.st-and.ac.uk or check their web site at <http://www.theory.cs.st-and.ac.uk:2Kon>

(And this is the 2001 Eastercon not, as reported last month, the 2000 one. Oops! – Ed)

13-16 April 2001: Paragon, Eastercon at the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lianne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership currently £25 Attending, £15 Supporting, £12.50 Junior and £5 Child. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114

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281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk

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.

Jophan Report #123 by Martin Tudor

A special silver 35mm print of David Fincher's beautiful, murky thriller, *Se7en* will be screened on 29th July at 6pm at the MAC cinema and again at 5.15pm at the Electric Cinema, as part of the 15th Birmingham International Film & TV Festival. Starring Brad Pitt, Morgan Freeman and Gwyneth Paltrow, the story takes place in an unspecified urban hell-hole and features countless *film noir* and horror influences, with references to Milton, Chaucer and Dante which detectives Somerset (Freeman) and Mills (Pitt) must decipher in order to solve the mystery. This is a Rosebud screening to coincide with the BFI Modern Classics book on *Se7en* by Richard Dyer and it is hoped that the author will introduce the screening. Contact the festival hotline on 212 0999 for further info. The Rosebud Movie Club will be meeting from 7.45pm on the 2nd August in Carpe Diem, Great Charles Street in Birmingham to discuss the film.

The Millennium UFO Roadshow, sponsored by UFO MAGAZINE, comes to the Birmingham & Midlands Institute in Margaret Street on 8th July as part of a nation-wide tour. Running from 6.30-10pm the evening will feature guest speakers such as Jaime Maussan from Mexico who will show video tape "evidence" of a wave of intense UFO activity over Mexico since 1991. Admission is £5 on the door, for further details call Freephone 0800 092 4565.

Cosgrove Hall Productions, who created such classics as *Dangermouse* and *Noddy*, have a new children's animation in line for ITV's autumn

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schedule -- THE FOXBUSTERS. Based on a book by Dick King-Smith (author of BABE and THE QUEEN'S NOSE) will feature three feisty hens, voiced by Joanne Lumley, Whoopi Goldberg and Jane Horrocks.

While the latest animation from Matt Groening, creator of the Simpsons, is FUTURAMA, a satire set in the year 3000 (when THE SIMPSONS are still on TV!). Having debuted in the US to record audiences FUTURAMA starts on Sky 1 in September.

Good news for BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER fans -- BBC2 will be picking up the interrupted series two with episode 6 in the autumn, despite previous indications to the contrary. Andrew Fitzpatrick, BBC2 deputy scheduler reports that "As is commonly known, the BBC shares BUFFY with BSKyB. BBC2 had the opportunity to consolidate the success of series one by scheduling as many episodes from series two as it could accommodate in its schedule before Sky entered its exclusive licence period. Therefore, it was decided to finish the current run at episode five, where there was a natural story break. We do apologise for any confusion caused by the incorrect continuity announcement that followed the end of episode five."

Glyn Robbins adaptation of JRR Tolkien's THE HOBBIT will be staged by the Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent from 13-17th October. Contact 01782 213800 for further details.

PNN reports that Novacon 29 Hotel Liaison Pat McMurray is preparing to launch Incandescent, a bid for the 2002 Eastercon. Pat is currently in detailed negotiations with a hotel on the south coast of England. He requested that PNN not name the hotel, as he is not yet seeking publicity for the bid. Although respecting his wishes PNN confirmed that the hotel in question, which has recently changed hands, has not been used for a major SF convention for more than a decade.

US fans Ted White and Robert Lichtman have been injured in separate accidents. PNN reports that Robert Lichtman, publisher of the excellent fanzine Trapdoor was in a car crash on 1st June, and has broken several ribs and his pelvis. At last report, he was still in hospital, but starting to walk on crutches. However, it seems likely that his recovery will take some time.

And on the 12th June, Ted White fell while uprooting a wayward plant and broke his hip. He'll be having surgery to insert a pin, and be in hospital for around a week.

Best wishes to both Robert and Ted for a speedy recovery.

In a higher profile accident on the 19th June the best-selling horror writer Stephen King was seriously injured in an accident while walking in the town of North Lovell, Maine. King, 51, was walking south on the shoulder of Route 5 in north Lovell, where he owns a home, at about 4:30 p.m., the Associated Press reported. A motorist approaching from behind lost control of his Dodge Caravan when his pet Rottweiler that was running loose inside distracted him.

King was thrown 14 feet and suffered multiple fractures of his right leg below the knee, a fractured pelvis and a broken right hip, a collapsed lung, and a scalp laceration. He was carrying a book at the time of the accident, though it is not known whether or not he was reading as he walked. He remained conscious after being struck and was able to identify himself to Oxford County Sheriff's deputy Matt Baker: "He was hurting, but he was able to communicate, he gave me phone numbers of where to call his family," reported Baker. Adding that according to witnesses, the driver, Bryan Smith, 41, did not appear to be speeding. Charges will not be filed against Smith. Baker said Smith, who was not speeding at the time of the accident and stopped immediately, will not face any charges.

Officials said he underwent a few hours of surgery to repair his hip, leg and injuries to his chest and lung caused by the accident. Hospital officials said he suffered a punctured lung, a broken hip and a broken leg. King is in stable condition and will remain in the hospital for several weeks.

King spent more than seven hours in surgery on the Monday following his accident, as doctors laboured to mend multiple fractures in his right leg and repair his broken hip. Though his condition remains classified as "serious, yet stable." The 51-year-old horror writer under-went successful trauma surgery late Saturday, before Monday's orthopaedic surgery. Though he'll be able to walk with the aid of crutches by the time he leaves the hospital, doctors estimate King will need at least nine months of intensive rehabilitation therapy before he is able to fully resume a normally active lifestyle. Not that any of this news has got him down. Dr. Maria Ikossi, a trauma surgeon at Central Maine, reported that the author "has a sense of humour. He's not frantic at all about what he's going through. He's an extremely easy patient to take care of."

King underwent his third and most extensive surgery on Wednesday 23rd June. Doctors reported that he felt "a little wiped out," but still positive after the 10-hour procedure. "He's a pretty resilient guy, and has a lot of support from his family, who are all here," says Dr. David

Brown, an orthopaedic trauma surgeon at Central Maine Medical Centre in Lewiston.

In a press release, Brown says the lengthy procedure to repair King's fractured pelvis was successful, and that the author's hip joint socket was restored to within a millimetre of its original dimensions. The precision of the surgery is crucial to King's eventual recovery. Brown added that King is scheduled for one more operation when doctors will concentrate on King's knee and a minor adjustment to his pelvis. Brown reports says that King should be able to return home in early July but will have a limited range of motion below the waist for up to six weeks, and won't be able to place much weight on his hip or leg for three to six months.

Hospital regulations do not allow flowers. The family has requested that a donation in lieu of flowers be made to: The Camp Jordan Capital Campaign, 101 Camp Jordan Way, Ellsworth, ME 04605, USA. Cards and letters may be sent to Stephen King, 49 Florida Avenue, Bangor, ME 04401, USA.

King, one of the world's most popular authors, has written more than 30 novels, many of which have been made into films. His novels include *The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Christine* and *Misery* - a story about an author who is seriously injured in a car accident and then imprisoned by a fan. The media have enjoyed pointing out that "the King of Horror" has a thing about possessed vehicles. There was *Christine*, the evil '57 Plymouth Fury, and the fleet of murderous semi-trucks in his short story "Trucks," which became the basis of the film *MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE*.

A number of King's fans have teasingly expressed relief that their hero was not subjected to the tender mercies of Annie Wilkes, a character he created for the best-selling *Misery*. The emotionally unstable Annie rescues her favourite author after she finds him trapped in a snow bank in the aftermath of an auto accident and then subjects him to various tortures during his convalescence to convince him to resurrect her favourite character. Actress Kathy Bates, who won an Oscar for playing Annie in Rob Reiner's movie adaptation of *Misery*, sent King a card bearing the cryptic inscription, "Got Novril?" - a reference to Annie's painkiller of choice!

An unexpected bonus from King's accident is that fans all over Maine has eagerly volunteered to donate blood for him. While the medical centre has plenty in stock, a spokesman said, "it's always a good idea to give blood, so I think those gestures are greatly appreciated."

The hospital has been deluged with cards, letters, and flowers sent by fans and friends, and some local florists have even reported selling out

their entire inventories. Traffic to the medical centre's Web page, www.emmc.org, has increased by 3,000 percent since the weekend of the accident.

With sales of his "fearsomes" (King's pet name for his terrifying tales) in excess of 100 million copies, King is reportedly the richest writer who has ever lived. He is predictably ranked among Forbes' highest-grossing U.S. entertainers (he earned \$84 million for 1996 to 1997 alone). In 1989, King signed a deal with Viking that netted him \$35 million for four books - a new record. But despite this King announced his decision to leave Viking (his publisher of eighteen years) in 1997, in order to cut a new deal, which netted him his \$17 million asking price for his latest novel, *Bag of Bones*. King most recently topped the best-seller lists with *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, and director Frank Darabont is wrapping an adaptation of King's best-selling serial *The Green Mile*, starring Tom Hanks, which Warner Bros. expects to release at Christmas.

According to his official Web site, www.stephenking.com, the author has two limited-edition anthologies of his short fiction due to be released this summer, *Legacies* and *999*. Avon will release a trade edition of *999* in September, and Scribner is also due to release *Hearts in Atlantis*, described as "a collection of linked stories," the same month.

August will see the publication of *DOWNS-LORD DAWN* by John Whitbourn (pb, £5.99) by Earthlight, followed in September by *SAILING TO SARANTIUM* by Guy Gavriel Kay (pb, £5.99). October sees *SUPERSCIENCE* by Michael White (pb, £5.99) and November *THE KEEP OF FIRE* by Mark Anthony (pb, £9.99), with his *BEYOND THE PALE* (pb, £5.99) coming out in December. While the new year will see *DRAGON AND PHOENIX* (pb, £9.99) and *THE LAST DRAGON-LORD* (pb, £5.99) by Joanne Bertin, and *GREEN RIDER* by Kristen Britain (pb, £5.99). Later in 2000, March sees the publication of *SARANTIUM 2* by Guy Gavriel Kay (hb, £16.99) and *THE MERLIN CODEX* by Robert Holdstock (hb, £16.99).

Before he discovered bar billiards and an ability to write brilliant comic fantasy (most recently, *ONLY HUMAN* and *WISH YOU WERE HERE*), Tom Holt wrote two historical novels set in Athens in the 5th century BC - *THE WALLED ORCHARD* and *GOATSONG*. Orbit published both in an omnibus edition entitled *THE WALLED ORCHARD* last year, and they now report that Holt's long overdue return to historical fiction is about to happen. This summer, Orbit are publishing *ALEXANDER AT THE WORLD'S END*, a novel of Alexander the Great and the man who,

for a short time, was his tutor. And next year they'll be publishing OLYMPIAD, a novel of the first ever Olympic Games.

Also due from Orbit are the following: RIVER OF BLUE FIRE (Otherland Volume 2) by Tad Williams (July, pb); MOUNTAIN OF BLACK GLASS (Otherland Volume 3) by Tad Williams (September, hb); A KNIGHT OF THE WORD by Terry Brooks (August, pb); ANGEL FIRE EAST by Terry Brooks (October, pb); THE PATH OF DAGGERS by Robert Jordan (September, pb).

Mark Olson reports in a recent PNN bulletin that the Bay Area in 02 Worldcon bid has folded their San Francisco bid and is bidding only San Jose. The San Francisco in 02 bid, one of two bids run by the Bay Area in 02 committee, has been dropped due to the loss of their main hotel, the Argent. The Argent (named the ANA in 1993) had welcomed the prospective Worldcon, but received a firm offer from mundanes and sold the space. With the loss of the Argent, the SF in 02 committee decided that the San Francisco bid was not viable and withdrew it.

Fortunately, they had received an attractive offer from San Jose, a city about 60 miles south of San Francisco at the other end of Silicon Valley and had already launched a bid for it as well, preferring to let fandom vote to choose between the two sites. San Jose is now their sole entry into the 2002 race. This race will be decided at Aussiecon 3. The other bidder is the Roswell, NM bid.

Tarzan, Austin Powers and John Travolta's *The General's Daughter* all beat George Lucas' *Star Wars* prequel *The Phantom Menace's* opening weekend's figures in the US. Despite the fact that *Daughter* is the kind of movie that must resort to using quotes attributed to the critic from the *Padukaville Press* (the only critic who liked it), the military thriller earned \$22.3 million to *Menace's* \$17.8 million. *Tarzan*, featuring the vocal talents of Tony Goldwyn, Minnie Driver, and Rosie O'Donnell, opened at No. 1 with an estimated \$34.1 million. It was the best opening weekend for a Disney film since *The Lion King*, which opened four years ago this month and took in \$41 million. *Austin Powers*, came in at No. 2; *The Spy Who Shagged Me* attracted \$31.9 million and crossed the \$100 million mark, therefore doubling the entire domestic earnings of its predecessor, *International Man of Mystery*.

According to the Associated Press, studio executives said it was the first time in their collective recollection that three movies grossed more than \$20 million on the same weekend. Lucas will just have to content himself with the fact that *Menace* has successfully overtaken *The Lion*

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King as the sixth biggest-grossing film in history.

Writer's Digest, a major publication for writers, recently released their Fiction 50 list - their list of the 50 most prestigious fiction markets worldwide check <http://members.tripod.com/theurbanite/>

Terry Pratchett and popular science writers Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen are interviewed by Dave Langford at [Amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk), about their joint effort *The Science of Discworld*. Check it out at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/pratchett-interview/>

Veteran director Ken Russell, one of the most remarkable figures in British film with a score of films and television documentaries to his credit, is also interviewed at Amazon. Where he plugs his SF novel "Mike and Gaby's Space Gospel", see <http://www.amazon.co.uk/ken-russell-interview/>

If you are interested in a new book about alien contacts contact Arthur D'Alembert at artis@mypad.com or check out the web site <http://www.goplay.com/aalembert>

The Seti@home programme, described last issue is suffering from teething problems reports PNN. Overwhelmed with over 500,000 volunteers, they have had to dedicate virtually all of their computer resources to servicing data submissions and requests for more data. Unfortunately, they don't have enough left to receive and process incoming raw data from radio telescopes, and break it down into bite-size packets to send out to volunteers. Exactly how many different packets of data they have is a closely guarded secret, but PNN understand that it may be a number not unadjacent to 115, and these few packets are being endlessly recycled and reprocessed. They promise that they are getting more resources, and this is a temporary situation. So keep on processing the data!

We knew it all along - warp drives that can propel starships around the Galaxy faster than the speed of light may be possible after all - with a little help from Dr Who! In 1994 Miguel Alcubierre, then at the University of Wales in Cardiff, startled physicists by showing that the starship Enterprise's famed faster-than-light propulsion system might not be so ludicrous after all. Alcubierre proposed that a starship could "warp" space so that it shrinks ahead of the vessel and expands behind it. By pushing the departure point many light years backwards while

simultaneously bringing destinations closer, the warp drive effectively transports the starship from place to place at faster-than-light speeds.

But in 1997 Michael Pfenning and Larry Ford at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, apparently killed this ingenious idea by showing that it needed far more than the entire energy content of the Universe to work.

Now Chris Van Den Broeck of the Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, has resurrected Alcubierre's proposal. The trick lies in using a strange form of warped space, involving a "bubble" with a large internal volume but a tiny surface area.

To picture how it works, first imagine space having just two dimensions. Then suppose there is a bubble that is connected to this flat space by a very thin neck. Inhabitants of this two-dimensional world would find that this neck has a very small circumference, but the inside of the bubble has a large surface area. In the real world, says Van Den Broeck, these 2D circumferences become surface areas and surface areas become volumes: "You can have regions of space that appear small from the outside, but have huge internal volumes."

Fans, of course, will instantly recognise this as one of the key properties of Dr Who's Tardis, which looked like a police box but had a spacious interior. But the real appeal of such bubbles is that their small surface area can be created with very modest amounts of energy. In his paper, published on the Los Alamos general relativity pre-print service, Van Den Broeck uses Pfenning and Ford's results to show that a bubble big enough to contain a starship could be formed using just a gram of suitable space-warping material. And with the space warped conveniently around the ship, once again destination and departure are brought together, allowing the ship to move faster than the speed of light.

Van Den Broeck cautions that this space-warping material must possess negative energy--and no one knows how to make such material at present. Even so, the discovery that warp drives may not need vast amounts of energy is already causing a flurry of excitement among theorists. "This is a beautiful result", says Alcubierre, who is now at the Max Planck Institute for Gravitational Physics in Potsdam, Germany. "Of course, there are still some basic questions - like how does one go about constructing this Tardis space-time - but it puts the concept of space warps back on the agenda."

A Worldcon bid has been launched for Charlotte North Carolina in 2004. A bid committee including Kelly Lockhart, Irv Koch and Shelton Drum will bid for a Worldcon to be held in the Charlotte Convention Centre in

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. The convention centre has 280,000 sq ft of exhibition space, and it is expected that it will be able to accommodate all the convention activities. There are apparently 2,900 bedrooms in a number of hotels at distances of between one and eight blocks.

North Carolina is in the Eastern rotation zone, so this bid is not dependent on the ratification of the No-Zone proposal at Aussiecon 3. However, if No-Zone is ratified, then potential competing bids will not be limited by the zoning system, and anywhere that is outside 60 miles of Philadelphia, site of the 2001 Worldcon, will be eligible.

(Many thanks to the PLOKTA News Network, New Scientist, Associated Press, BBC Online, Reuters, WHAT'S ON, EXPRESS & STAR and the BFS news update for much of the above information.)

Book Reviews

SOMEPLACE TO BE FLYING by Charles De Lint,

Pan £6.99, 620 pp

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Some books catch the imagination in such a way that, not only do you wish you had written it, but it has a ring of truth about it. This is one of those books. Set in modern America, it involves people who belong to a mythic past. According to some Amerindian myths, the first people were animals and among them, Coyote was a mischief maker.

In *Someplace to be Flying*, Hank goes to the aid of a photographer who is attacked in the backstreets of Newford. Two girls who seem to appear from no-where rescue both of them. The photographer, Lily, is looking for animal people, about whom she has heard rumours. What she doesn't realise, is that they have found her and want the container in which she keeps her film. This was given to her by a friend, Rory, after he had been cleaning out the attic of the apartment house where he lived. The container is a magical item that frequently gets lost and disguises itself. Her attackers want it, so does Coyote, who hopes to use it to undo his past mistakes. As a result, a number of the animal people, and their descendants, become involved.

The complexity of the plot means that any attempt to summarise it, trivialises it. The characters are well drawn and the mix of the contemporary setting and myth works well. If anything, it is a bit long, and one section, although it sheds light on the motivation of some of the characters could have been cut. Nevertheless, this is a fantasy novel well worth reading.

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(Pauline sent this to me some time ago but it became lost in the chaos of my system. Sorry - ed.)

MOONFALL, by Jack McDevitt,
Harper Collins, 544pp, Pbk, £6.99
Star rating ***
Reviewed by Michael Jones

Although at first sight a comet crashing into the Earth – Moon system might not seem a very new idea for a novel, this one is of extra-solar origin and is travelling nearly ten times as fast as a typical in-system object. The result is the total destruction of the Moon and the consequent bombardment of the Earth with falling debris, culminating in one piece big enough to repeat the event that supposedly wiped out the dinosaurs.

Despite its sf plot and setting (year 2024, fully functioning space stations and an operating base on the moon) this reads more like a mainstream novel. The narrative point of view switches from one character to another every couple of pages or so and many of the lesser characters are there solely in order that the reader may, through their experiences, understand something more of the effect events are having, or are going to have, on the world as we know it. They contribute little to the advancement of the story and in my view constitute padding, which would have been better left out to reduce this big book to a more manageable length.

That having been said, it must be admitted that it is otherwise an excellently contrived novel. The spaceflight scenes have a very authentic feel, the descriptions of the devastation wrought by fragments of the moon impacting on the Earth are well done and the political background is effective. The story builds to a dramatic climax in which the Earth is saved from total ruin by good old human ingenuity. Unfortunately, I could not escape the feeling of having heard it all before. The sheer inventiveness pervading McDevitt's earlier work appeared to have deserted him and he has produced little more than a routine disaster novel, albeit one as competently written as anyone else has managed previously.

EARTH MADE OF GLASS by John Barnes,
Millennium £6.99, 416pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

In over 400 pages, very little happens; all the real action is in the last fifty

pages. John Barnes is an award winning author and a fine writer. A different fine writer would have told the essentials in a short story.

The husband and wife team of Girault and Margaret Leones from the Office of Special Projects, are sent to the planet of Briand. What they are expected to achieve remains a little vague but they seem to be the catalyst for the events which eventually follow. This planet has been colonised by two very different, idealised societies. One group tries to live according to the tenets of Tamil poetry, the other as the ancient Maya did. Neither group speak to each other in case they contaminate each other's cultures and they hate each other irrationally, simply for existing. Under normal circumstances they might have been left to get on with it but the advent of spinner technology (which offers instant translocation to any other place in the colonised sphere) and the increasing number of discoveries of alien artefacts means that a resolution of some kind must be achieved. Much of the book gives up a beautiful guided tour of the two cultures or dwells on the disintegrating relationship between Girault and Margaret.

This is a book that you will love because of the richness of language and description, or loath because this gets in the way of the story.

DRAGONSHADOW by Barbara Hambly,
Voyager £6.99, 297 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Dragonsbane, first published in 1986, introduced us to John Aversin, an unlikely dragonslayer, and Jenny Waynest, a witch. Dragonshadow is the sequel. When a dragon is reported in a neighbouring valley, John is sent for. This, however, proves to be an illusion sent by bandits to cover their activities so while Jenny stays behind to deal with the bandit mage causing the trouble, John returns home. Then a real dragon strikes. Badly injured, John sees another mage heal the dying dragon and fly off with his son. Both boy and dragon are possessed by demons, setting the scene for a deadly battle that there seems little hope of winning.

The narrative is straight forward but the plot has its ingenuities as John enlists the help of the black dragon, Morkeleb, who he encountered in Dragonsbane. Both John and Jenny are willing to risk everything for each other and the life of their son. This is fantasy at its best and although Dragonshadow is a sequel, it is not necessary to have read, or reread the original.

LORD OF LIGHT by Roger Zelazny.

Millennium £6.99, 261 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

There will always be differences of opinion when it comes to choosing the best of anything but there will always be excellent books remembered with fondness. Some of those are worth making available to every new generation of readers that comes along. This series of SF Masterworks is such an attempt. So far it seems to be working. *Lord of Light* is a book that caught my imagination first time round. It may not be quite the same book as I remembered but it is just as good.

In some far distant future, this world has been colonised. At one time there was war with the demon-like natives. Then there was dissension amongst the first comers. Some think that remembered technology must be banned and the only scientific developments must be genuine innovations - the printing press has been suppressed many times. But the First use technology to enhance their powers and to reincarnate themselves. They have become god-like and have taken aspects of the Hindu pantheon. Some, though, like Sam, think technology should be available to all. This is Sam's struggle against Heaven.

The story is much more than this, and more subtle than a synopsis sounds. This is a book that must be re-read at intervals, if only as a reminder of how brilliant a writer Zelazny was.

The production of this volume is spoilt by too many printing errors.

THE MARRIAGE OF STICKS by Jonathon Carroll,

Gollancz, hbk, 282pp, £16.99.

Star rating *****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

I'm going to give Rog yet another chance to make his favourite comment. He did it when I admitted in a review that I hadn't read any Stephen Baxter (I have now thank you). 'What do you mean?' he'll ask, quite kindly (but loudly) because he can see how much money I'm going to spend in the near future in *Andromeda*, 'What do you mean, you've never read any Jonathon Carroll before?' I've got my riposte figured out already. 'Why on Earth,' I'll ask, 'Did you not press a copy of one of his novels into my hand and insist that I buy it like you did with the Sparrow?' To be fair, perhaps he assumed I was well enough read not to need his help.

What's so good about it? It's difficult to say. A synopsis doesn't do justice to the book but lets have a go. Carroll sets the scene, introduces the main character, Miranda Romanac, and her wonderfully realised

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world. She is going to go to her class reunion with her best friend. Both of them hope to meet their old boyfriends. At the reunion Miranda is told that James Stillman died three years earlier in a car crash. Gradually Miranda's life begins to change, slipping slowly away from certainty. She meets and begins an affair with Hugh, a married man. Then she sees James Stillman waving to her. With increasing pace her life slides into the fantastic, surrealistic chaos.

This is a truly fascinating book, delightfully well-written. The dialogue is believable, the descriptive passages lyrical (reviewer's cliché but true) and the emotions are so strong you feel them in sympathy. Even the chapter titles are great: 'The Dog Makes the Bed', or 'Stories Written in the Snow'. This is a book that I would pay hardback prices for. Hell, next time Rog gets him across for a signing I will even go and queue up to have it, and the rest I'm going to buy next time I'm in town, signed by the great man. Give it a try.

(And now a quick admission from the editor. I'm now on the list of shame. I'm sorry. I'm reading The Fifth Head of Cerberus and it's great but last week I came over all unhappy and insecure and had to read Robert Heinlein books and eat lots of chocolate. I'll finish the book and review it for the next newsletter - Ed)

The 'Star Ratings' are:

- * Utter dross
- ** Not totally unbearable
- *** Worth risking it
- **** Pretty damn good
- ***** BUY IT!!

Colophon

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