

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

December
1988

Issue
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The monthly Newsletter of the
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1988 Committee: Chairman - Bernie Evans Secretary - Chris Murphy
Treasurer - David Wake Newsletter Editor - Dave Hardy Reviews Editor -
Mick Evans Publicity Officer - Andrew White Novacon 18 - Tony Berry



The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at the PENGUIN (ex LADBROKE) HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham at 8.00pm. Membership costs only £5.50 per year (£8.00 for two people at the same address)

Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer at 160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham B30 1NY (telephone 021-451 2287)

Book Reviews to Mick Evans at 7 Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7UY (Telephone 021-707 6606), which is also the Chairman's address.

Other contributions and enquiries to Dave Hardy, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AB (telephone 021-777 1802)

This Month's Meeting is on:
Friday 16 December at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

NB: at Aston University -
Senior Common Room

This month's meeting is:

The Christmas Party 🎄

There will be a Video Quiz, running continuously, to give you a chance to win a valuable prize. You also have a chance to get yourself free gifts (which may be valuable or not so valuable, but nobody goes away empty-handed) at our surprise item.

There is also an excellent Buffet Meal, and the room has its own Bar. There will be music - but not so loud that you can't have a conversation with your friends. And the cost of all this unadulterated pleasure is a mere £2.50 per person, whether a member or not. However, you really should have booked by now...

DON'T PANIC! There is still time to ring Bernie (number on front cover) or send her your cheque. You are even welcome to turn up at the door, as long as you don't mind taking pot luck (we put you in a pot and some lucky person wins you as a prize). See you there.

NEXT MONTH: 20th January is our AGM, at which next year's Committee is elected. Some posts are still open - see last month's *Brum Group News*. If you want to apply, please send your nomination in writing to the Chairman.

After the AGM, as usual, Mr Roger G. Peyton will declaim in his usual oratorical fashion. Yup, there will be an Auction - but for that we need books, paper bags, books, and unwanted Christmas presents. Please bring them along.

Last Month

Gwyneth Jones

How can you hope to write up nearly two and a half hours in a space as big as this? Yes, it was nearly 10.30pm when the audience let Gwyneth take a well-deserved rest.

Well, they say a picture is worth a thousand words, so here's how Gwyneth started her talk - unusually, by showing three pieces of flint. The first was covered in chalk: the flint, she said, represented the basic myth, while the chalk was the story written around that myth. The second showed how the story could be 'decorated' or embellished, with interesting landscapes, characters and so forth. But the third was the core of flint (no chalk covering) which, she said should be left well alone. The basic myth should not be tampered with...

Gwyneth also explained that (like Tolkien and Hall Green!) she found that the background of her stories was based on her native Manchester; places with the unlikely names of Blackley and the 'Stinky Pipes'. Bernie says she knows them well!



The Chairman's (bi-annual) Bit...

Now, if there's one thing I hate almost as much as speaking in public it's writing. So why am I writing this? Because that bully Dave Hardy made me, that's the reason why!! [Actually, she begged me on bended knees to let her write a piece. Well, there's as much truth in it...] Here it is, then, my end-of-the-year round-up.

What have we had this year, the year in which I promised more home-grown entertainment and more SCIENCE FICTION? We've had a quiz and a debate on the home-grown front, both quite well attended. We've had a speaker on robotics, something we've never had before, (and never will again while I have a say in things!). That was something new we tried, but I don't think it quite came off. [Actually, we *have* tried it before - before Bernie's time. It was the speaker, not the subject, that misfired this time.]

Then we had another shot at something new in July: Paul Kincaid and Maureen Porter to talk about the BSFA. A bit of a shaky start to that meeting, but once it got going it turned out to be the surprise success of the year.

On the 'Famous Author' front we had Freda Warrington, Bob Shaw, Sheri Tepper, Iain Banks, and Gwyneth Jones. Two writers known more for fantasy than SF, a lady who writes both and refuses to recognise that there is a difference (and who has gone some way to changing MY mind about fantasy), one old favourite SF writer, and one I don't think anyone has yet managed to pin a label on!

Finally, John Jarrold from the publisher's side of things, who has publicly stated that he'd like to see more hard SF back on the shelves. Until a few months ago John was a fan, just like the rest of us. He still IS a fan, but now he's also SF Editor at Futura, so we'll see what transpires there.

Looking back, I think we've given you a fair mixture of events. But what do YOU think? It's YOUR group. If you like what I've done this year then buy me a drink, and if you don't then let's have your ideas - and let's have you standing for the Committee!!!

And next year? Read future Newsletters to find THAT out!

Bernie Evans

There's no **Andromeda Top Ten** this month, as the only person there who can count went off to Hamburg to get paralytic. (Why Hamburg? ask him, when he's able to speak again) However, there is a signing session at the shop on Saturday 21 January at noon, by Jonathan Wylie. The new book is *Dreams of Stone*, the first in a new trilogy - 11 years after *Servants of Ark*.



NEWSFILE

News and Gossip from the world of SF, incorporating the noted Jophan Report by Martin Tudor.

If you have any information, don't keep it to yourself - send it in. (This does mean YOU!)

THE JOPHAN REPORT # 22

The GUFF Race this year has been won by the Dutch fan Roelof Goudriaan, who, having beaten Linda Pickersgill by a reportedly narrow margin, will be travelling to the Australian Eastercon in 1989.

Andy Porter's *Science Fiction Chronicle* reports that a recent issue of *The Bookseller* has outlined problems which could face British publishers after 1992. Due to the fact that English is a common technical language throughout Europe there are already a large number of Continental publishers dealing with English language works.

Under post-1992 rules an English language SF book could be imported legitimately in one country and then sent into Britain to be sold.

The Bookseller says: "Competing and infringing US editions of UK titles may be imported into the UK through Europe. It is even possible that the remaindered editions of a US title could reach the UK before publication of the legitimate full-price title bought by a British publisher."

SFC goes on to point out that "With a weak dollar versus a strong pound it is even possible for the regularly priced US edition of a book to compete effectively with the same book published in the UK."

Also under the new EEC regulations there will be a major restructuring of rights sales for trade publishers in the next few years, with British publishers attempting to acquire European rights, rather than just British rights, for new titles. American publishers are of course opposing such moves, as they see the loss of valuable rights markets in individual European countries. British publishers are counter-attacking by promising to pay authors higher royalties, as well as moving to establish distribution channels throughout Europe, treating individual countries as extensions of the domestic market.

AUTHORS AND BOOKS

Julian May has sold *The Galactic Milieu Trilogy*, a prequel to the 'Pleistocene Earth' series, to Del Rey. Entitled *Jack the Bodiless*, *Diamond Mask* and *Magnificat*, the books will be published in both hardback and paperback. The first will appear in 1991, with the next volumes scheduled for 1992 and 1994.

Loqus reports that Robert Holdstock is working on a third 'Mythago Wood' novel for

Gollancz, as well as an occult novel about 'the one psychic power that Stephen King has missed'. Arthur C. Clarke's authorized biography, to be written by Neil McAleer, has been sold at auction to Contemporary Books by the Scott Meredith Agency. While on this side of the Atlantic Mary Gentle has sold a short story collection, including some original works, to Macdonald/Futura.

The mother of Robert Tappan Morris, the graduate student accused of being responsible for the outbreak of a 'virus' in US computer networks, has revealed that he read and re-read John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider*. Brunner's 1975 novel of computer tampering was one of the first books to mention computer viruses. In the latest *Loqus* Brunner says he would like to meet Morris: "I would serve him an excellent meal. Then I would pump him about computers."

Talking Rings Entertainment, Inc. have acquired the sequel rights for George Pal's version of *The Time Machine*. It is not yet known whether the sequel will be based on Pal's original idea (which was subsequently published as a paperback original novel), but Arnold Leibovit envisions the sequel to be in the \$10 to \$15 million price range. *Star Trek V*, which will be in the \$30 million range, will be directed by William Shatner. The script, by David Loughery, will re-unite the cast and send them off to locations on the South California desert plains. Still on sequels, *Oh God IV* is currently being planned at Warners.



Tim Groome

"JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED!"

Christmas Competition Christmas Competition Competition Christmas Competition Christmas



W S O R D S Q U A R E W O

Hidden in this Word Square – kindly provided by Pauline Morgan – are hidden the titles of science fiction, fantasy or horror novels. Each title consists of *one word only*.

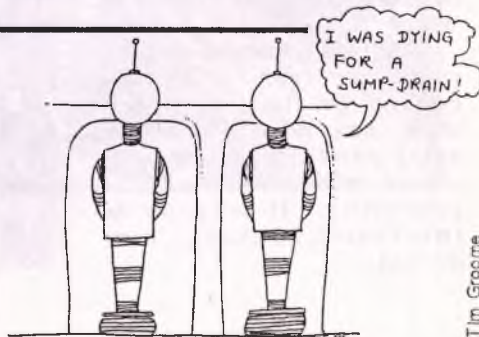
The titles run horizontally, vertically or diagonally, in either direction, but never round corners.

When you have found as many titles as you can, write them down and either hand them to Dave Hardy at the Christmas *or* January meeting, or post them to him at the address on the front cover by the date of the latter. There will be a prize.

(Incidentally, Pauline has put the answers in a sealed envelope so that for once I can have a go at a competition - so no cries of "fix!" if I should win! Not that I expect to, unless nobody else bothers to have a go - but you have been warned...)

New Member: November

The Brum Group is proud to welcome (Dr) Patrick Collins as a member. Not that we can expect to see him at many meetings, I'm afraid, as he lives in Kennington, London. Many of you will remember that Patrick gave us a talk on Space Tourism a year or so ago - since which he has become quite a keen fan, and has attended several cons - including two Novacons.



THE GRAPHIC WORK OF

RICHARD MIDDLETON



It may be more suited to a Hallowe'en issue than Christmas, but beggars can't be choosers...

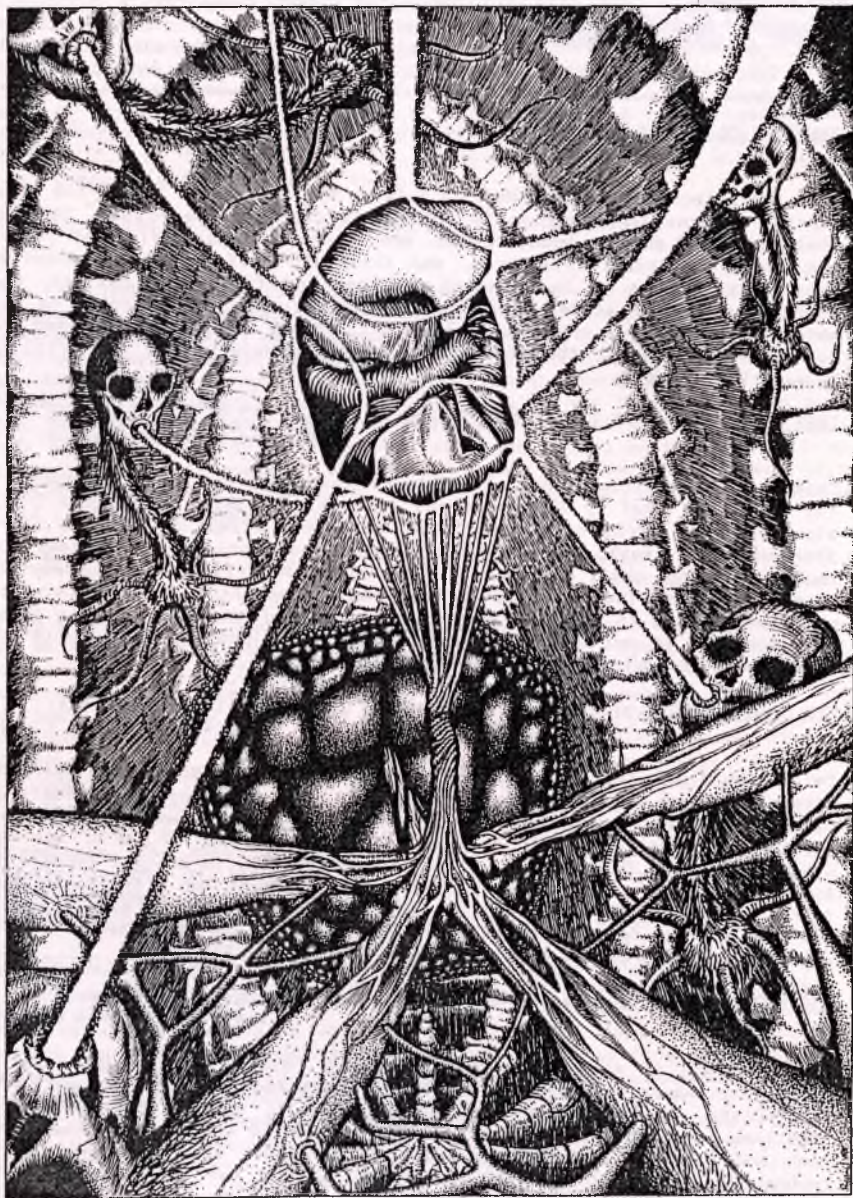
Richard wasn't at Novacon long enough to put any work in the Art Show, unfortunately, but a few of us were lucky enough to see him produce his portfolio in the Book Room. I immediately asked him if I could use a few pieces in the *Brum Group News* - and to my surprise (because contributions from outsiders aren't all that common) he sent me some copies to use.

The two linocuts on this page are from a limited edition (of ten, of which only seven will be for sale) portfolio of *Gormenghast* which Richard is producing. If anyone is interested, contact him direct:-

c/o Victoria Mount, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4PU.

At left is 'Sepulchre', and below 'Barquentine and Steerpike', while on the facing page is a pen and ink fantasy entitled 'Green Pepper Foetus'. One can see shades of several classical and fantasy artists in Richard's work - I'll leave you to name your own, but I'm sure you will agree that talent like this deserves encouragement.







All books reviewed in these pages by members have been provided by the publishers, who will receive a copy of this Newsletter. Members may keep books reviewed by them (or may donate them as Raffle Prizes, or Auction Items, if feeling generous...) Please keep reviews to under 150 words, unless instructed otherwise. Deadline for reviews: at least 2 weeks before next meeting

THE FOLK OF THE AIR by Peter S. Beagle; Headline; 330 pages; £2.99 p/back.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

From the author of *The Last Unicorn* this is his only novel in far too long. Farrell returns to Avicenna, California to discover one friend, Ben, is living with an obscure goddess, Sia, and another friend, Julie, has joined the League of Archaic Pleasures, who (like the real Society of Creative Anachronism) dress up in medieval costumes and fight mock battles. One young "sorceress", Aiffe, finds that the magic she is practicing is not entirely imaginary. After a good start, where Farrell terrorises an inexperienced mugger, the story moves rather slowly until the gripping climax. Very good.

TREE AND LEAF by J.R.R. Tolkien; Unwin; 101 pages; £7.95 h/b £3.95 p/b.
Reviewed by Wendell Wagner Jr.

This is a new edition of one of Tolkien's books with one new item added. Of the old items *Leaf by Niggle* is one of Tolkien's minor non-Middle Earth stories, like *Smith of Wooten Major* or *'Farmer Giles of Ham*. *On Fairy Stories* is a classic defense of the reading and writing of fantasy and should be on the shelf of anyone interested in the criticism of fantasy and science fiction. The new item is the poem *Mythopoeia*, just one stanza of which was quoted in previous editions of *Tree and Leaf*. It's only a three page poem, so if you have the old edition of this book you should only buy the new one if you're a Tolkien completist (like me).

THE SHADOW HUNTER by Pat Murphy; Headline; 223 pages; £2.99 paperback.
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Pat Murphy's *The Falling Woman* won the Nebula for Best Novel last year. At first I assumed that this was her next book, but the copyright reveals it dates from 1982. Many newly famous writers get their deservedly obscure earlier works dredged up to cash in. *The Shadow Hunter* is one of the few cases where this is worthwhile. "Sam" a Neanderthal, is brought forward in time to the 21st century by a time travel experiment (or a trickster bear spirit, depending on your point of view). The beauty of this story is that Sam sees everything in terms of his tribal spirits, and often seems to have a better grip on reality than the modern characters. Very good.

THE WHORES OF BABYLON by Ian Watson; Paladin; 302 pages; £3.95 paperback;
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The Americans of almost the year 2000 have rebuilt the ancient city of Babylon in the Arizona desert, peopling it with Americans who pretend to be Babylonians. All technology is forgotten (well, almost all) and it is sometimes an offence to refer to it. The plot tells of two young Americans, Alex and Deborah, arriving in Babylon, and shows how they fare. While Deborah becomes first a whore then the wife of a god, Alex is sold as a slave. But all is not as it seems: Babylon is a complex city and Alex is soon involved in several strange intrigues. It becomes evident that the title (and much else in the novel) is symbolic. This is another outstandingly original book from one of SF's greatest innovators.

LINCOLN'S DREAM by Connie Willis; Grafton; 256 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Sharon Hassall.

Jeff Johnston is employed as a historical researcher on the American Civil War. Whilst researching information for the book his employer is writing on Lincoln's dreams, Jeff meets Annie who has been having disturbing and haunting dreams of her own about the war. In fact Annie appears to have been having General Lee's dreams. Jeff recognises these as such and feels they have more meaning than that accredited to them by psychiatrists. This is story of how Jeff sets out to discover the true meaning of these dreams and why Annie has been having them. I thought this was an intriguing idea for a storyline, but felt the story concentrated too much on historical details for my liking. Also I was disappointed with ending which seemed weak compared with the rest of the plot.

KINSMAN by Ben Bova; Methuen; 269 pages; £11.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The book ends with the first steps being taken toward the establishment of a permanent manned installation on the Moon. This is a personal triumph for Chester "Chet" Kinsman whom we have seen grow from a young Airforce trainee into an experienced but troubled astronaut driven by a compulsion to lead mankind to the Moon, not only to escape from the Earth but also, perhaps, to escape from himself. Some of the episodes in his life which have made him the way he is were originally published as short stories, which have now been rewritten to take account of recent world history as well as technological developments, and it all comes together as a novel with something more in it than space adventure among the futuristic hardware. Read it when the paperback comes out.

EYE by Frank Herbert; N.E.L; 328 pages; £3.95 paperback.

Reviewed Tony Morton.

I am a great fan of short story collections, it gives a wider perspective of an author's work, usually over a period of time. *Eye* is no exception, but of the dozen stories plus *Dune* travelogue and introduction, I found few outstanding. The ideas seem okay but treatments vary between mediocre and adequate, with only *Cease Fire* (invention of the perfect weapon), *Try To Remember*, (how to communicate with aliens) and *The Tactful Saboteur* (Bureau of Sabotage agent evokes chain of events) in any way memorable. Using the introduction to the book as a plug for the *Dune* movie and softsoap of how 'intellectual and discerning' S.F readers are didn't help and the inclusion of *Frogs and Scientists* at the end seems just a page filler. The *Dune* travelogue, *The Road to Dune*, is the most interesting part of the book, purely because of the Jim Burns artwork used to back up the spiel. Retrospectively, perhaps this book should be *Eye* by Jim Burns with occasional stories by Herbert?. One for Herbert fans only.

THE SHORE OF WOMEN by Pamela Sargent; Pan; 456 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

This is a thoughtful tale of Earth's far future. Nuclear holocaust has become pre-history and women have rebuilt civilisation from the ruins left by men. The women in their cities enjoy a leisurely lifestyle by courtesy of their advanced technology, while the men outside exist in neolithic barbarism; kept in check by a combination of a matriarchal quasi-religion based on mental telecommunication with a high porn content, and punitive expeditions with laser armed warships. Birana is exiled from her city for not stopping her mother trying to kill someone, Arvil survives the destruction of a band that tamed horses. Together they come to understand and love each other as they seek refuge from two hostile cultures. The birth of their daughter means a return to the city where their story provokes a re-examination of the women's values that may stir them from stagnation. There aren't many good S.F romances; this one's worth reading.

THE DARK TOWER Vol.1 THE GUNSLINGER Steven King; Sphere; 224 p; £6.99 1/p/b
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here is something rather different from the usual King horror blockbuster. It's a series of connected stories about a gunslinger chasing (mainly on foot) a mysterious man in black across a deserted arid landscape. It seems to be set in the American West in the 19th century, but this is illusory. Really it's a fantasy novel set in the far future, with magic; everything is symbolic. The gunslinger is Roland, searching for the Dark Tower. This book is not complete, merely the first volume in a long series. It's rather slow, even by King's standards, but has just enough good writing and unexpected twists to keep the reader interested. Unusually, there are some interior colour illustrations by Michael Whelan, which have added about £2.50 to the price of this paperback.

THE MOON GODDESS AND THE SON by Donald Kingsbury; Grafton; 544 p; £3.95 p/b
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This is in many ways quite an extraordinary book. It's about a girl called Diana who runs away from home because her father beats her; an American astronaut and his errant son (you begin to understand the title?); about the colonisation of the Moon and near-Earth space using electro-magnetic transporation; about SDI; and about one man's attempt to get inside the Russian mind and create a revolution which will end forever the paranoia between East and West. It could have been half the length and gained in pace, but the author obviously wanted to make his point (and demonstrate his very deep knowledge of the Soviet Union and its neighbours). If you can plough through all this you may learn a lot, but it is a bit like a sermon. It's intriguing though.

OFF PLANET by Clifford D Simak; Methuen; 223 pages; £10.95 hardback.
Reviewed by Tony Berry.

A collection of short stories set, as the title suggests, on other worlds. There is a long-winded introduction by F. Lyall who says that he envies the reader encountering these stories for the first time - and then proceeds to give away half the plots. The stories themselves are not outstanding, but enjoyable none-the-less. Several have common themes; they deal with the impact of alien cultures and artifacts on the Earthmen who confront them, especially when the aliens turn out to be not at all what they seem. Conversely, Mankind's effect on the aliens is also explored. There are a number of good ideas here; in one story the crew of a spaceship find themselves stranded on a planet simply because something has removed from their brains the knowledge of how to take off! eek. The only thing we can smile at is the description of Mars teeming with life - but we'll forgive him for that. A reasonable collection from one of the SF greats, spanning his career from the 40s to the 70s. If you've never read Simak this is a good place to start.

SPHERE by Michael Crichton; Pan; 385 pages; £3.95 paperback;
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

Michael Crichton is of course best known for his *The Andromeda Strain*. The only similarity here is that a group of scientists is stranded in a potentially dangerous environment. In this case it is a deep-sea habitat, where they are to investigate a sunken, 300 year old spaceship; I cannot really give any more information without revealing the story. The unlikely hero is a 53 year old psychologist, who is there to monitor the reactions of the scientists to possible alien life. In the course of the story the characters recall a couple of movies; *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *The Wizard of Oz*. I was reminded of another - you'll see why if you read this (and it is worth reading); *Forbidden Planet*. Crichton tends to show that he has done his homework by having a character give a lecture, but even so the story moves along nicely.

SWORD AND SORCERESS 2 Ed Marion Zimmer Bradley; Headline; 287 pp; £2.99 p/b
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is another anthology of heroic fantasy, but with women as the main heroes instead of as just decoration. It maintains the high standards set by the first book. A theme in several stories this time is the "Chosen Maiden", who volunteers to be sacrificed to save her people. Bradley sent out to potential contributors a list of all the clichés she did not want to see again. One of my favourite parts of the book is the humorous poem she got back about this!. However the best story is the last one, "Wound on the Moon" by Vera Nazarian - at 18 the youngest contributor. Quite good.

NEMESIS: BOOK ONE OF INDIGO by Louise Cooper; Unwin; 246 pages; £3.50 p/b.
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Princess Anghara is a spoilt brat who, in a fit of pique, defies custom and visits the ancient Tower of Regrets. Her action looses seven demons on the world and leads to the death of hundreds, including her own family. To atone she is given the task of destroying the demons. Considering this is the first part of a projected eight novel series, it is easy to predict the format (*Nemesis* being the vehicle for providing background and setting up the situation). The question is, can Cooper make each part different enough from each other to hold the reader. There are spectacular scenes in this novel, but the main character is unsympathetic, and the pace is generally leisurely without the tension and thrust that marked her last one, *Mirage*.

BEING A GREEN MOTHER by Piers Anthony; Grafton; 384 pages; £3.50 paperback.
Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is (for now) the final volume in the *Incarnations of Immortality* series and I must say that I was looking forward to this one to see how Anthony would explain the Incarnations of Nature. I had to wait 300 pages before the office of nature changed hands, and the workings of said office were not explained. For a series that started so promisingly with *On a Pale Horse*, it rapidly and disappointingly deteriorated to the point that if Mr Anthony were presumptuous enough to write about the incarnations of God and Satan (and knowing Anthony he will) I would not bother reading them. One for avid collectors of Anthony's work only.

WHITE MARE, RED STALLION by Diana L. Paxson; N.E.L; 237 pages; £3.99 p/b.
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Historic fantasy seems to be an up and coming sub-genre of fantasy and this is a good example. Firmly rooted in a little documented period the basic premise is factual. The world of Maira, daughter of the chieftain of the White Horse Clan, is real. Her people believed in the power of the Old Gods, the need for ritual sacrifice and the influence of Rome. Set in about AD 192, in Alba (now Dumfriesshire), Maira has the misfortune to fall in love with a man from a neighbouring tribe. When his vassal kills her father she swears revenge. The war is both within and around her as she tries to reconcile loyalty and love. There is magic, not just in the manifestations of the Old Gods and their lore, but also the writing portraying the events.

THE RETURN OF THE SHADOW by J.R.R. Tolkien, ed by Christopher Tolkien; Unwin Hyman; 497 pp; £17.95 h/back. Reviewed by Wendell Wagner Jr.

This volume is of course essential for anyone who collects all of Tolkien's works, but for those who've been intimidated by all the posthumous Tolkien volumes that have been edited by his son Christopher, this would be a good place to start. This is the first of a set of two or three books in which Christopher Tolkien collects and annotates all of his father's preliminary manuscripts for *The Lord of the Rings*. The gradual development of the story from earliest drafts to the final work is quite fascinating to follow and doesn't have the dense prose of some of the other posthumous Tolkien works.