

BRUM GROUP NEWS

July 1993

Issue 262

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

GROUP CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, SECRETARY - HELENA BOWLES, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
TREASURER - RICHARD STANDAGE, REVIEWS EDITOR - BERNIE EVANS, PUBLICITY OFFICER - STEVE JONES,
ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVAACON 23 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON.

This month's meeting on Friday the 16th July 1993, 7.45 for 8.00pm, will feature *"DAVE COX'S STUPENDOUS PUB QUIZ"*

Wherein teams of three will compete for the honour of holding the title of the 1993 BSFG Quiz Team Champions (not to mention the AMAZING prizes which go with said honour). Those of you who attended last year's Christmas Party will have a good idea of what a ~~devious bastard~~ an excellent quiz master Dave Cox is and will also know how ~~bloody frustrating~~ much fun this meeting will be. Lest the likes of Peyton, Weston and Morgan become too cocky *this time* our illustrious Chairman, Tony Morton, is threatening to introduce "seeding" ...
Everybody welcome ! See you there !

Admittance: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.50

(Half-price admission for 14-18 year-olds on production of proof of age, at the discretion of the Treasurer.)

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs function room of the White Lion, corner of Thorp Street and Horsefair/Bristol Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are £9.00 per person, or £12.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the treasurer Richard Standage at meetings or by post c/o Bernie Evans (address below). Book reviews and review copies should be sent to the reviews editor Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).

COLOPHON

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Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group.

All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise.

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Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for typing the Book Reviews, all of our reviewers, STEVE GREEN, DAVE COX and CRITICAL WAVE for the news in the Jophan Report and TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

16 JULY 1993: BRUM GROUP QUIZ NIGHT teams of three will compete for glorious prizes! All welcome! 7.45pm for 8pm, at the White Lion.

24 JULY 1993: ROBERT HOLDSTOCK will be signing his new Mythago Wood book *THE HOLLOWING* (hardcover, £14.99) and BOB SHAW will be signing copies of his new hardcover *WARREN PEACE* (14.99) and the paperback of *WHO GOES HERE?* (£3.99) from noon at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

31 JULY 1993: COMIC MART at the Midland Hotel, New St., midday. Contact Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW.

28 AUGUST 1993: STORM CONSTANTINE will be signing at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

28 AUGUST 1993: COMIC MART at the Hotel Ibis, Ladywell Walk, off Hurst Street, Birmingham. Doors open 11am, admission 50p, contact: Peter Lennon, 15 Yew Tree Close, Batchley, Redditch, B97 650 (0527 585036).

3-6 SEPTEMBER 1993: CONFRANCISCO. 51st world science fiction convention at the San Francisco Marriott Moskone Convention Center. Guests of Honour: Larry Niven, Tom Digby, Alicia Austin, Jan Howard Finder. MC: Guy Gavriel Kay. Attending \$125.00, supporting \$25.00 until 16 July, \$145 on the door. Contact British Agent: Chris O'Shea, 12 Stannard Road, London, E8 1DB.

18 SEPTEMBER 1993: IAIN BANKS will be signing at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 643 1999 for further details.

30 SEPTEMBER 1993: WILLIAM GIBSON will be signing copies of *VIRTUAL LIGHT* at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from 1pm. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

1-3 OCTOBER 1993: FANTASYCON XVIII Midland Hotel, Birmingham, Guests of Honour: Peter James, Ted Williams and Les Edwards, Master of Ceremonies Dennis Etchison, further guests to be announced. Attending £20 (to British Fantasy Society members) £30 (non-members), Supporting membership £10. Contact: Mike Chinn at 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0TG (tel: 021 474 2585).

Can YOU eat a
'Desperate Dan Pie' ?

Find out at the
BEER & SKITTLES
EVENING AT THE
(newly re-named)

LITTLE RIB ROOM
(Bradley Green, Hanbury to
Feckenham Road, B4090
out of Droitwich)

If you are interested
call HELENA BOWLES
on (021) 558 7591

5-7 NOVEMBER 1993: NOVACON 23 the Brum Group's own sf con, at the Royal Angus hotel in the city centre. Guest of honour Stephen Baxter. Attending membership costs £25 until 1st October and then £30 on the door. Supporting membership is £8.00 (please note that this will NOT automatically reserve an attending place, but it WILL ensure receipt of all of the convention's publications and entitle you to vote in the Novas). Although the hotel has agreed to increase the membership ceiling from 300 to 350 people the committee advises you to register early, as they will if necessary turn people away on the door. Further details from Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997).

11 NOVEMBER 1993: COMIC MART at the Hotel Ibis, Ladywell Walk, off Hurst Street, Birmingham. Doors open 11am, admission 50p. Contact: Peter Lennon, 15 Yew Tree Close, Batchley, Redditch, B97 6SO (0527 585036).

22-27 NOVEMBER 1993: *THE INVISIBLE MAN* following a hugely successful run in the West End this sinister story of a tormented, twisted and transparent scientist will be retold at the Alexandra Theatre, Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Tickets £6.00-£14.50, tel 633 3325, credit cards 643 1231.

26-28 NOVEMBER 1993: CON-YAK, annual international BeNeLuxcon, venue probably Altea Hotel, just outside Amsterdam. Guests of honour to be announced. Contact Richard Vermaas, James Wattstraat 13, 1097 DJ Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

1-4 APRIL 1994: SOU'WESTER. 45th UK national sf con. Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Guests of honour: Diane Duane, Neil Gaiman, Barbara Hambly, Peter Morwood. Until November 1993: Attending £25.00 (£23.00 for paid-up pre-supporting), Supporting £12.50, children aged 9-14 (on 1 April 1994) £12.50, £1.00 for "babies and beasts". Contact: 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

30 APRIL - 1 MAY 1994: COME-BACK CON. The first Belgian BeNeLuxcon in a long time at the Rubenianum House, Antwerp, Belgium. Attending 650BF, Supporting 500BF until 31 Dec 1993, then Attending 750BF, Supporting 650BF until 31 March 1994, children up to age 6 free admission, age 6-12 50% of current price. Contact: Alfons J Moes, Zandkapelweg 18, B-2200 Noorderwijk, Belgium.

27-30 MAY 1994: INCONCEIVABLE. Second 'humour' con from Octarine, Tudor Court Hotel, Draycott, near Derby. Attending £20.00 (£18.00 for

members of Octarine or ZZ9, contact 12 Crich Avenue, Littleover, Derby, DE23 6ES.

1-5 SEPTEMBER 1994: CONADIAN, 52nd world science fiction convention, at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. Guests of Honour Anne McCaffrey, George Barr, Barry B Longyear, Fan Guest of Honour Robert Runte. Attending US\$65.00, CAN\$95.00, Supporting US\$25.00, CAN\$30.00 until 6 September 1993. Contact British Agent: Helen McCarthy, 147 Francis Road, London, E10 6NT.

14-17 APRIL 1995: CONFABULATION 46th UK National sf con at the Britannia International Hotel, London. GoHs Lois McMasters Bujold, Bob Shaw and Roger Robinson. Attending £15.00, Supporting £10.00, children born on or before 13 April 1981 pay the supporting rate and small children (born on or before 18 April 1987) pay nothing. Contact: Confabulation, 3 York Street, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH.

24-28 AUGUST 1995: INTERSECTION, 53rd world-con, SECC, Glasgow. Guests of honour Samuel R Delany, Gerry Anderson. Attending £50.00, Supporting £15.00, please note that Glasgow pre-support and friend benefits expired on 30 April 1993 when pre-supporters became non-members and Friends became supporters. Contact: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

27 DECEMBER 1999 - 2 JANUARY 2000: MILLENIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (£10.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee (to be announced before 1997). Contact: Malcolm Reid, 2/R, 9 Airlie Street, Hyndland, Glasgow, G12 9RJ.

Although details are correct to the best of my knowledge, I advise readers to contact organizers prior to travelling.

Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

HAVE YOU GOT SOME SPARE STORAGE SPACE ?
If so MICK & BERNIE EVANS would like to hear from you on 021 558 0997 ASAP!

Due to work on their house they need to temporarily relocate their possessions - which as you might guess include more than a box or two of books....

BHEN IS 20

Years before ET became the mundane public's 'lovable alien', Bhen had become a favourite among sf fans. He first appeared on the cover of *THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION*, and has now appeared on no fewer than nine issues, with another in the pipeline. He was also adopted as 'mascot' of the Brum Group, and appeared on PRs, badges and most literature for their Fifteencon and Twentycon, including a specially designed T-shirt for the former. (Incidentally, not a lot of people know that Dave has held more committee posts in the Brum Group than any other member, having been Chairman four times (three consecutively), Secretary, Publicity Officer and Newsletter Editor (three years). He says he'll never be Treasurer because he can't count.)

It was in 1973 that Dave Hardy returned to Birmingham from six years exile in Norfolk, and promptly joined the Brum Group. He 'conceived' Bhen, along with his friend, cartoonist and stained glass artist Anthony Naylor, one drunken evening when he (Bhen, not Dave) took shape out of a lump of green Plasticene. Ed Ferman of *F&SF* took to him at once, and Carl Sagan bought the original of the first cover, which showed Bhen sailing down sardonically as the Viking I lander scratched in the Martian soil for signs of life... Incidentally, Bhen is not the archetypal 'little green man' that most people think. The interplanetary hobo always appears with some piece of NASA hardware which he has converted to his own use, and if you compare him with the Lunar Rover or the bowl of Pioneer 11 in which he sits, you'll see that he is over two and a half metres tall!



[The above is reproduced from a press release supplied by Dave Hardy, he also included an attractive full colour postcard featuring Bhen, which I assume you can buy from Dave. Contact him o 021 777 1802 for details. Many thanks Dave, and happy 'birthday' Bhen!]

JOPHAN REPORT #64

by Martin Tudor

Congratulations to Stan and Helen Eling who will be celebrating their 35th wedding anniversary on the 19th July.

Congratulations also to Dave Cox who recently started a six-month contract with computer manufacturers Hewlett-Packard in Bristol. Best of luck with your search for decent digs Dave!

Hodder & Stoughton is merging with Headline Book Publishing following a £49M buyout announced by Headline chief Tim Hely Hutchinson on 3 June. The hybrid imprint, Hodder Headline, will be among the top five British publishing corporations.

Hutchinson's rise has startled the industry. Headline was only founded in 1986, but its highly commercial range of horror, sf and thrillers struck a chord with readers; its 1992 pre-tax profits were £2.05M on a turnover of £15.7M, against Hodder's recorded loss of £9M on sales of £74.2M during the 15 months ending June 1991 (although the final six months of 1992 show pre-tax profits of £1.8M on sales of £30.7, a 35% improvement).

The company has also proven popular with authors, Graham Joyce and Storm Constantine among those latterly wooed to its hardback line, with Hutchinson's company topping the two most recent Society of Authors polls.

Severn House was scheduled to publish a hardcover edition of *NEMESIS*, the first volume of Louise Cooper's "Indigo" fantasy sequence, on 24 June, priced £13.99. The eighth and final volume, *AISLING*, was published in Grafton softback on 5 April at £4.99.

Two sequels are being planned to the bestselling graphic novel *JUDGEMENT ON GOTHAM* in the wake of Sylvester Stallone's apparent decision to portray the granite-jawed Mega City lawman Judge Dredd on celluloid.

The announcement follows DC Comics' move to license the award-winning British character for American spin-offs, whose initial encounter with Gotham City dark knight Batman proved a massive commercial success.

The third issue of *SF NEXUS* includes essays on horror by Jessica Yates and comp-

uters by Charles Stross, fiction by Geoff Ryman and Syd Foster, plus contributions by Chuck Connor, Colin Greenland and Gwynneth Jones. A four-issue subscription costs £10.00 from PO Box 1123, Brighton, BN1 6JS.

Lester del Rey, the American fantasy author and editor who gave his name to the bestselling Ballantine imprint, reportedly died on 11 May, three weeks before his seventy-eighth birthday. Born Ramon Filipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Alvarez-del Rey in Minnesota, del Rey was among the first generation of sf fans, publishing his debut story "The Faithful" in 1938. For a decade, del Rey chose John W Campbell's *ASTOUNDING* as his only outlet for short fiction, and it was there that arguably his two best-known stories first saw print, "Helen O'Loy" [1938] and "Nerves" [1942].

By 1952, del Rey was writing full-time, but the bulk of his novels were aimed at a juvenile audience. That year also saw him at the helm of the short-lived *SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES*, editorial skills he later applied to the anthology series *BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR* [1972-76]. In 1977, he and his fourth wife Judy-Lynn Benjamin del Rey [1943-86] launched Ballantine's Del Rey Books, handling fantasy and science fiction respectively; Terry Brooks and Stephen R Donaldson were among the authors whose careers he helped develop (indeed, it was once rumoured that Lester del Rey was the only editor prepared to tackle Donaldson's fantasy novels).

The Peterborough Science Fiction Group will hold a one-day *STAR TREK* mini-convention on 28 August, with the group's third tele-fantasy event scheduled for 27 November. For full details, send a reply-paid envelope to 47 Marcham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough.

Karl S Guthke's *THE LAST FRONTIER: Imagining Other Worlds, from the Copernican Revolution to Modern Science Fiction*, is at last being released in softback by the Cornell University Press; Helen Atkins work on this volume won the American Translators Association's German Prize in 1991.

Michael Watkins was nominated for the American Society of Cinematographers' 1992 Outstanding Achievements Awards for his work on *QUANTUM LEAP*.

The *Australian* newspaper closed its Young SF Writer of the Year competition on 25 May; with DEC as co-sponsor, it's hardly

surprising that all entries had to feature computers or that the prizes took the form of computer equipment.

Garry Kilworth's short story "The Sculptor" took first place in *INTERZONE's* annual readers' poll, with Mark Harrison's cover for *IZ#65* named best exterior art and Martin McKenna best interior art. David Langford's monthly "Ansible Link" column, which uses material from his news-sheet *ANSIBLE*, came first in the poll for non-fiction, followed by Nick Lowe's film reviews.

Dick and Leah Smith winners of this year's Down Under Fan Fund race received 155 of the 227 votes cast. The full results were as follows (with Australian/US figures followed by total votes cast): Dick and Leah Smith (38, 117, 155), Charlotte Proctor (9, 16, 25), Richard Brandt (6, 39, 45); there was one Australian write-in vote for Mark Manning and another for "Hold Over Funds".

HEADPRESS, the Stockport-based counterculture magazine, has joined forces with the London publishing house Creation Press to launch a new "transgressive" imprint, Bad Blood. The initial releases are Simon Whitechapel's *THE SLAUGHTER KING*, an anthology of material from the early issues of *HEADPRESS* and *SEX MURDER ART*, David Kerekes' biography of Jörg Buttgerit, the controversial German director of *NEKROMANTIK*.

This month sees Creation's release of Arthur Machen's *THE GREAT GOD PAN*, including a new introduction by Iain Smith of the Arthur Machen Society, followed in August by Oscar Wilde's notorious *SALOME*, banned in 1892. Meanwhile, the second volume of James Havoc and Mike Philbin's *RAISM*, a graphic adaptation of Havoc's novel (based on the life of Gilles de Rais), has been cancelled due to poor sales.

Contributors to *STARSONGS: The 1993 New Zealand Anthology of Science Fiction & Fantasy Stories*, include Philip Mann, Lyn McConchie, Vivienne Plumb and Tim Jones; the collection was edited by Jean Weber, with Chico Jones supplying the cover art.

Ben Leech's debut horror novel, *THE COMMUNITY*, will be published by Pan this September, priced £4.99; Leech's short horror fiction has previously appeared in *PEEPING TOM*, and he's written several children's books as "Steve Bowkett".

Pan's other summer and autumn releases include Eric Brown's *MERIDIAN DAYS* (August),

DARK VOICES 5 (October), Freda Warrington's *SORROW'S LIGHT* (July), Richard Christian Matheson's debut novel *CREATED BY* (October) and *THE CITY*, a graphic novel by author James Herbert and artist Ian Miller.

Chris Drumm Books has gathered eight previously uncollected short stories by Bruce Boston for *NIGHT EYES*; a regular edition is available at US\$4.50 and a signed limited-edition run (including an original poem, "The Last Existentialist") at US\$8.00. For further details, write to Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226, USA.

Scores of British horror, dark fantasy and counterculture publications are now available through Dark Carnival Distribution, as well as many of the leading American titles; for full details, send a reply-paid envelope to 21 Avon Road, Scunthorpe, South Humberside, DN16 1EP.

A fanzine anthologizing stories about the Australian sf fan Roger Weddall, who died in December, was being prepared by Jane Tisell in March for a possible launch at Swancon 18 over the Easter weekend; the aim is to replace Weddall's DUFF trip report and raise money for the fund.

Short stories by Storm Constantine and Terry Bisson lead off *INTERZONE #73*, cover-dated July, joined by an interview with the Australian author Greg Bear. The June issue, meanwhile, includes fiction by Stephen Baxter, Peter Crowther, Jennifer Swift, Eric Brown and William Spencer, plus an essay by J G Ballard and interviews with authors Harry Harrison and Brian D'Amato.

HarperCollins has merged its softback lines, Fontana and Grafton among them, into one, HarperCollins Paperbacks; a new genre sub-imprint, HarperCollins SF & Fantasy, will be launched when the change is introduced in August.

The new paperback division will be handled by the managing director, Jonathan Lloyd, with Malcolm Edwards running fiction overall and Jane Johnson editing the sf and fantasy releases.

Karen Pender-Gunn plans to publish *THE EVER SO SLIGHTLY UNUSUAL DINOSAUR COLOURING BOOK* to raise cash for FFANZ, the fund which sends Australian sf fans to New Zealand conventions and vice versa; for full details, write to her at PO Box 567, Blackburn, Victoria 3130, Australia.

Stan Nicholls, described by Michael Moorcock as "one of the best interviewers in the business", has collected together 50 of his profiles for *WORDSMITHS OF WONDER*, to be published by Orbit on 8 October.

Among those featured are Clive Barker, Greg Bear, Ray Bradbury, James Herbert, Lisa Tuttle, Colin Greenland and J G Ballard, with a cover by Trevor Scobie.

The "Art Vs Trash" theme adopted by the comic convention Caption '93 will be reflected in two panels; in the first, a group of comic publishers will debate whether distributing trash is fun, whilst the second contrasts arty comics which look deliberately trashy with trashy comics aspiring to be art.

The event, being held in Oxford on 17 July, also features a performance of Steve Marchant's "Captain Civilian" and an appearance by the National Theatre of Earth Prime; confirmed guests include Martin Barker, Nick Abadzis, Ed Hillyer and Carol Swain. Roberta Gregory, Bob Lynch and Eddie Campbell are among those who have donated original artwork to this year's auction, in aid of the London Cartoon Centre. For further details, contact Adrian Cox on 0865-244332 or Jenni Scott on 0865-512293.

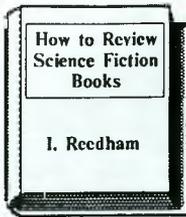
This year's Milford (UK) SF Writers' Conference will be held in Keswick, Cumbria, on 12-19 September. For admission details (published authors only), send a reply-paid envelope to 56 More Close, St Paul's Court, Gliddon Road, London, W14 9BN.

A one-day version of Mexican 6 may be held in 1994, marking the 20th anniversary of Tynecon and the tenth birthday of Mexican, its spiritual descendant.

Series six of *RED DWARF* is scheduled for the autumn, with the regular cast returning for another six episodes: "Psirens", "Call Me Legion", "The Four Gunmen of the Apocalypse", "Rimmer World", "Polymorph II: Emohawk" and "Present from the Future".

For those who can't wait, "Psirens" is one of the scripts included in the recent Penguin release *PRIMORDIAL SOUP*.

Meanwhile, creators Rob Grant and Doug Naylor are reported to be discussing a movie version with Universal, despite the failure of both pilots for a US version (Terry Farrell joined *STAR TREK: DS9* after appearing as a female Cat in the second attempt), whilst the BBC has delayed release of the first season on video yet again, this time until June.



Book Reviews

THE MAN WHO WAS TOO LATE by Louis Begley
Macmillan, 201 pp, £14.95 h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the story of Ben, outwardly a successful and brilliant financier, but inwardly a man spiralling down towards madness, because he has decided that at all of life's turning points he was too late. Not physically late as in tardiness but, for example, he married a divorcee who had no love left for him as she had given it all to her previous partner. He was too late to be a real father to her two daughters who only saw him as a sexual threat. This obsession Ben places on himself, and his eventual lack of belief in himself, are the reasons for his final downfall.

Whilst this is beyond any doubt a fine novel, it is literary, witty and elegant - as are many sf novels, it is in no way an sf novel. I am puzzled as to why it was sent to us for review, there are no science fictional themes, characters, devices or plotlines. It will win prizes, be exhibited on peoples coffee tables - but it is not sf.

ALIEN EARTH by Megan Lindholm
Grafton, 385 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Megan Lindholm is known primarily for writing fantasy - this is her first science fiction novel. In some ways it works, but in others it proves overlong.

As Earth began to die from all the poisons pumped into its systems the Athroplana arrived in their Beastships to evacuate human beings, but after the first rush only perfect specimens were selected to go. They were resettled on two planets, Castor and Pollux, with the proviso that they mustn't do anything to damage the environment. Those not worthy of planetside living are confined to vast space stations. This all happened thousands of years before the bulk of this story is set and despite all the constrictions a small but wealthy group, Earth Affirmed, have kept alive the dream of one day returning

to the Homeworld. To find out if the planet can support life they hire the Beastship Evangeline to investigate. Evangeline is a huge, living entity that can travel space. She is owned and controlled by the Arthroplanan, Tug, who is encysted within her body. The humans John and Connie are her captain and crew.

Their voyage is one of discovery. John and Connie become marooned on Earth and learn to rely on their own resources rather than those of the Beastship. Evangeline, through accessing the dreams of her other passenger Raef, who remained aboard when the original evacuees disembarked, learns that she is capable of far more than Tug has permitted her to do. As racial memory reawakens she discovers how much has been taken from her in making her a slave. And Tug finds out what happens when the slaves revolt.

There are a lot of fascinating ideas in this book but it could have been judiciously pruned to remove the slower passages which, although interesting, do not ultimately add to the personal development of the characters.

TRAPPED by Dean Koontz, (Illustrated by Anthony Bilau, adapted by Edward Gorman)
Eclipse, 73 pp, £6.99, Graphic Novel

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

What we have here is a graphic novel, a comic book for adults. Except that this one clearly isn't aimed at adults. The story of a young, attractive widow and her cute ten-year-old son being menaced by a few large, highly intelligent rats which have escaped from a nearby research establishment, is utter rubbish. It's totally lacking in subtlety, surprise, interest and credibility.

Let's examine credibility: normal rats are very successful by staying out of sight, eating mostly the stuff we discard and by breeding fast, but these super-rats draw attention to themselves and get killed. The widow and her son not only escape almost unscathed, but there's a romantic ending, too. Part of the blame must go to Koontz, who can't write short stories, but much is the artist's fault for his crudely stylised and massively overdramatised pictures. Give this one a miss.

RED BRIDE by Christopher Fowler
Warner Books, 424 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

After a brief and seemingly irrelevant, prologue *RED BRIDE* becomes the story of a mundanely ordinary man named John Chapel. He has just left a well paid job as an accountant

to join a PR agency, and soon finds himself thrown into contact with a stunningly beautiful actress named Ixora. They become lovers, but his association with her loses him his family, his new job and almost his entire existence as a series of apparently motiveless but increasingly gruesome murders are found to have one thing in common - Ixora.

A good 80 per-cent of the book proceeds like that - a straightforward murder mystery with scarcely the slightest hint of the occult or supernatural to justify mentioning it in these pages at all. Right at the end a Satanist explanation for all that has happened is provided, but by then it is too late to define what the author intended to accomplish. Supernatural horror it isn't, but the ending will assuredly spoil it for the straight murder mystery fan.

Judged by its own lights this is actually not a bad book. Fowler writes superbly about life in present-day London and only occasionally does his craftsman-like use of figures of speech and carefully constructed descriptive writing become annoyingly too obvious. The narrative is gripping and I was surprised at how quickly I came to the end, but having done so I could not help wondering what it had all been for. Worth reading once I would say, but not twice.

THE ELVENBANE by Andre Norton and Mercedes Lackey
Grafton, 575 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

There is a prophesy that a child born of a human mother but sired by an Elven father will have magical powers stronger than those of the Elven Lords and will ultimately lead a rebellion that will overthrow them. Centuries earlier the Elven race appeared and with their magic cast the native humans of this world into slavery. In some cases, especially those of the human concubines, a comfortable slavery. Interbreeding is forbidden on pain of death, that of the mother and her child. When Serina, the current favourite of Elven Lord Dryan, finds herself pregnant she flees into the desert where she is delivered of a daughter, but Serina dies. The midwife is a shape-changing dragon, a shaman of her tribe who cuts short a religious rite to deliver the child. She takes the child, Shana, back to her tribe and raises it along with her own young.

Shana grows up thinking she is a dragon "stuck" in human form when a shape-changing experiment went wrong. When she instinctively uses her untrained magic to defend her foster brother she is exiled by the dragons, captured by humans and sold into slavery. Rumours about

a halfblood, which had been rife at the time of Shanas birth, resurface at her capture. Her clothing - shed dragon skin, her age, colouring and temperament are commented on. She manages to escape and becomes firstly the focus and then the leader of a rebellion against the Elven Lords, but her untrained powers are no match for theirs.

This collaboration between the Grand Dame of Fantasy, Norton, and the up and coming young writer, Lackey, has produced an excellent novel. Quite how this collaboration functioned we are not told, but it works. The novel is one of high adventure with an excellent plotline, an absorbing, entertaining yarn. I wonder if they'll collaborate again?

SMALL GODS by Terry Pratchett
Corgi, 381 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

SMALL GODS is the story of Brutha, the not-very-bright novice monk who would have a photographic memory - if only he could read, and the Great God Om - whose believers no longer actually believe in him. Fortunately Brutha still believes, enabling Om to cling on as a small and rather battered tortoise instead of vanishing away altogether, as gods do when people stop believing in them. From this inauspicious beginning Om, with Brutha's help, manages to get back to his rightful place in the Discworld scheme of things. However Brutha is now Om's prophet, and has something to say about the way things will be done in future.

All this is told with the deft humour typical of the Discworld series, and if you don't know what that means it's time you did. But to stop and consider what one of these books is actually about is to realise that Terry Pratchett is actually a very thinking person. I cannot imagine a riskier thing to do than to say to him "Everyone knows that.....", because you can be sure that he won't believe it, whatever it is. He doesn't so much launch a frontal attack on entrenched beliefs as slip around the side and approach from an oblique angle which explores all the logical inconsistencies that everybody else has forgotten to look for. That is where all his best jokes come from, and it explains his appeal to me - other readers may have other reasons.

In *SMALL GODS* the targets are religion and philosophy. The end result is well up to expectations and it works on both levels. On the surface the comic fantasy is as good as ever but underlying seriousness is there as well. It may not be the best Discworld novel yet, but it will do fine until the next one comes along.

THE WEERDE: BOOK 2 ed Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney
Roc, 386 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

While I enjoyed the first volume in this series I cannot say the same for this one, sub-titled *THE BOOK OF THE ANCIENTS. the first volume* had a wide range of very different stories giving the anthology breadth and depth. This one seems much narrower being tied to the idea that each story has to have an Ancient in it. For those unfamiliar with the premise behind these books, it is that there is living amongst us a race which are able to change their form to blend in with humankind. Only our werewolf legends give us a clue to their existence. When the Weerde reach a certain age they change into hideous monsters of the kind that have been celebrated in myth - such as the Minotaur. A number of the same authors appear in both volumes.

For me, two stories stood out though for totally different reasons. "Deep in the Native Land" by Mike Ibeji ventures into the tunnel systems excavated by the Viet Cong in their war against the Imperialists. The narrator is sent down into one of these systems to make sure that it is clean. It is a good, tension filled story that just fits into the parameters of the anthology, it would not be out of place anywhere. "The Deconstruction of the Known World" by Elizabeth M Young gets very silly in places but beneath that is a story of loneliness and exploitation. Marvin, a rather deformed Weerde who only just passes for human, picks up Bobby, a penniless opportunist. It examines their relationship and the delusions that people develop. It is not pleasant, but it is interesting.

Overall, the talent in this volume has been squeezed into the shape required of it and many of the stories might well have been more memorable if they had been allowed to escape their straight-jackets and stretch.

ARISTOI by Walter Jon Williams
Grafton, 448 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The Aristoi are the future flowering of the human race. Beautiful, clever and creative, they build their own worlds on which they live as gods. Implanted communicators connect them to a communication and data network, which links planetary systems via instantaneous tachyonic transmitters, and enables them to interact through a virtual reality system of incredible sophistication. They have genetic manipulation and cosmetic surgery to make of themselves whatever they want to be, and nano-

technology to make for themselves whatever they want to have. It is an idyllic existence of unlimited pleasure and unimaginable luxury.

It is not, however, a totally hedonistic one. They care genuinely for the future of the human race and for the well-being of the lesser mortals who still make up nearly all of it. Consequently when one of their number, Gabriel, discovers that another is failing to live up to these high ideals he does not hesitate in setting off to challenge him, taking it for granted that the support of his fellow Aristoi is his for the asking. Only now does the story really get going, and the book is nearly halfway through. Hitherto we have only had the preliminaries needed to set the scene, and there has been rather a lot of scene to set. As a result, the opening narrative has been slow, rambling and tedious.

Part of the problem is that these are almost supermen. Their feelings and motivations are scarcely accessible to the ordinary reader, who can find little with which to identify, and looks in vain for weaknesses with which to sympathise. Gabriel is just too good, too clever, too perfect, and I hated him - although I must admit my dislike was probably born of envy as much as anything else. Perhaps the author has done a good job of creating these characters, but how can one tell?

More importantly, fundamental questions are posed about the future - given that homo sapiens acquires the facility to shape his own destiny, how is it possible to know that conscious choice will produce a better, righter result than natural evolution? SF is about questions like this and, on a level below the superficial, this is a thoughtful and thought-provoking work.

THE MAN FROM UNCLE by Michael Avallone
THE DOOMSDAY AFFAIR by Harry Whittington
Boxtree, 155 pp each, £3.99 each, p/bs

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

These two stories give a flavour of the cult sixties TV series. I say only a flavour because the TV programmes were always very visual, not leaving much to the imagination.

The first novel, *THE MAN FROM UNCLE*, concerns our two intrepid heroes searching for the cause of the mysterious and grisly deaths of firstly the people of a village in Africa, then the people of a small town in Scotland, and finally of an Uncle Agent in a rural town in Germany. They all died in the same way, delusion, madness and death, followed by quickly rotting corpses that turn from fully fleshed bodies to skeletons in two days. It seems Thrush has invented a deadly

new virus so Solo and Kuryakin must find and destroy the source before it is used against the population of a large city - New York!

THE DOOMSDAY AFFAIR finds the pair hunting down Tixe Ylno, Thrush's most secret agent, there are no pictures or documentation on him, but Uncle has found out that he has an atomic device that he intends to use against Washington - so in true *MAN FROM UNCLE* style the race is on, find the villain before he blows up the White House.

These novels, originally published in the mid to late sixties, come over as far too serious and stilted when compared with the essential silliness of the TV series. Maybe the actual putting down in black and white of each move and thought of the plot and the heroes loses something in "translation", so to speak. As a fan of *MAN FROM UNCLE* I found these tales disappointing - stick to the television versions.

INNERVISIONS by John Gribbin
RoC, 165 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by David A Hardy.

This is a rather ingenuous book (yes, that's a "u"). The publishers do not state that it's a juvenile, but I think they should: there's no sex, little violence and no bad language. Since John Gribbin is primarily a science writer ("but wants to be a science fiction writer when he grows up", says the blurb) it is not surprising that it is the gradual unfolding of the nature of the world on which (that should be "in which") this short novel takes place, rather than the characters, which clearly interests the author most. The main characters are an erratically telepathic girl, an oddball scientist and inventor, and a marine navigator.

It is not really very original either, though the eccentric scientist's explanations for the phenomena they encounter are quite interesting. "The world was a sphere..... and they were inside it....." says the cover. Do you really need me to tell you the true nature of that "world"? But for young readers, or those fairly new to sf, it's not a bad yarn for all that.

MIRACLEMAN - THE GOLDEN AGE by Neil Gaiman & Mark Buckingham
Eclipse, 158 pp, £8.99, Graphic Novel

Reviewed by William McCabe.

For those of you who didn't already know, "Graphic Novel" is advertising-speak for "Comic Book". This isn't, by any stretch of the imagination, a novel. It is the comic book equivalent of a same-world short story

collection. It comes with all the requisite blurbs (Alan Moore on the back cover, Delany introduction) to salve the consciences of those who "don't read comics", but still fails to be anything more than a comic book. To further labour the point, it is also a superhero (TM) comic book, which is a limited genre at the best of times - admittedly this is about as good as it gets.

This is collection four, and the plot starts after Miracleman has made a perfect world so that everyone can be happy/contented - that sort of thing - and has moved into rooms at the top of a vast pyramid in London. The stories are rarely interconnected and involve MM as little as possible. There is a pilgrimage to the top of the pyramid (something like an Everest expedition), accounts of meetings with MM and Mrs MM years before, the fake city where they put all the spies, and a memorial to the dead followed closely by a carnival for the children.

They all manage to give the same impression - they've finished the story, how to carry on? - of someone running very short of ideas. If you must read a superhero comic book, this is as good as any and better than many. It isn't great, but it isn't bad either.

GERALD'S GAME by Stephen King
NEL, 394 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

King's latest horror novel to be paperbacked is occasionally tense but ultimately unsatisfying. A rich couple, Jessie and her lawyer husband, Gerald, are holidaying at their very rural summer bungalow beside a New England lake. As part of their sexual frolics, he handcuffs her to the bed, then he dies of a heart attack and she's trapped, unable to escape. So most of a 400-page book is concerned with a thirtysomething woman, wearing nothing but her knickers, trying to free herself from two pairs of handcuffs. It's more interesting than it sounds, because she talks (in her head) to old friends and relives a childhood trauma, but at times not much more entertaining. Because she was such a fool as to accept the degradation of the handcuffs in the first place, I couldn't find any sympathy for her. One has to admire King's audacity in developing such a slender idea into a novel, but only two or three scenes gripped me. So is King at last running out of ideas? No, because there's one terrific idea here, which he only really brings in at the end, presenting it poorly and wasting its power. He has had problems with his endings before, but this one is probably his worst.

BODY OF GLASS by Marge Piercy
Penguin, 582 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book is the winner of the 1993 Arthur C Clarke Award, therefore you would expect great things from it. You will not be disappointed.

The novel is set in a polluted, poisoned future controlled by huge multilateral corporations. Most of the population live in relative squalour, dependent on the multis for jobs, food, medicine etc. Life expectancy is not long. There are a few independent towns which survive only because they have a product which they can sell to the multis. Tikva, a Jewish town, produces data protection systems, called chimeras, which the multis need to guard their Bases from pirates and assassins. Shira Shipman returns home to Tikva after Y-S, the corporation she works for, awards custody of her son to her ex-husband and then posts him to a space station. She finds that Tikva is a town under threat, partly because of the work of her grandmother, Malkah, in creating chimeras, and partly because of the illegal cyborg Avram Stein has created. Shira is given the job of teaching the cyborg, Yod, to pass as human.

Parallel with the main thrust of the narrative is the story that Malkah tells Yod, of the golem Joseph, created to protect the Jews of Prague in 1600. Such are the similarities between the two episodes that it is obvious that the historical tale is told so that the reader, even without the knowledge of this part of Jewish heritage, cannot help but see the connections. Fortunately it is done in such a way that it is entertaining and not intrusive. There are always dilemmas, moral and ethical, about creating artificial intelligence, especially in a deeply religious community. Here they are discussed, and acted upon and I doubt that anyone will condemn the decisions made, or have complained if they were different - they fit the characters and the tone of the novel. This is the mark of a great writer, who can put the decisions into the hands of her characters and make us believe that there could be no alternative. Despite being a little slow in places, this should be on everybody's "must read" list.

THE SECRET SHARER by Robert Silverberg
Grafton, 395 pp, £5.99, p/b, "C" format

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This is the second volume of the collected short stories of Robert Silverberg, and is an excellent follow-up to the first volume. Doubts

have been cast in Silverberg's recent novels, which are perhaps not up to the standards of his classic 60s and 70s work, but this book shows that he's still an excellent short story writer. With each story we also get author's notes on the whys and wherefores of the story, a definite plus for me. The stories first saw the light of day in various magazines such as *PLAYBOY*, *OMNI*, *ASIMOV'S* etc. It seems that *PLAYBOY* is now possibly the highest paying market for short fiction in the USA.

There are eleven pieces in all, and my personal favourites? "The Asension Solution" is a brilliant tribute to Isaac Asimov. "A Sleep and a Forgetting" is an alternate universe tale featuring Ghenghis Khan. Best of all is "Enter a Soldier, Later, Enter Another", with the personae of Francisco Pizarro and Socrates conjured up in a holotank, and able to argue with each other, this is classic Silverberg.

REVELATIONS by Clive Barker

(artwork by Lionel Talaro & Hector Gomez)
Eclipse, 90 pp, £6.99, Graphic Novel

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here are two more of Barker's stories from *THE BOOKS OF BLOOD* (though the publishers conceal this fact, along with their copyright date of 1985) newly converted into graphic novel form. "Revelations" itself has been skilfully and atmospherically adapted (Talaro's artwork). It's a clever supernatural horror tale about a US evangelist and his wife staying at a small rural motel and ending up in a room which... But I mustn't give it away; it's worth finding out for yourselves.

Less satisfactory is "Babel's Children", wherein a young woman holidaying alone on a small Greek island is too noseey for her own good and is imprisoned in a small village that might be Portmeirion. Yes, this story was clearly derived from *THE PRISONER*, and displays all the clarity and logic for which that series was renowned. Gomez's artwork is a little more basic and unconvincing than that for "Revelations". These two stories are separately paginated and seem to have been tossed together without much thought or care and without separate title pages.

To close these pages, a note from your editor. If those of you who type your reviews on a computer would like to (please!) pass them over on a disc, as well as Amstrad 3" discs, I can now use 3 1/2" discs, PROVIDED they are DD not HD, formatted to 720k, and the reviews are saved in ASCII in the root directory. If you let me have a hard copy as well on the first occasion (so I can type them in from scratch if anything goes wrong) and talk to me at the meeting about disc availability and how fast you need them returned - Bernie,

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