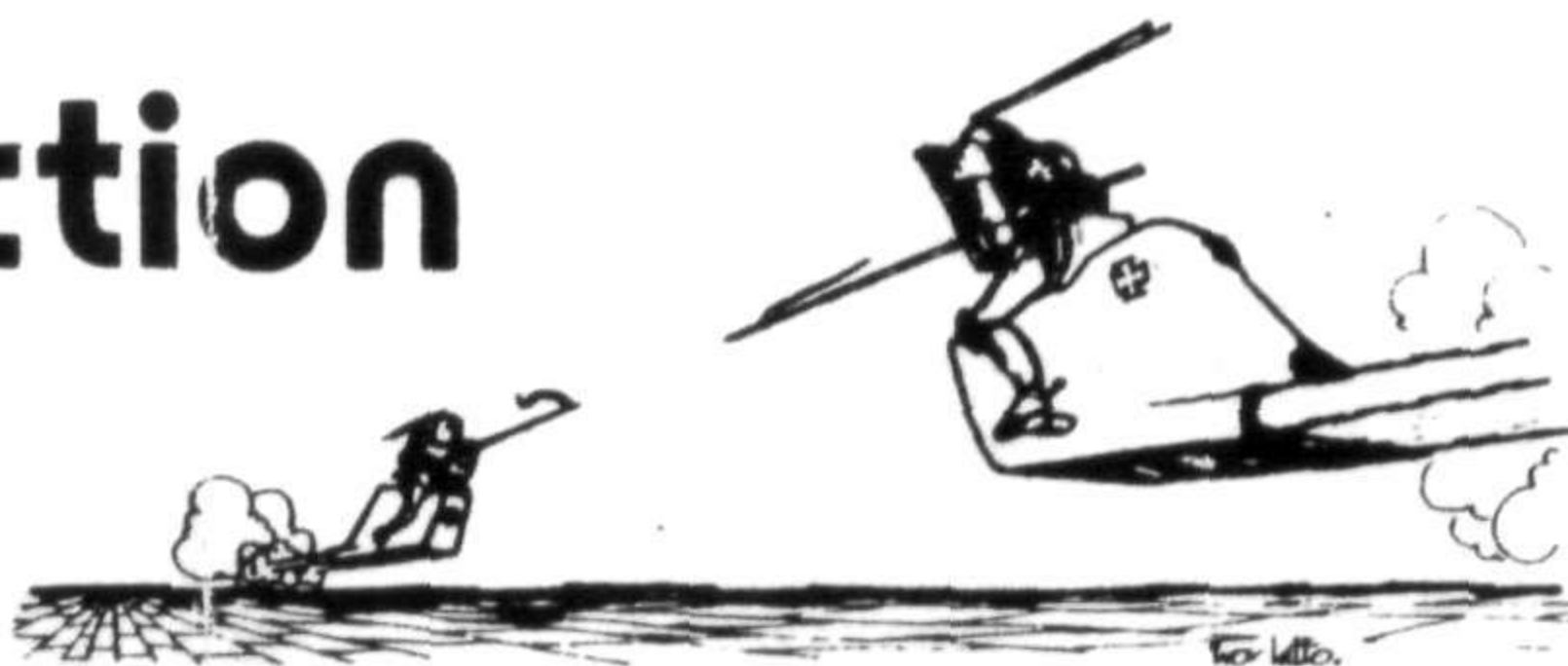


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison)



NEWSLETTER 137

January 1983

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the upstairs room of THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at THE OLD ROYAL pub, on the corner of Church Street and Cornwall Street, Birmingham 3. (Church Street is off Colmore Row.) New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-months subscription is £3.50.

JANUARY MEETING - Friday 21st January 1983 at 7.45 pm

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING is where you, the members, elect next year's committee. So far we have recieved the following nominations;

Chairman: Vernon Brown, Peter Weston.

Treasurer: Margaret Thorpe.

Secretary:

Publicity Officer: Dean Bisseker, Alan Cash.

Newsletter Editor: Pauline Morgan, Eunice Pearson.

Further nominations for any post or items you want included on the agenda should be sent to Vernon Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield. After the business part of the meeting Alan Cash will provide running commentry for a SLIDE SHOW featuring celluloid impersonations of Group members.

Of course, there will also be the traditional AUCTION, providing you all remember to donate your unwanted paperbacks, magazines, etc.

Admission this month is FREE to members.

DECEMBER MEETING

Each member, as they arrived had a sack thrust under their noses and was instructed to "choose". There was silence as each unwrapped their Christmas present and then tried to find the 54 one-word book titles hidden in a word square (Dave Holmes found the most) or solve Stan Eling's puzzle. The food, as we have come to expect from the Ivy Bush, was excellent. There were paper hats, balloons, a raffle, a game of "Call My SF Bluff" before the evening degenerated into a rowdy charades session. On the whole, a very enjoyable night out.

FORTHCOMING

* March - Publisher Toby Roxborough has agreed to talk to the Group

* The rest of the year - The retiring committee have several items that are not yet confirmed. Give your suggestions to the new committee, they will want to know who you want to see at next year's meetings.

HAZEL FAULKENER, who as Hazel Reynolds was chairman of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group in 1975 and chairman of Novacon 3, is expecting a baby in March.

DICKY HOWETT, who has provided the occasional illustration for the Newsletter, was one of the finalists in The Sunday Times £1,000 strip cartoon competition.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP'S top ten best selling paperbacks for December were:

1. The Stainless Steel Rat for President - Harry Harrison (Sphere),
2. The Elfstones of Shannara - Terry Brooks (Futura),
3. E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial - William Kotzwinkle (Sphere),
4. The Fifth Sally - Daniel Keyes (Hamlyn),
5. The Book of the Beast - Robert Stallman (Granada),
6. The Cyborg and the Sorcerers - Lawrence Watt-Evans (Del Rey distributed by Futura),
7. Roderick at Random - John Sladek (Granada),
7. The Dark Crystal - A.C.H. Smith (Futura),
9. Radix - A.A. Attanasio (Corgi),
10. In Winter's Shadow - Julian Bradshaw (Methuen),
10. Watchtower - Elizabeth A. Lynn (Hamlyn).

SOLIHULL SCIENCE FICTION GROUP celebrates its second birthday on January 9th which is also the first meeting in the new twice-monthly schedule. Members voted to locate all future meetings at The Red House in Hermitage Road (off Lode Lane) on the second and forth Sundays of each month. The second issue of the SSFG publication Twilight Zine will be out at the end of this month.

CONVENTION NEWS

RA CON Feb 4-6 at the Grosvenor Centre Hotel, Edinburgh. G-o-h Harry Harrison. Membership £8 to Chris Anderson, RA CON, 77 Baron's Court Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 7EN. Supporting membership £4.

ALBACON II April 1-4 in Glasgow. G-o-h James White, special guest Tanith Lee. Attending membership £8 to Doug McCallum B/L 8 Highburgh Road, Glasgow.

SOL III May 27-30 at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Star Trek con with g-o-h James Doohan, Walter Koenig, Anne McCaffrey & Bob Shaw. For details send an sae to 39 Dersingham Ave, Manor Park, London E12.



BECCON 1983 July 29-31 at the Essex Crest Hotel, Basildon. G-o-h Kenneth Bulmer. Supporting membership £3, attending membership £7. Details from 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4BU.

TRIPLE C CON Aug 26-29 in Birmingham. Details from Chris Chivers, 39 Nelson Street, Gloucester GL1 4OX.

BENELUXCON 10 Sept 2-4 in Eindhoven, Holland. Copies of Progress Report available from Ken Slater, 39 West Street, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2LX.

UNICON 4 Sept 2-4 in Colchester, Univ of Essex. Supporting membership £3, Attending £5. Special guest Garry Kilworth, fan g-o-h Ken Slater.

MYTHCON Sept 16-17 in Birmingham. Supporting membership £2 to Marion van der Voort, 133 Sheen Lane, Sheen, London SW14.

CON WITH NO NAME Sept 17-18. Attending membership £10. Details from P.M. O'Neill, 111 Chestnut Grove, Conisborough, S.Yorks.

NOVACON 13 November the somethingth at the Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. G-o-h Lisa Tuttle. Attending membership £7 to Phill Probert & Eunice Pearson, Apt 2, 1 Broughton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B20.

FILMS



E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL, the film directed by Stephen Spielberg.

Reviewed by Jane Tietjen.

A very condensed version of the book, but the humour is retained and is both fast moving and visual. The opening scenes have been given a smokey and indistinct atmosphere, obviously to build tension which everyone would feel in such a situation. Special effects are used sparingly but well, with some flying bicycle scenes included. The hero of the film is E.T. himself, a marvellous little creation whose antics guarantee him a place in your heart, although his mental status seems somewhat lower on celluloid. Very much Spielberg's ideal, it is a lovely, sentimental family film. Take some tissues---for the laughs as well as the tears!

THE THING - a Universal film directed by John Carpenter

Reviewed by David Wiseman.

This one is definitely not for the squeamish. About 100,000 years ago a spaceship crashed into the Antarctic. A Norwegian research team find it, dig up something alongside and take it back to their base. This thing is far from dead and wipes out the entire base except for two men and a husky, which escapes. The dog is, in fact, the Thing, and they chase it to a US base. The film is full of nasty incidents. All the gory bits were very well done (suspiciously so) and there are shocks galore. I love films like this and enjoyed it very much, though it did give me some bad dreams for a few nights afterwards.

If anyone hasn't noticed this Tuesday 11th January saw the start of BBC 2's SEASON OF SCIENCE FICTION FILM CLASSICS. It started with The Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956 version) and will include in future weeks When Worlds Collide (1951), War of the Worlds (1953), Invaders from Mars (1953), It Came from Outer Space (1953), The Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954), Forbidden Planet (1956), This Island Earth (1955), Silent Running (1972), The Forbin Project (1969), Robinson Crusoe on Mars (1964) and Fantastic Voyage (1966).

BOOK REVIEWS

FOUNDATION'S EDGE by Isaac Asimov, Granada £7.95, 325 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

After an interval of 30 years for Asimov and 500 years for the Foundation, there is a sequel to the Foundation trilogy. The background, which has to be introduced into the opening of the novel, makes fairly heavy going at first, but the rhythm soon picks up, and the ideas and inventions typical of an Asimov novel soon make for easier going. There is also plenty of Asimov's wry humour in later parts of the book. The Foundation is riding the crest of its success, and progress has been rewarded by a vision of Hari Seldon. One of the council, Trevize, is tricked into proclaiming his distrust of the Plan, and is exiled from the Foundation world, Terminus. Trevize and Pelorat, a historian, begin a search for Earth, but are, unknown to them, being followed by members of the Second Foundation, which is thought to have been destroyed.... Trevize and Pelorat discover not Earth, but the home planet of the Mule, the mutant who helped destroy the First Foundation, with far-reaching consequences for all. This is destined to join the previous three novels as a classic.

RADIX by A.A. Attanasio, Corgi £2.95, 384 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

The first part moves at a fast and furious pace. It is exciting and nasty. Sumner is a big, fat, slob, a social outcast who enjoys killing people. The picture of the unloveable greaseball whose ambition is to be dreaded is well executed and deserves the Nebula nomination it received last year. But after Sumner's capture by the authorities, rigor mortis sets in. The transformation, mental and physical, strikes a discordant note and the prose becomes turgid with philosophical passages. By the end, I was bored and confused. Although this author has undoubtedly got talent he has greatly over-reached himself in this, his first novel.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION edited by George H. Scithers, Hale £7.95, 284 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

This is the second "best of" volume from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine. The accent is on entertainment with a wide variety of stories including SF by Randall Garrett (and, inevitably, from Barry B. Longyear), horror by Tanith Lee and several borderline fantasies. I particularly enjoyed "Mandalay" by John M. Ford (most of the stories are by fairly new writers). Despite the magazine's reputation for concentrating on shallow, formula-type SF, these stories are generally good and occasionally excellent.

DARK UNIVERSE by Daniel F. Galouye, Hamlyn £1.35, 191 pages

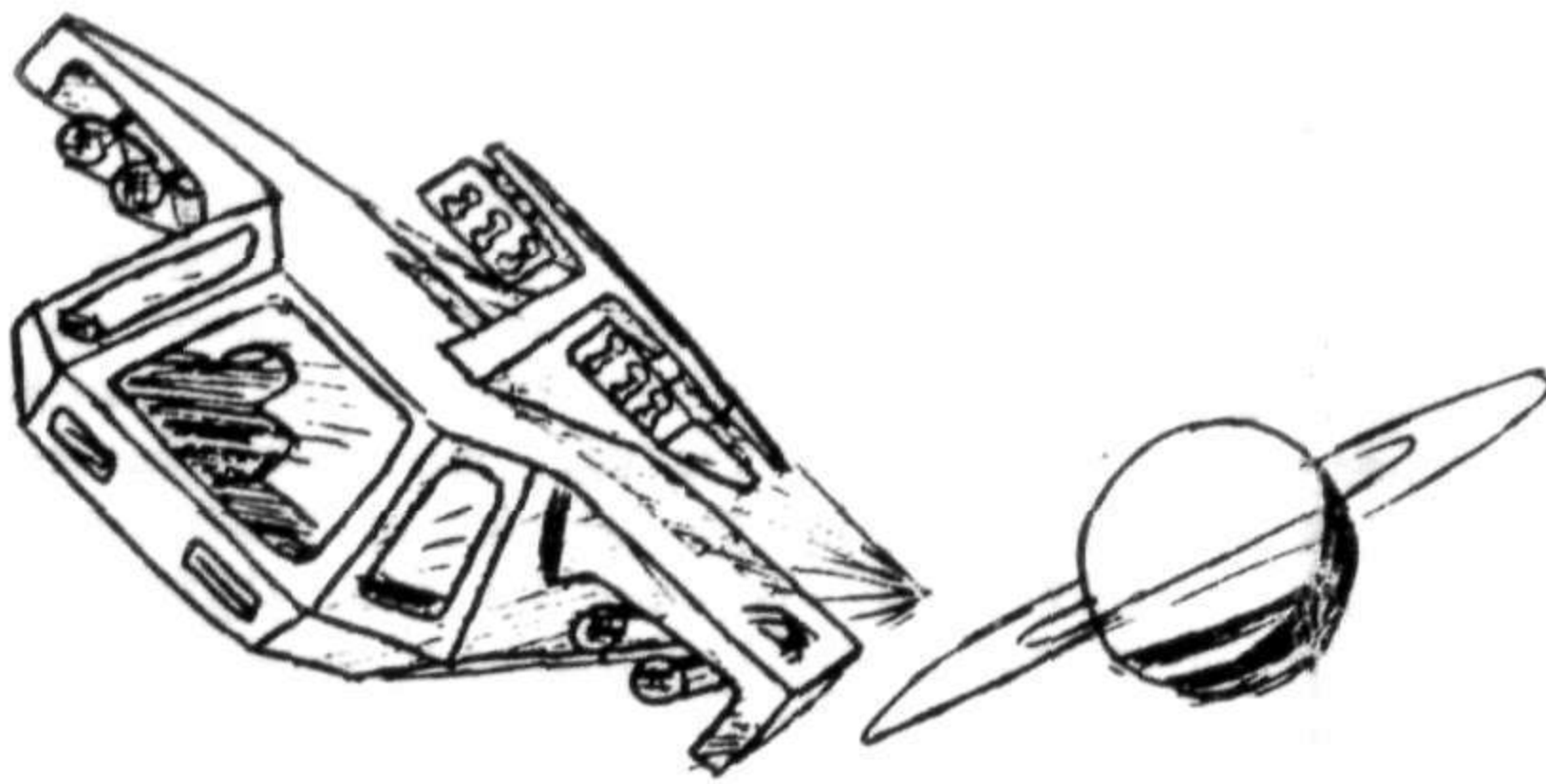
Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Written in 1961, this is a well composed example of a typical novel of the era, somewhat towards the lower end of the range in its simplicity. Nowadays it would be an "introduction to SF" type juvenile. A post Holocaust tribe, living in darkness in the bowels of the Earth, are having trouble with a similar tribe of mutants and with invading monsters. Jared, an inquisitive individual about to be married for political reasons, is misjudged by his fellows and cast out from the tribe. The standard plot follows. The sort of book to keep around to read at odd moments.

STARSEEKERS by Colin Wilson, Granada £1.95, 331 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

A comprehensive, though necessarily slightly superficial, survey of man's quest to understand the universe, all the way from ancient monuments such as Stonehenge and the Pyramids, through the history of the contributions made by Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and many others, up to the present-day problems raised by post-Einsteinian discoveries. In the process it takes a look at a whole range of unanswered questions in such areas as cosmology, philosophy, evolution, the nature of consciousness, and more. I was a little disconcerted by the lack of an introduction of any sort---the author plunges straight into his subject without preparation---but perhaps this is a trivial complaint. This book is never the least bit dull. A good workmanlike job, aimed at the general reader.



STAR-SEARCH by Colin Kapp,
NEL £1.25, 171 pages
Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

The fourth and final part in the Cageworld series has the oddly-assembled five chasing off to find what is holding up their concentric shells. Each encounter on the outward journey brings a seemingly obligatory small adventure, leaving only ten pages to find the surface. This makes the novel disjointed and aimless in the author's attempt to tie-up loose ends. The basis of the

stories is the population doubling every 30 years with the suggestion that, when the Earth is full, another Earth is needed 30 years later. This is carried to an extreme with many concentric spheres surrounding the Sun, and at last even this must be replicated every 30 years. The system devised by Colin Kapp is incapable of building another shell and shows the consequences of overcrowding, in famine and war. The books have plenty of action and should be read in sequence.

THE CYBORG AND THE SORCERERS by Lawrence Watt-Evans, Del Rey distributed by Futura £1.60, 248 pages

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

Slant, the cyborg of the title, has landed on the planet Dest, in the course of his 'seek and destroy' mission for Earth. He would like to terminate his mission, since he knows Earth has been destroyed, but his computer won't let him. It doesn't know, and has been programmed to kill him by detonating a thermite bomb in his skull if he surrenders or is captured. The Sorcerers on Dest offer him a way out. Can they remove the bomb in time? Can Slant deactivate the computer before it decimates the planet? And what will happen to him afterwards? Read the book and discover the answers to these and many more questions. It is easy to read, easy to digest, extremely funny in places, and has a not totally unexpected twist at the end. Read it and enjoy it!

MISSION by Patrick Tilley, Sphere £1.95, 396 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Oversexed Jewish lawyer and his medical girlfriend find themselves face to face with Jesus Christ, stigmata et al, in the morgue of Manhattan General Hospital. Net result, "The Man" and his two disciples flee from the police and the politicians, not forgetting the powers of darkness. Really this book deserves an autopsy, not a review. Tilley's prose is ugly and swamped with Americanisms. He tries to show he is knowledgeable by throwing in UFOs, Gnosticism, Zen Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Rennes-le-Chateaux; the list is endless. All of the preceding subjects, and not a few others he tries to slot into his von Danikenesque theory of Christ, the Universe and Everything. If you are a glutton for punishment then wade through this quagmire of pseudo-philosophising drivel. Compared to this even von Daniken and Co. seem tame!!

TRON by Brian Daley, NEL £1.50, 186 pages + 8 pages of colour stills

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Even by the standards of film novelisations, this is poor. It's not all Brian Daley's fault; there was little he could do with Steven Lisberger & Bonnie MacBird's Flash Gordon-type plot (full of chases, captures, assumed deaths, hair's-breadth escapes, etc) except smile and take the money. Just as in Flash Gordon, the goodies are too good and the bad-dies too bad. The basic idea---of a human converted into a computer programme (by a big, bad computer) and forced to play computer games from the inside, with his own life at stake---is very good, but the magical electronic background is largely unexploited in the book. I believe the film is better.

THE SIRIAN EXPERIMENTS by Doris Lessing, Granada £.95, 331 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

The writing is intoxicating, the over-view breathtaking, the insight into human behaviour uncomfortable. The Sirians have all the faults and characteristics of humans and are unable to understand that others might see things differently; they assume that the Canopeans, their rivals, will act exactly as they do. The narrator, during the events which make up Man's pre-history on Earth, begins to develop an awareness of these differences. The plot, which, because of the millennia it covers is not action packed, is the vehicle of and of secondary importance to this growing understanding of a vastly different nature. This the third volume in the Canopus in Argos: Archives series and parallels the first, Shikasta. It well deserved its short-listing for the Booker Prize in 1981.

THE NORTHERN GIRL by Elizabeth A.Lynn, Hamlyn £1.50, 374 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

This is No.3 of a trilogy which began with the award-winning Watchtower, then the Dancers of Arun. Sorren is a bondservant to the noble house of Med in the Southern capital of Arun. Her only possession is The Cards, a sort of tarot set forbidden by the witch clan. Sorren is content with her kindly mistress and her kindly lover, but she still dreams of the North, where her visions take her. Yet she is afraid of the witches who want her to join them. The Northern Girl is the story of the fulfilment of her destiny. A pleasant, absorbing book, rich in exotica and homeliness. It would be a nice place to live. And there's scope for a sequel.

IN THE BEGINNING: SCIENCE FACES GOD IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS by Isaac Asimov, NEL £1.75, 234 pages

Reviewed by Bob Vernon.

Like a sex manual written by a virgin: plenty of facts, interesting speculation, but something vital lacking. Or a guide to economics, "Mao or Maggie" that recognises no other alternatives. Asimov compares the Fundamentalist approach to the biblical account of creation with that of the scientist, but ignores the view of most Christian scientists that biblical truth is concerned with meaning rather than method, the science tells us "how"; spirituality suggests "why". Ignoring this mainstream argument simplifies and distorts the task, and wastes a lot of good research, shoring up minds rather than opening them. If you really want to know why the Old Testament is written the way it is read Bernhard Anderson's Living World of the Old Testament.

THE DARK CRYSTAL by A.C.H.Smith, Futura £1.50, 176 pages (illustrated with colour stills: art concepts by Brian Froud).

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This is the book of the film, rather than the book on which the film was based, and I found myself comparing it with The Never Ending Story on which I worked recently (but there the 'classic book came first). In both, the main character is a young boy who is plunged into a quest, and the remaining 'characters' are nearly all fantastic creatures. I've only seen a trailer, but I image this film is notable mainly for its special effects; the book is written in a bland, pedestrian narrative style which provokes little excitement. In the hands of a 'name' fantasy writer it might have been good.

THE ELFSTONES OF SHANNARA by Terry Brooks, Futura £2.95, 636 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

This book is billed, optimistically, on the cover as the long-awaited sequel to The Sword of Shannara, featuring a brand-new generation of adventurers. In Arborlon the magic Elven tree, the Ellcrys, is dying, loosing the spell of Forbidding that holds the hordes of Demons at bay. Already some of them have broken through and are hunting the bearers of a seed from the tree, which will renew the Forbidding. This promising scenario, unfortunately, is ruined by the book's lack of effective narrative technique, its wordy overwriting, and its naive, clumsy construction. The story is peppered with moments of ludicrous improbability and stylistic infelicities, the Demon horde is an unconvincing, off-the-peg job-lot, and the map doesn't even match up with the text. However, let us by all means look on the bright side---there's a very good story in there, somewhere, pleading to be let out.

DEATHHUNTER by Ian Watson, Corgi £1.50, 173 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It is undeniable that Watson's previous novels, concentrating much more upon metaphysical development than upon action, have tended to be too cerebral for many readers. By contrast, Deathhunter is an exciting tale with a strong plot which twists and twists again. Jim Todhunter is a death counsellor in a future society which has sublimated violence by encouraging euthanasia. Instead of just guiding people to their deaths, Todhunter tries to discover (through scientific experiment) the nature of death and what comes after it. He and the reader have many surprises before the end. Recommended.

A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE by Peter Beagle, Unicorn (Unwin Paperbacks) £2.75, 213 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

"The grave's a fine and private place, But none, I think, do there embrace", wrote the poet Andrew Marvell three centuries ago. In this fine novel from 1960 Peter Beagle concentrates on a large New York cemetery containing two pairs of lovers---one dead, the other alive. Add a talking raven, some Jewish humour and a lot of extremely attractive prose and you have a beautiful, unusual book. Buy it. Read it.

CAUTIONARY TALES by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Granada £1.50, 285 pages

Reviewed by Elizabeth Farr.

All these stories have something to say to whoever will listen. Many of them are chilling because although they may be set in alien or future worlds the emotions and reactions are easily recognisable. These are subtle horror stories, of infinite variety. In "Un Bel Di", the cruelty of an alien ambassador is coloured by the gentle innocence of equally alien natives. By contrast, "The Fellini Beggar" portrays the cruelty of circumstance---an exquisite voice trapped in a hideously deformed body. They are well worth reading.

THE BOOK OF THE BEAST by Robert Stallman, Granada £1.50, 224 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Apart from the familiar shape-changing alien beast, this third and final volume in the series also features astral projection and some raising of the dead, which is a bit too much to swallow. The Beast manages to contact others of its kind and there's a sub-plot involving peyote drug-trips among the Navajo Indians. The writing itself remains sharp and sensual---rather like early Ray Bradbury---and the 1930s background retains interest, though at times there is a lack of polish suggesting that Stallman's death prevented him from finishing his final draft. Best read in conjunction with its predecessors, The Orphan and The Captive.

SIX OF SWORDS by Carole Nelson Douglas, Dey Rey distributed by Futura £1.60, 276 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

Although flawed, this is a competent first attempt at a fantasy novel---far worse efforts frequently disgrace the shelves of bookshops. Irissa, a Torloc seeress, and Kendric, a Wrathman (and so one of the hereditary guardians of the Six Realms) find themselves abandoned in a world that is rapidly falling apart. Their mentor is Felabba who appears to be a cat. What else she is, is not fully revealed---to the credit of the author who does not bore us with long passages of explanation but gets on with the story. Read it, there is enchantment here.

KINE by A.R.Lloyd, Hamlyn £1.50, 251 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

Once upon a time there was a rabbit called Hazel. He was followed by a lot of other talking animals, like moles. Now it's the turn of weasels. Kine chronicles the war between the weasels, led by Kine, and invading mink. The terror brought by these callous killers is watered down, as most of the nastiness is off-stage. As a result the novel lacks punch. The continuity of the story is disrupted by too many passages from the viewpoint of the humans who lurk on the fringe of the action. However, as an introduction for young people to the wild life in Britain's remaining woodlands it succeeds reasonably well.

At our regular Ivy Bush meetings the speakers covered the Science Fiction rainbow, ranging from top authors by way of artists, the media and fandom to "home grown" items such as the Christmas Party. Brian Aldiss started the ball rolling in February in his usual inimitable style, followed by Colin Kapp who regaled us with details of his Cageworld Series. We had hoped that Ken Bulmer would chew his pipe at us in April but at the last minute he was unable to make it (the meeting, not the pipe) and so we had to wait until June for our next author, Dave Langford. The millionaire of words, Brian Stapleford, was interviewed in August by Chris Morgan and gave a fine exhibition of how to duck awkward questions.

Creative fandom was represented by Dave Langford, who in June spoke of his writing first as a fanzine editor then as a self-employed author--- a path a fair number of others have taken. On the home fannish front a quiz to replace Ken Bulmer's talk was enjoyed by all present, being won by Rog Peyton's team. The ones who knew all the answers were invited to take part in a regional SF Mastermind heat in November. It was won by Rog by a narrow margin. In July we had our (becoming) usual Beer and Skittles evening at the White Swan, Harborne. To round off the year there was the annual Christmas Party at the Ivy Bush during which various games and competitions attracted varying degrees of enthusiasm, although a good time was had by all.

Can next year match up to this now

"A NEW ONE HAS BEGUN" ?

XX

Thanks this month to Ken Slater for convention details and to all reviewers and artists. The artists are: P.1 Ivor Latto, P.2 Dave Wood, P.3 John Dell and P.5 David Wiseman. Next month you may find somebody else doing this job (who knows?) but this January 1983 issue has most definitely been edited and produced by Pauline E.Morgan, 321 Sarehole Road, Hall Green, B28.