

April 2000

Issue 343

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-Vernon Brown, Secretary-Dave Hardy, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-Martin Tudor, Ordinary Members-Anne Woodford & William McCabe, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 30 & 31 Chair-Tony Berry.

Alaistair Reynolds

will speak to the BSFG on

Friday 14th April 2000



7.45pm for 8pm, 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). (Discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.)

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING 12 MAY 2000:

ANDY SALMON will deliver a talk entitled "From Kazakhstan to the Stars"
(what Baikonur Cosmodrome is like to visit).

This month's Speaker is: Alastair Reynolds

Alaistair Reynolds first novel REVELATION SPACE was published in hardcover by Gollancz last month, price £17.99 or £14.39 from amazon.co.uk whose plot synopsis reads: "Was it just pure bad luck that the Amarantin's star chose to flare just when they were on the verge of discovering space flight? For the human colonists now settling the Amarantin homeworld, this seems of little interest, until they discover that the Amarantin were wiped out for a reason." Dave Langford reviews it at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0575068752/o/qid=.../026-2858785-090583>

Signing Sessions

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

April 15th: Alastair Reynolds will be signing *Revelation Space* (Gollancz, £10.99) at Andromeda.

May 13th: John Harris will be signing his new art book, *Mass*. If anyone would like signed copies of any of David Gemmel's books please contact Andromeda.

Unfortunately, Guy Gavriel Kaye will not now be coming to Andromeda before Eastercon.

Forthcoming Events

19 MARCH-29 APRIL 2000: FutureWorld the BBC's touring exhibition of the way in which digital tv services will transform communications technology. In the Gas Hall of the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. For further details call 0121-303-2834/1966 or check www.birmingham.gov.uk/bmag

10-15 APRIL 2000: Ben Elton's GASPING at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre. Call the Box Office on 01902-429212.

14 APRIL 2000: BSFG meeting at the Britannia, a new writer ALISTAIR REYNOLDS will be speaking to the Group about *Revelation Space* (Gollancz, £17.99) his first novel. A work of "hard" SF on an epic scale!

20-29 APRIL: RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET performed by 80 young performers at the Old Rep Theatre. For tickets call Birmingham City Council's Leisure & Community Services Department on 0121-236-5622.

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

12 MAY 2000: BSFG meeting at the Britannia, ANDY SALMON will deliver a talk entitled "From Kazakhstan to the Stars" (what Baikonur Cosmodrome is like to visit).

26-29 MAY: Plokta.Con, small con at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. GoH Ken MacLeod. Further information from 3 York St, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH, UK, or plokta.con@plokta.com.

9 JUNE 2000: BSFG meeting at the Britannia. Editor of the Earthlight line of books, JOHN JARROLD, will be speaking to the Group.

14 JULY 2000: BSFG meeting at the Britannia. ANDY LOUND from the Planetary Society will be speaking to the Group.

8-10 SEPTEMBER: FantasyCon 24, the annual convention of the British Fantasy Society at the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham. GoHs Storm Constantine, Stan Nicholls. Further information from 46 Oxford Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT, UK or <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/files/fc200reg4.jpg>

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVACON 30 at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Chris Priest, Special Guest Rog Peyton, Guest Artist David A Hardy. Attending membership costs £28.00 until Easter 2000, after which it may rise again. Contact: Steve Lawson, Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html>

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

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.

Book Reviews

STAR MAKER by Olaf Stapledon. Millennium SF Masterworks. Pbk. 272pp, £6.99. Reviewed by Tony Berry.

With an introduction by Brian Aldiss and rave reviews by various literary luminaries, this book is considered to be one of the most influential works of SF ever written. William Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950) was a pacifist and philosopher whose first published work of fiction was *Last and First Man*, another seminal SF novel, although Stapledon never knew he was even writing SF.

Written in 1937 *Star Maker* is an astonishing work of imagination: a man stands on a hill in England, looking at the stars, and then finds himself leaving his body and flying outwards from Earth through the cosmos. No explanation is given for this and none is needed; we don't even know his name. Eventually he discovers alien life on another planet and comes to reside in the mind of one of them. When he leaves this world, several years later, he takes the mind with him on his travels, and so they go, linking with more minds and growing in power, until this huge force, maybe thousands strong, ranges up and down the whole of space and time. The book flags a little here, as one set of strange aliens and their society is described and then another, and then another. Impressively inventive, yes, but get on with it already. Eventually, of course, they decide to go and find the Creator and say hello. On the way, as the group-mind becomes ever more attuned, they discover that not only are the planets intelligent, but the stars, nebulae and even entire galaxies are

sentient. Bloody hell. This is where Stapledon's truly cosmic imagination goes into overdrive, and it's easy to see how he has influenced so many other writers. I'll let you find out what happens when they finally confront the Star Maker and his works.

The wealth of ideas in this book is really too much to take in on one reading. I first came across it when I was quite young and found it pretty baffling. Not surprising really. Although limited by 1930s understanding of cosmology, it is still a remarkable work and well ahead of its time (at one point Stapledon describes interplanetary war where entire races are destroyed with atomic energy, and this was written years before the Manhattan Project). Even today it is still up there with the best. Highly recommended.

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT JOINS THE CIRCUS by Harry Harrison, Gollancz, 269pp, £16.99, hardback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Star rating ***

The first Stainless Steel Rat story was published in 1957 and was a fresh and original tale featuring the eponymous hero, also known as 'Slippery Jim' DiGriz, a professional criminal who was forced to turn interstellar law enforcer to escape the consequences of his misdeeds. It became a book, followed over the years by half a dozen more and now, after a hiatus of about twelve years, here is another instalment in the saga – presumably the last, since it concludes with Slippery Jim's avowed intention to retire and concentrate on writing his memoirs (!). Before that he has taken on and defeated a master criminal who begins by ostensibly employing to solve a series of mysterious robberies but turns out to be a con artist intending to avail himself of the Rat's talents and use him to perpetrate a monumental interplanetary swindle.

I must confess to having been somewhat disappointed. Tastes have changed in thirty-odd years and SF has perhaps become more sophisticated (I certainly hope I have). Thirty years ago the stories had something new to say and Slippery Jim DiGriz was a worthy addition to the pantheon of great SF heroes. By contrast, this latest one seemed short on originality and lacking in excitement. Obviously the ending was never in doubt and on the way the hero's smug cleverness became a trifle boring. Even the jokey style has lost its lightly amusing touch and become heavy-handed. I seized this book in eager remembrance of past glories, but living on past glories is not enough and without something new to say an ongoing series is in danger of becoming too formulaic.

That said, it is not all bad. Harry probably couldn't write a really bad book if he tried and there is still plenty here to satisfy. Wait for the paperback though.

RECKLESS SLEEP by Roger Levy. Victor Gollancz, 344pp, £16.99
h/b, £10.99 trade p/b.

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating ****

At some time in the unspecified future the survivors of a failed colonisation attempt have returned to a world devastated by vulcanism. In this dystopian England, where the forces of law and order barely maintain control, people eke out a precarious existence from which virtual reality games offer some kind of escape. Jon Sciler, one of the survivors, becomes involved with a project to develop a bigger and better game but finds that the project seems already to have taken the life of his best friend and looks likely to kill him as well unless he can discover the secret agenda in time.

The foregoing summary is hardly sufficient to do justice to a very complex book. The plot unfolds gradually, layer by layer, and everything is eventually worked out and explained as various early incidents assume a significance which could scarcely have been foreseen on first encounter. It also displays considerable originality, despite the fact that as I worked my way through the story I found myself identifying several books I knew from which Levy seemed to have derived some of his ideas. This is not to say that it is plagiaristic – far from it – and considering that it is a first novel, *Reckless Sleep* is a very considerable achievement.

However, I came to the end undecided as to how much I had enjoyed it. It had held my interest throughout and I had been anxious to get to the end and discover what had really been going on, but when I did find out I felt that ultimately the book was a bit too complicated for its own good. Nevertheless, I recommend it and would definitely say that further work from this new writer will be worth looking out for.

DUNE by Frank Herbert (new illustrated edition) Gollancz, 447pp,
£16.99, hardback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star Rating *****

There can be few fans who do not know of *DUNE*, which has been around now for some thirty-five years. The *raison d'être* of this latest

edition is the addition of the dozen illustrations created by John Schoenherr for the original magazine serialisation, illustrations which author Herbert is said to have preferred over all others. As to whether it is now enhanced as a reading experience by their inclusion, I have reservations. Although artistically attractive, they are impressionist rather than representational and do little to provide the reader with a believable visualisation of how people and places looked (or will look!) in that far-off future world. For that one must look to the De Laurentiis/Lynch movie of 1984 which, whatever its other faults, constituted what can only be described as a stunning visual experience.

The story of DUNE is immense in scope, dealing as it does with the emergence of a messiah to lead the human race to a new future, his existence the result of a deliberate, though covert, programme of selective breeding over many generations. His story is set thousands of years from now against a complex background of religious manoeuvring, political intrigue, commercial machinations, inter-family rivalry and planetary war. However it is not an easy book to read. It is incredibly detailed, with appendices and a glossary to explain what may not be immediately obvious, and the reader dare leave no sentence unremarked in case some seeming trivial fact or casual remark may assume later significance. Nevertheless, anyone prepared to put in the effort to understand it fully will find it a rewarding experience. Although it might not quite justify the claim on the front cover that it is the greatest science fiction novel of all time, it should certainly be on everybody's list of the top ten.

However, this review must chiefly consider it in the form of this new illustrated edition. It is probably not worth buying it for the illustrations alone but, what I said earlier notwithstanding, it is adorned by Schoenherr's paintings and if you have not already read it – and you should! – this version is the one to have.

FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON by Daniel Keyes, Millennium SF
Masterworks, £6.99, 216pp
Reviewed by Dan Waters
Star Rating *****

I have often heard of this book, ever since I was at school, but I have never had the opportunity to read it until now. I was expecting a difficult read but I was very pleasantly surprised, in fact I found it extremely difficult to put the book down.

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

The book is in the form of a diary kept by Charlie Gordon, a mentally handicapped man, who has agreed to take part in an experiment that will increase his IQ. Algernon, of the title, is a mouse who underwent the experiment before Charlie, whose intelligence has increased immensely. As the diary progresses you can see Charlie's intelligence increasing and very soon he loses his job as a floor cleaner at the bakery and eventually surpasses even the scientists' intelligence. He writes of the cruelties of the people around him as he becomes aware of what and why they do things to him and eventually he becomes aware of the inadequacies of the scientists treating him. The story told in the diary covers a period of time of about nine months, in which time the story goes full circle. At the beginning Charlie is willing to do the experiment even if it will only make him clever for a short period of time. However, at the end, his loss of intelligence is felt a lot more as he desperately seeks a cure for himself and Algernon. Also, he desperately searches for friendship, love and respect from other people. Only on the way up and on the way back down again does his intelligence measure the same as any of his friends and as he surpasses them they become scared of him. It seems to hfm like the greatest gift to be given intelligence and yet the cruellest torture to lose it again.

I found this book to be one of the most gripping books I have read in a long time. I loved it and would heartily recommend it to anyone who wants to read a master's work.

CITY WATCH TRILOGY by Terry Pratchett. Victor Gollancz, £16.99, 759pp, hardback.

Reviewed by Dan Waters

Star Rating *****

This book consists of *Guards! Guards!*, *Men at Arms* and *Feet of Clay*. There seems to be, nowadays, three camps where Terry Pratchett is concerned. The first, which I fall into, is the one that loves his work, the second is the one that doesn't like his work and the third, the one that is dwindling almost daily, the one where people have not read his work. Saying that, I thought this book would be a nice easy book to read and review and, to be honest, it was very easy to read. It is also simple to review. It is great!

The fact that three of the best of his Discworld stories are put into one volume made it a lot easier to read them in continuation, whereas the first time round I had to wait for two or maybe three years between stories.

Guards! Guards! The first novel of this trilogy introduces us to Captain Vimes, Carrot, Nobby Nobbs and Sargent Colon of the City Watch, and Lady Ramkin, who breeds swamp dragons, raises funds for the Sunshine Sancturay for Sick Dragons and owns half of Ankh-Morpork. Someone has summoned a dragon into the city and it is appearing, disintegrating people and burning houses, then disappearing again. Vimes knows there is a crime involved but doesn't quite know which one. And since the arrival of Carrot something strange has been happening to the Watch, they have been trying to *catch* criminals.

Men at Arms continues the story of the Watch. Vimes is retiring and marrying Lady Ramkin. Someone has stolen the Gonne from the Assassin's Guild and now they are taking pot-shots at important people in the city, including Sam Vimes. And if that wasn't enough, he only has until noon tomorrow to crack the case.

Feet of Clay finalises the trilogy. Vimes is now Commander of the Watch and Carrot is the Captain. Someone is murdering seemingly innocent people in the city. They are also poisoning the Patrician. Nobby Nobbs has been made an Earl. When the city golems start committing suicide Vimes has yet another problem on his hands.

Terry Pratchett has three of his best works in one volume and if you have never read any of his work before this is probably one of the best ways to start reading the Discworld novels. But then again, I am a little biased.

SLOW LIGHTNING by Jack McDevitt. Voyager, £10.99, 435pp, Trade pbk. Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse
Star Rating ***

There's a fairly long review quote from Stephen King on the back of this book. In part it says, 'a nail-biting neo-Gothic tale that blends mystery, horror and a fascinating look at how first contact with an utterly alien species might happen.' Somehow, despite everything, it didn't work for me. There were certainly bits that were scary. There were bits that were interesting and Kim Brandywine, heroine of the book, was sufficiently real to me that I wanted to give her a bloody good shake but I wasn't gripped. If it hadn't been the only book I'd got with me on the plane I'd have dumped it back onto the review table with the hope that someone else would pick it up.

Kim works as a marketing person for the Seabright Institute who are turning stars nova in an effort to attract aliens, in a universe that seems

empty of other life. (Naive? Yup.) Some years ago her older clone/sister disappeared after returning from an expedition to find life. This loss has affected Kim deeply. It seems to have turned her into the sort of person who would carelessly risk her own and other people's careers, and indeed lives, out of curiosity. Inevitably she sets out to investigate what happened all those years ago with massive consequences.

It's difficult to say quite why I found it so uninspiring. Certainly I found the reliance on individual stupidity and misjudgement to be irritating with Kim being a particularly splendid example. The scary bits were pretty damn scary but somehow didn't come to anything. The mystery looked interesting but again, was finally revealed to be fairly mundane. It is a well written book which I found, ultimately disappointing.

FOURSIGHT by Graham Joyce, James Lovegrove, Kim Newman and Michael Marshall Smith. Victor Gollancz, £16.99, hbk, 216pp.

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Star Rating *****

Now this book didn't even make it to the reviewing table. Nope. I snatched it out of the envelope and marked it down for mine, all mine. I buy any book I come across with a Michael Marshall Smith story in it, hence owning all four Dark Terrors books though I don't like horror. This had the additional attraction of a Graham Joyce story. I hadn't read James Lovegrove or Kim Newman before but I will now.

So here is dark fantasy with depth, flavour, humanity. Hurray. I wrote some time ago that I didn't like dark fantasy but it seems I was wrong, I just didn't like that particular novel, because I like this book very much indeed.

Graham Joyce's story, 'Leningrad Nights' is an ugly story told with great beauty. It's the fight for survival of Leo, young and abandoned in the nazi's nine hundred days siege of Leningrad. Surrounded by death and starvation, transported by his grandfather's opium tea, Leo survives by sordid means and with the help of a frozen grandfather, a whore and her baby and various parts of himself. This is a very dark story indeed and yet, illuminated.

James Lovegrove's 'How the Other Half Lives' is very much a modern fairy tale with the princess in the tower replaced by a prince in the cellar. The idea of power being bought by subjection and sacrifice of an

innocent victim is not a new one but this has an up-to-date feel to it whilst retaining all the strength of the archetype.

Kim Newman's 'Andy Warhol's Dracula' is an alternative reality story where vampires are undeniably real. Johnny Pop is new into America from Romania. Finding his feet, making a place for himself, he is drawn into Andy Warhol's circle. This is a fascinating story, so woven into 'real life' that I was hard pressed to know what was real, what invention. The idea of vampires selling their blood as a drug filled me with admiration. A lovely decadent story.

Michael Marshall Smith's 'The Vaccinators' tells of Eddie who looks back with longing for the days when he could cut a deal with Columbian kidnappers, make some easy money, save a life and know the deal would be honoured. The 'people' he's dealing with now are much less reliable. As always, Smith is witty and amusing whilst being at the same time clever and disturbing.

This is a book well worth buying, even in hardback. I very much look forward to Peter Crowther's next volume of four SF novellas.

DYNASTY by John MacLeod, Sceptre, £8.99, 386pp, pbk.

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse.

Star Rating ****

Subtitled 'The Stuarts 1560 – 1807' I wondered why this had come through my door. Not SF at all but pretty good for all that.

Having given up history and geography quite early at school to study sciences and fail calamitously at languages, I'm well aware that there are huge chunks of British history that I've missed. This book has filled in quite a piece for me in an entertaining and interesting fashion.

Of course, it always helps for me if the characters are believable. I'm not sure that the Stuarts *are* believable. As in *Slow Lightning*, it is constantly amazing to watch characters completely bugger up their lives, which is what the Stuarts seemed to do best. What an unhappy, unlucky, idiotic bunch they were. Well worth a look, although the price is a bit worrying. I mean I know it's pretty sad to look back to when I could buy a book for one and six but £8.99 seems to be the next step up.

WHITE MARS or THE MIND SET FREE: A 21st CENTURY UTOPIA by Brian Aldiss in collaboration with Roger Penrose

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Little Brown, hc, £16.99, 323pp

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

There are two ways of writing a novel about a utopia: the more common is to demonstrate it as a going concern by having a native of it explain things to a visitor (as in Thomas More's original). Almost unique is to show the utopia being set up, which is what Aldiss does.

The setting is a Mars lightly colonised by humans in the 2060s, when its 6000 inhabitants are suddenly cut off from Earth by Earth's financial collapse. Quickly abandoning money, the colonists debate over how they should govern themselves, how their society should be structured, how lawbreakers should be treated, and similar problems. So the novel is partly an examination of what makes a utopia. Clearly, no form of government will satisfy all of the people all of the time, so part of the problem is deciding how dissenters should be treated.

The elderly Tom Jefferies is the main architect of these utopian attempts, and also one of the novel's two major narrators. The other is Cang Hai, a young Chinese woman who becomes Jefferies' adopted daughter. (I must mention that the colonists include representatives of just about every colour and culture on Earth, reminiscent of the old 1950s cliché of a starship being sent out crewed by ten people from ten different nations. I didn't believe it then and, despite Aldiss's explanations, I don't believe it now.) There are, alas, too many characters here, mostly minor, so it's impossible for the reader to remember who's who, and almost the only personalities, which come across, are those of the narrators.

An important thread of the novel (which provides its title) is the belief by most colonists and the authors that Mars must be protected from commercial exploitation and preserved for science, similar to Antarctica. In particular, Mars must not be terraformed.

This is a novel containing clever plot twists, fascinating details of life in the domes, some drama, many references to that great utopian H.G. Wells and, unfortunately, too much impassioned argument about science and utopianism. It's difficult to know how much influence Roger Penrose has had here, though he's probably responsible for an extended section concerning the search for a subatomic particle called a smudge.

So WHITE MARS is a most worthwhile subject and a grand saga of Martian colonisation, which is extended, in summary form to cover the whole 21st century. It contains dozens of larger-than-life characters and a

wonderful sub-plot concerning Olympus Mons. Without giving away too much I'll tell you that utopia is eventually achieved, though in a very unexpected manner.

BUY JUPITER by Isaac Asimov, Millennium £6.99, 255 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Originally published in 1975, this is a collection of Asimov's lesser reprinted stories. Thus, within these pages you will find gems, not easily available elsewhere. Unfortunately, not all jewels are valuable. Over the period covered here, 1950-1973, Asimov was prolific. His work appeared in many, eclectic places - not all of it was fiction. Also, a story that was thought good in the 1950s would not necessarily stand up to modern competition. Of much more interest, are the biographical notes that accompany the stories themselves, detailing when and why each was written and also some of the other events that were going on in Asimov's life at the time.

In general, these pieces are short in length containing just one idea and without the room to develop characters to any great depth. Some have been written, just to get a pun in the last line, such as "Shah Guido G" which tells of the demise of the space station inhabited by the rulers of Earth.

Very few of the stories are memorable. I had read this collection many years ago, and only two were familiar. "Button, Button", a time experiment which, although successful, fails because the parchment the rare signature was written on, appeared too new. and the title story, "Buy Jupiter" in which the planets are used as galactic advertising hoardings. This collection will only really appeal either to the Asimov completists, or to those interested in Asimov's biography.

CHILDREN OF THE MIND by Orson Scott Card, Orbit £6.99, 387pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Regrettably, this is a "do not start from here" book. This is the fourth volume of the Ender saga, the others of which will stand alone. Children of the Mind is a direct continuation from the third, Xenocide, and you need to be familiar with the characters and what has gone before to gain full understanding.

Ender's Game told the story of a boy, Andrew Wiggin (the Ender of the title) who was tricked into destroying an entire alien species. He reappears in Speaker for the Dead centuries later, his life prolonged by interstellar travel on the world of Lusitania, invited there to Speak the life of one of the colonists. It is a planet which has a native sentient species but it is only during this book that the relationship between the alien species. It is here, that Ender finds a home for the only surviving Hive Queen (from the species he reputedly slaughtered). Xenocide introduces new characters; Wang-mu whose planet is populated by a high percentage of people suffering from a genetic illness, and Jane a computer entity.

Children of the Mind follows the attempts of Wang-mu and Peter (an Ender replica) to stop the fleet that is on the way to destroy Lusitania. The other problem is to save Jane. The system that is her life-support system is to be shut down to purge her from the system. The solutions make fascinating reading.

The first two books in the series won Hugos and should therefore be on everyone's reading list, the quality of the writing here does not disappoint either.

FAREWELL TO LANKHMAR by Fritz Leiber, Millennium £6.99, 361 pages.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The big, red-bearded barbarian, Fafrd, and the slight, grey-clad swordsman and thief, the Grey Mouser, were fantasy legends of the 1970s. They have been the inspiration for numerous later fantasy heroes, none of which quite match the originals.

Gollancz has reprinted these classics in three volumes instead of the original six. This, Farewell to Lankhmar, is an extra, bringing together the remaining stories. In "Rime Isle", the last story of the previous volume, (Return to Lankhmar in this series, Swords and Ice Magic in the original) the heroes were recruited by Cif and Afreyt, two Rime Islander women, who proved a match for them. When the adventure they were hired to complete was over, Fafrd and the Grey Mouser stayed.

There are four stories in this volume, all of which have been printed elsewhere. Collected here, they form a sequence that is not quite a novel. In the first, "Sea Magic", the last two Simorgyans decide to reclaim their treasures, which are the sacred icons of the Rime Islanders. They would

have succeeded, but Fafrd is drawn to follow Ississi as she flees. In the tussle between them, Fafrd rescues the icons. In "The Mer She" Ississi has a go at the Grey Mouser, who is returning to Rime Isle with a cargo of necessities. He is saved from disaster by his sudden obsession with triple lashing the cargo. This gives the ship sufficient buoyancy to rise to the surface after being dragged under.

In "The Curse of the Smalls and Stars" the two wizards who have sponsored the heroes in the past, decide to try and entice them back to the mainland of Lankhmar to continue acting as their agents. To this end, they persuade the gods favoured by the heroes, to curse them. Fafrd becomes obsessed with the stars, and Mouser with insignificant things found in gutters. Meanwhile, assassins have been hired to kill the heroes, as previous opponents do not want them returning to the mainland. This story, longer than the previous two, has the touches of humour that made the other novels so enjoyable. "The Mouser goes Below" brings in a number of characters from previous books and although enjoyable in its own right, is better appreciated if the earlier volumes have been read first. The plot concerns the wrath of Loki against the heroes, and without warning, Mouser suddenly sinks into the ground. A frantic digging ensues to rescue him. Fafrd, conversely becomes lighter and floats off into the sky.

Read and enjoy the series, but start with Ill Met in Lankhmar to fully appreciate these legends. This is the weakest book in the series but essential rounding off the heroes lives.

BSFG Web Site

If you have a moment to spare in front of your browser why not turn it to William McCabe's BSFG web site at <http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com/> Comments, suggestions and any help will be welcomed by William who can be contacted by e-mail at wam@wamccabe.freesever.co.uk

BSFG Dates for your Diary

14 APRIL 2000: ALISTAIR REYNOLDS.

12 MAY 2000: ANDY SALMON - "From Kazakhstan to the Stars".

9 JUNE 2000: JOHN JARROLD.

14 JULY 2000: ANDY LOUND from the Planetary Society.

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVACON 30 - Guests Chris Priest, Rog Peyton and Dave Hardy.

Committee and Contacts

The BSFG meets from 7.45pm for 8pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). **Group Chairman**, Vernon Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH. **Membership** (which includes 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) is £16.00 per person, or £21.00 for two at the same address. Cheques to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: The Treasurer, Alan Woodford, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). **Newsletter Editor**, Yvonne Rowse call 01299-400750 for info or mail to Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk). **Web:** www.bsfg.freesevers.com/

Colophon

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