

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

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

1989 Committee: Chairman - Bernie Evans Secretary - Chris Murphy  
Treasurer - Chris Chivers Newsletter Editor - Dave Hardy Reviews Editor -  
Mick Evans Publicity Officer - Helena Bowles Novacon 19 - Martin Tudor

This Month's Meeting is on:  
Friday 10 November at 7.45pm

**This Month's Programme**

Admission: Members £1.25  
Visitors £2.00

This month's Speaker is none other than:

## HARRY HARRISON

Now come on - what do I have to tell you about Harry? He's Co-President of the Brum Group, he's one of the best-known SF authors around, the paperback of his *Return to Eden* (final part of the Eden trilogy) is due out about now, he's always entertaining, and always welcome. . .

JUST DON'T FORGET THAT THIS MEETING'S ON 10TH, *NOT* 17TH, OR YOU'LL MISS HIM!

*The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) \*  
at the PENGUIN (ex LADBROKE) HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham at 7.45 pm.  
Subscription rates: £6.00 per person (£9.00 for two members at same address)*

*Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer, c/o the Chairman (below).  
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, fax 021-777 2792)*



# GROUP NEWS

Last Month

## The Great Debate

October saw the latest round in the continuing battle between the Brum Group and the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Group. David Wake (who is a member of both) later revealed that he had suggested the motion: "THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT COMICS ARE THE CUTTING EDGE OF SCIENCE FICTION" with the (malicious) intention that Rog Peyton should propose the motion FOR!! Naturally, Rog had said "No Way", so he and Tony Morton were against the motion and Mike Ibeji and Stefan Dziewanowski (pron. 'Chevanovsky') were for. Tim Stannard having a double booking, Chris Murphy bravely took the chair (I can say 'bravely', having done the same thing myself last year...) A vote was taken *before* the debate, resulting in 2 for, 25 against and 3 abstentions.

Mike Ibeji led off, by speaking in a strange, raucous voice about "Captain Comix meets Andromeda", but gradually calmed down. He said that comics were generally thought of as providing cardboard cut-out characters worse than those in *Neighbours*, it transpired that most do, but that a very small minority - notably those written by Alan Moore - are "doing for the comics genre in the 80s what the Greats of SF did in the 50s for SF". It was a cutting edge because it was challenging its own genre. Titles given as 'good' examples included *Miracle/Marvel Man*, *The Spiral Path* (fantasy/Celtic myth), *Watchmen*, *Halo Jones*, *Hell Blazer* ('Demon Yuppies from Hell'), Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke*, and Frank Miller's new rendition of *Batman*, *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Rog Peyton countered with the intellectual argument: "What a load of pretentious crap!" adding "What has it got to do with SF?" He then produced a copy of *Thomas (the Tank Engine)'s ABC*, saying that comics are to teach young people to read - and become grown up. Back in the 50s he had picked up *The Eagle*, with its Dan Dare strip. When it was reprinted recently he experienced nostalgia - but was it a cutting edge for SF in the 50s? No - it used existing SF ideas. The SF magazines started in 1926, comic books in the 1930s, and the latter ripped off ideas from detective and SF fields. Comics have not moved forward except in the quality of their paper... The debate continued, with Stefan saying that comics now contain believable, 3D characters and situations, Tony pointing out that one can't compare the best comics with the worst books. The audience then participated. Final vote: For - 5. Against - 20. Abstentions - 6. Motion defeated!

## **New Member: October**

We have been joined by Phillip Cobley, who is a computer scientist at Aston University. He likes Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett, SF films - and 'just about anything as long as it's a series!'. Should be easy to please, as long as he's serious... (No jokes about Uncle Tom)

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Thanks to Tim Groome for artwork, to Martin for the Jophan Report, and to all book reviewers.

# NEWSFILE

News and Gossip from the world of SF, including Martin Tudor's celebrated JOPHAN REPORT.

If you have any information, don't keep it to yourself - send it in.

(This does mean YOU!) (Yes - YOU!)

## THOSE PUBLISHING DELAYS...

I have had another letter from Dave Langford. He is upset by an item in last month's JOPHAN REPORT, which reads: 'The August edition (of *The Intermediate Reptile*, a new monthly newsletter) opens with an article by Dave Langford which blames petty oneupmanship between Pan Books and New English Library (specifically Kathy Gale and Humphrey Price) for delaying the softback edition of Brian Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* from next month until next Easter.'

Dave points out that this was lifted from *Critical Wave*, verbatim, and had already caused 'so much trouble'. He says that when he wrote the piece on publishing delays he had no idea that it would be used as a lead item. He now admits that it might have been more suitable for *Ansible*, which had a circulation of 600, than for a more public forum. The relevant portion of his article reads:

'Brian Stableford's literary career also seems to be stretching further into his future than he'd like. Long ago, Kathy Gale of NEL bought a trilogy he'd developed from the erstwhile DAW book *Journey to the Centre* (concluding with "the first cyberpunk version of *Clash of the Titans*"). Then Brian found new fame with *The Empire of Fear* (1988), and although *Journey* had by then been awaiting publication an awfully long time, Kathy dynamically arranged to delay its NEL release in hope of riding on the publicity splash for Pan's paperback of *Empire* to Easter 1990.

'This changed when Kathy moved to Pan -- and swiftly deferred *Empire* to Easter 1990, conceivably to ensure that rotten NEL wouldn't trade on her expensive publicity. Enter NEL's Humphrey Price, who had the cunning notion of rescheduling book 3 of *Journey* to coincide with the delayed *Empire*, in hope of...

'When this strategy was rumbled at Mexican, it was revealed to NEL and a bemused Brian that not only would *Empire* now be delayed still more, but Pan's 1990 release will be a posh C-format paperback, with the mass-market edition and publicity spurge deferred to 1991 (by which time, a sufficiently cynical observer might presume, the NEL *Journey* trilogy could be safely remaindered). As they say: the saga continues.'

Dave adds: 'It's the final three paragraphs that have resulted in wrath. The facts were lifted directly from conversations with Brian Stableford, who when I checked back agreed that all the details of actual reschedulings were perfectly correct. I was disappointed that

publishing tangles should lead to Brian's best and most acclaimed book waiting three long years from its hardback to its mass-market edition, but (not knowing the publishers' side of the story) did no more than mischievously hint that publishing rivalries might have played their part.'

This nuance, he says, was clearly lost on the editors of *Critical Wave*, and adds that the paraphrase that resulted seriously misrepresents the tone of what he (Dave) wrote, exaggerating a tongue-in-cheek hint into a plonking accusation. Also that *CW* got the delay periods wrong and failed to make the important distinction between C-format and mass-market editions, and that he specifically did not use the words 'petty', 'oneupmanship' or 'blame'.

It seems that Kathy, reading *CW* before ever seeing *Reptile*, was considerably annoyed. Understandably perhaps - though after all his years in this 'business' Dave should hardly be surprised to see his words paraphrased in a manner rather more sensational than he intended. . . Still, it would be a pity if professional editors such as Kathy and Humphrey were 'using' the SF media and fandom to score points off each other, wouldn't it?

I might add that I have received no complaints or explanations from any publishers (though I have evidence that they do read the *BGN*, at least on occasion). If any are reading this, I'd be grateful to have their reasons for delays in publication (not necessarily of the books mentioned above). My own book, *Visions of Space*, which I mentioned in October as being due to be published 'by the time you read this', is still not in my hot little hands as I write this,\* nearly a month later. (It was originally scheduled for 14 September.) \* P.S. IT IS NOW!

## THE AUTHOR'S ANGLE

Spare a thought for the author - and for the bookseller. In my case, I arranged a lecture on space art in Cardiff on 26 October because 'the book is bound to be published by then'. A signing session was arranged at Andromeda for 4 November, and widely publicised. I don't know about fiction authors like Brian, but *my* final advance on royalties is due 'on publication': what do you think happens when publication is delayed month after month - ?

Meanwhile, Kathy Gale is Senior Fiction Editor of a new hardcover line for Pan, to be launched in 1990, including SF, fantasy and horror. Titles previously scheduled to appear from Sidgwick & Jackson will now move into Pan hardcover. Kathy says she is 'absolutely

delighted to be able to offer her authors an even more cohesive publishing strategy, from hardback right the way through to paperback.' (I hope I've quoted that correctly.)

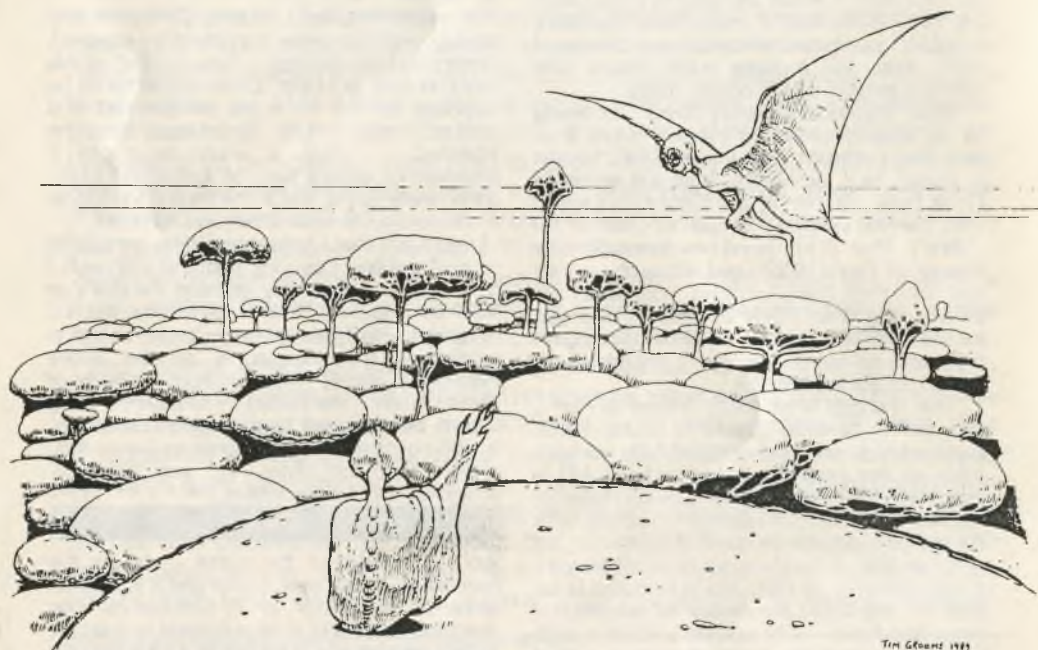
### THOSE HUGOS: a base for complaint?

Dave Langford also had a comment to make about this year's Hugo award bases, which Robert Sneddon praised in the October *BGN* (he actually called them 'really neat skiffy') in his Impressions of Noreascon 3. According to Dave, two of them self-destructed in a shower of ball-bearings within hours of presentation. John Jarrold described the bases as 'looking like green toilet seats covered with

knobs', and Martin Hoare, who collected Dave's for him, devoutly wished that Noreascon had opted for something simple and 'tatty' like Conspiracy's plain wooden bases. Although not as daft as Nolacon's gigantic Hugos (which were nine inches wide and sixteen high, and weighed ten pounds) this year's were not the easiest to transport 3000 miles. Still, adds Dave, it was nice to get it. . .

### CONGRATULATIONS!

Sharon Hassall and Andy Wright were married at the end of September. (Bernie says there must be a joke there about 'Mr (W)right coming along', but I don't think so, do you?)



## Don't forget the Christmas Party!!!

Details are as in the last *Brum Group News*: 15 December at Aston University, price £3.00 including a good buffet. You can bring your wives, husbands (how many do you have?), friends, lovers... There will be prizes and special items. Tickets on sale at the next meeting.

I'm afraid there was an error in the Hugo Award winners reported last issue. The Award for Best Fan Artists was awarded JOINTLY to Brad Foster and Diana Gallagher Wu, and NOT solely to Brad Foster as stated. Apologies for any confusion caused. (Thanks to *MATRIX* for pointing out the error.)

*MATRIX*, the newzine of the British SF Association, also reveals in its latest issue that *INTERZONE* is still eligible for the Semiprozine Hugo Award. Previously it has been stated in a number of places that *INTERZONE*'s print run had exceeded an average of 10,000 copies thereby rendering it ineligible. However, David Pringle, editor and publisher of *INTERZONE*, has hit back by revealing that the total number of copies printed in 1989 was 59,950 which, divided by six, makes an average of 9,991 copies per issue. He goes on to state that as far as the year 1989 is concerned *INTERZONE* is "still a semi-professional magazine and therefore eligible for a Semiprozine Hugo, should anyone care to nominate us next time around". Your next opportunity to vote will be at the Dutch worldcon ConFiction in 1990.

*MATRIX* is available to members of the BSFA, along with critical journal *VECTOR*, book reviewzine *PAPERBACK INFERNO* and would-be-writers forum *FOCUS*. Membership costs £10 per year. Cheques, payable to the BSFA, should be sent to the Membership Secretary, Joanne Raine, 33 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland, TS26 8EW).

British and American administrators of the TransAtlantic Fan Fund have agreed to delay the 31st race until 1991. The next exchange will send a European sf fan to the United States and with Holland hosting the 1990 worldcon, it was felt candidates would prefer to attend the 1991 worldcon in Chicago. Nominations will open next summer and anyone interested can contact UK administrators Christina Lake and Lillian Edwards at 47 Wessex Avenue, Horfield, Bristol; donations of air mile vouchers would also be extremely welcome. A fanzine auction in aid of TAFF is being run by US administrator Robert Lichtman at PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442 (send two IRCs for details, any donations would be appreciated). But probably of more interest to readers of this piece there will be

a TAFF auction on the Sunday evening of NOVACON 19 at the Excelsior Hotel.

Australian fans Larry Dunning, Roman Orszanski and Mark Loney & Michelle Muljser are running in the 1990 GUFF (The Get Up-and-over Fan Fund) race. The winning fan or fans will attend the 48th World SF Convention in Holland next year.

Irish fan Walt Willis will be Fan Guest of Honour at MagiCon, the 50th World SF Convention in 1992, with Jack Vance and Vincent DiFate as Pro Guests of Honour. MagiCon will be held in Orlando, Florida, Spider Robinson will be Toastmaster. Supporting membership is \$20 and attending membership is \$50 until 31 January 1990, enquiries and cash to MagiCon, PO Box 621992, Orlando, FL 32862, USA.

The sf yearbook *CONCATENATION* is planning a listing of all British fanzines and small press magazines for its fourth issue, due out next Easter (with a further 1,000 copies distributed at the Dutch worldcon). Editors are invited to submit entries up to 25 words long to Tony Chester, 44 Brook Street, Erith, Kent, DA8 1JQ; publications with a cover price will be expected to chip in £5 towards Concatenation's running costs.

There will be several signing sessions at *ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP* in November: HARRY HARRISON will be signing copies of the paperback of *RETURN TO EDEN* as well as the hardcover *BILL THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE PLANET OF ROBOT SLAVES* at 11am on Saturday the 11th; RODNEY MATTHEWS will be signing *LAST SHIP HOME* at noon on the 11th; DAVID GEMMELL will be signing the fourth *Sipstrassi Tales* - *THE LAST GUARDIAN* at noon on the 18th; PATRICK TILLEY will be signing the *Amtrak Wars* volume 5 - *DEATH BRINGER* also at noon on the 18th; TERRY PRATCHETT & JOSH KIRBY will be signing *GUARDS! GUARDS!* and *TRUCKERS* hardcovers, *WYRD SISTERS* paperback - all with Josh Kirby covers. Josh's own book *THE JOSH KIRBY PORTFOLIO* will be available, as well as Terry's cartoon book *THE UNADULTERATED CAT* all at 2pm on Saturday the 18th November.

In addition to the above *ANDROMEDA* will be hosting a multiple-signing session/free drinks party on the Friday night of NOVACON 19 at the Excelsior Hotel, Coventry Road, Birmingham. The party will start at 9.30pm all members of NOVACON 19 are welcome. Membership costs £15 on the door.



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

## NOVACON SPECIAL

We devote the first of this month's review pages to extra-long reviews of three books which are of particular interest to those attending NOVACON. The first is by the Guest of Honour, the second is a debut novel launched at the time of NOVACON, and the third contains the story of GILGAMESH, a dramatic version of which will be presented at NOVACON by GEOFF RYMAN.

THE CHILD GARDEN by Geoff Ryman; Unwin Hyman; 399 pages; £12.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

This book is as rich as a fruit-filled Dundee cake and as full of surprises as a bottomless treasure chest. Reading it is like watching the shifting patterns in a kaleidoscope, and it leaves you a little breathless. Like his earlier novel, *The Unconquered Country*, *The Child Garden* began life as a novella. In it Ryman offers an almost surreal image of the future. Cancer has been cured but with the side-effect that no-one lives beyond the age of thirty-five. The benign viruses that have achieved this breakthrough give children the faculties of an adult almost as soon as they are born - they do not need to learn, the viruses tell them all they need to know. And people are purple. A photosynthetic pigment in the skin reduces the need for food - as long as the sun shines there need be no starvation.

Milena Shibush is an actress and is afraid of the viruses. All her actions are coloured by a paranoid desire not to catch them. As an infant she appeared to be immune to them, then a massive dose almost killed her. All ten-year olds are Read by an organism known as the Consensus, and their personality defects cured by worse viruses, but as Milena has never been Read people find her a little strange.

Her life begins to change when she hears Rolfa singing. Rolfa is a Polar Bear, a genetically engineered woman whose body is covered in thick fur to enable her kind to survive and work in the Antarctic wastes. Rolfa's music is original. There has been no new music since the viruses were introduced, and Milena decides that the composition (which is an opera of Dant e's *Divine Comedy*) should be heard by everybody. What follows is Milena's struggle to get the opera performed, and the sacrifices, many of them involuntary, that she has to make to achieve this, interwoven with the slowly unravelling tapestry of her own life.

Geoff Ryman is an extremely talented writer and his work should be savoured. I wish there was more of it.

THE ARCHIVIST by Gill Alderman; Unwin Hyman; 380 pages; £12.95 hardback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

On a far-off planet - very similar to Earth, inhabited by, apparently, humans - where science and technology have been developed and partly discarded, is the City, it is simultaneously elegance and poverty, sophistication and barbarism. In its murkier depths lives Cal, a non-citizen, a non-person, who has managed to evade being registered and Marked (tattooed with a caste mark) for eighteen years. He is a very attractive youth, much fancied by women, and very intelligent. When caught he is condemned to death. But he is noticed by the Archivist, the most powerful man in the City's matriarchal society, who recognises his talent, gives him a new identity, takes him on as an assistant, introduces him to some of the City's intelligentsia and involves him in schemes of revolution which necessitate a guided tour of the continent.

Sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? Compressed like that the plot resembles many previous novels hovering between SF and Fantasy (several of them by Samuel R Delany). In fact Gill Alderman's novel (her first) is different from all the rest. Her backgrounds (particularly in the City) are vividly original, richly complex, full of extraordinary characters who savort through a handful of pages then disappear from view. As with many first novels, this one has too many ingredients. It's hard work for the reader because of its complexity and also because of the writing style, yet the hard work is rewarding. This is a subtle novel which works at different levels, hinting at many things left unsaid. It is a first novel of considerable achievement and tremendous promise.

THE GREAT DEEDS OF SUPERHEROES by Maurice Saxby & Robert Ingpen; Paper Tiger; 194 pp; £12.95 1ge h/b. Reviewed by Al Johnston.

As the cover makes plain, this is nothing to do with Superman, Batman or any other comic heroes: there is no hint of air in the brushwork of the illustrations. Rather, this book concerns the classical heroes of myth and legend, ranging in time and space from ancient Greece to mediaval Spain. Fifteen heroes are included: Perseus, Heracles, Theseus, Jason, Odysseus, Gilgamesh, Sigurd, Vainamoinen, Moses, Samson, Beowulf, Arthur, Cuchulain, Roland and El Cid. What is offered is a short, almost pr cis, account of the life and principal deeds of each hero, with a brief introduction and a table summarising their lives for comparison. The illustrations are there in a supporting role, contrary to usual expectations from this publisher, and equal billing given to author and artist. As stated before, this book provides a basic reference guide to its subjects, which may jibe in one or two details with some of the novels available about these men. A good introductory towa, with a useful bibliography for those seeking more depth.

THE VANG by Christopher Rowley; Legend: 369 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Drifting in space is one of the last vestiges of the war between the Vang and an unknown alien race, for thousands of years the seed has been barely alive. Discovered by an illegal prospecting crew the seed starts to come alive. Christopher Rowley's latest book has links with his previous books *Starhammer*, *The War for Eternity* and *The Black Ship*, but the links are very tenuous and the time table of events seem to be getting muddled with each book. *The Vang* follows in the footsteps of *Aliens*, with the added colour of drug smuggling, but Christopher Rowley manages to keep the storyline crisp and well paced. The chronology of the novels, if they are to be linked in a loose but connected series of stories, could be made clearer, and the anomalies that have cropped up from time to time ironed out.

RUNESPEAR by Victor Milan and Melinda Snodgrass; N.E.L.: 279 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Victor Milan is previously known for co-authoring the *War of Powers* series, fantasy so dire I usually recommend it as a perfect example of the genre. Fortunately this book is much better. In 1936 explorer Rafe Springer, journalist Billi Forsyth, and Professor Shrewsbury are dragged into joining the Nazi expedition to find Gungnir, the legendary spear of Odin. In other words this is *Raiders of the Lost Ark* territory. Rather too much of the book is about the preparation for the expedition. On the other hand, after the craziness of Nazi Germany, trekking across Greenland looking for trolls seems perfectly reasonable in comparison. I expect the Spear of Odin will show up in the next Indiana Jones film anyway.

GIANTS' STAR by James P Hogan; Grafton: 332 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

At the end of my review for the *Gentle Giants of Ganymede* I said that I looked forward to reading the third book. Now I have read it, and it exceeded expectations. As I said, the second of the trilogy was all a bit too 'pat' and smooth running; but it set the scene for this final volume, which is full of twists and surprises. I wish we could get James Hoggan to talk to the Brum Group, as I'd love to ask whether he planned any sequels when he wrote *Inherit the Stars*. If he didn't, it's perhaps even more clever of him to develop the story so intricately, and with such a satisfying ending (complete with a brain-burting time paradox). If you enjoy real SCIENCE fiction, but with believable human and alien characters (and don't mind some rather stereotyped baddies), don't miss this.

CRACKEN AT CBITICAL by Brian W Aldiss; NSL: 200 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Based in a parallel world, the story begins with a Finnish composer discovering the dead body of a young woman, and diversifies from there. The dead woman's possessions contain amongst other things, 'pulp' books of 'maybe myths', which our illustrious composer gets ample opportunity to read as he's wrongly arrested for her murder. These two novellas, previously published by Aldiss writing as Jaal Craken, provide tongue-in-cheek parodies of certain types of stories written at times throughout SF history and with the murder/composer central theme tying it all together, form a wonderful pastiche for the reader. Fun to read.

THE PLAYER OF GAMES by Iain M Banks; Orbit: 309 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Far in the future society lives without poverty or need, with all wants satisfied, and no conflict (well, wars anyway). This society, The Culture, contains humanoid and machine mind sharing equal status. One diversion to occupy the time is games; it is in fact a life, as to master the numerous games takes time, intellect and strategy. One player considered a master of all the games played has become disillusioned with his lot and seeks a more challenging endeavour. This seems to become possible if he accepts a challenge set by Contact (Culture's space exploration arm) to play Azad not, it seems, just a game but how this somewhat barbarous empire chooses its leaders. Gurjeh - the games master - accepts and goes to Azad (also the name of the planet) for the game, and faces a complex society he finds totally alien. As I've come to expect from Banks, this is a complex pot-pourri of ideas and characters amalgamated into an enthralling story. If you're unfamiliar with the author's work (where have you been?) the masterly writing style and wit found within his novels are a joy to read. Fully as good as his other work and highly recommended.

CLOUDROCK by Garry Kilworth; Unwin; 160 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Peter Day.

Isolated on the summit of a narrow pinnacle of rock a tiny, inbred community manages to exist. It is a society revolving around rituals of incest, cannibalism and the ruthless sacrifice of anybody born with abnormalities. Only Shadow, a neuter dwarf, manages to escape this fate, but only so long as no-one acknowledges he exists. A situation ripe for changes to occur, and these duly do so. This is my first experience of Garry Kilworth, and I'm impressed. Here is a thoughtful, questioning writer who handles his material skilfully and is never boring, even though none of the themes in this novel seem to be particularly new and he does lean just a little too much on coincidence for my liking. An excellent little book and I'll be reading more of his work in the future.

RADIX by A A Attanasio; Grafton; 433 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

When this book was originally published in 1981 it was nominated for a Nebula award - a considerable achievement for a first novel - and there is a considerable degree of quality about the writing. Unfortunately the prose is very dense in places and inclines towards the pretentious and philosophical. It begins with a fat, unlovable adolescent, Sumner Kagan, He has two passions - eating and killing. He causes a great deal of havoc before he is finally shopped by his mother. The prison he is sent to transforms him into an ultra-fit, musclebound killer but he still has his destiny to fulfil. One of the problems with this book is that it contains too much. The changes postulated by Attanasio in the thirteen centuries between now and then are taken for granted by the characters. As these are not merely extrapolations of present society but involve cosmic events, the system becomes more and more confused as the novel progresses. Attanasio has taken great leaps of imagination but has left the rest of humanity to follow a very difficult path. Most readers won't make it.

ABANDONATI by Gary Kilworth; Unwin; 162 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This very English dystopia paints a believably black picture of near-future London. The abandonati are London's poor (much diminished by disease, malnutrition and violence) who have inherited the city after a social collapse and the departure of the rich. Some years on, the resulting mess is seen on a small scale, following a middle-aged man named Guppy, an inoffensive alcoholic, as he creeps through just a part of the harsh world around him. He manages to find friendship, humour and even hope in what is a clever and subtle but also depressing novel.

LITTLE HEROES by Norman Spinrad; Grafton; 733 pages; £6.99 lge paperback.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

When Spinrad is on form he can be one of the most enjoyable writers in SF. Here, with a big futuristic satire on Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll he's definately on form. At a time when many pop songs are performed by Artificial Personalities (Max Headroom-type computer constructs) the leading firm in the business (Muzik Inc) tries to produce a new AP with the charisma of a live performer, and Red Jack is born. He is based on a twerpish computer expert (much enhanced) and achieves two massive hits. But these songs are decried as subversive and are used by the Reality Liberation Front in their attempt to bring down the US government and financial institutions. In a complex and vivid novel it is demonstrated eventually that the real person, the 'little hero', is more important than the image. As usual, Spinrad goes way over the top, getting carried away in some overlong passages. On the whole the book is great fun, though not for the fainthearted.

THE EVOLUTION MAN by Roy Lewis; Corgi; 160 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Forget Raquel Welch in *One Million Years BC*, this book is the definitive representation of cavemen the way they really weren't. A young caveman (named Earnest) has an appallingly inventive father. Fine one weak, exogamy the next, a young apeman does not know where he is, Uncle Vanya is always predicting doom and disaster, but father never listens to him. This book even comes with the old marketing ploy, you know, (in small letters) "With a new introduction by" (in big letters) "Terry Pratchett". If this makes you want to read it you may well be disappointed as it is not at all the same kind of humour. Some knowledge of palaeontology probably helps, so if you find "if that's a hipparion, we must still be in the Pliocene" funny, then this is the book for you.

WHO'S AFRAID OF BEOWULF by Tom Holt; Orbit; 206 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

From the author of the absolutely hilarious *Expecting Someone Taller* comes an even funnier tale of myth mixed up with the twentieth century. When King Hrolf Ketilsson and his men awake after 1200 years, their first thought is to continue their quest to kill the evil sorcerer-king. But things have changed. For a start, the sorcerer-king wears a business suit and lives in a Dark Tower of black glass (I always had suspicions about the Copthorne Hotel). His plans are not so much 'conquer the world, as buy it. Fortunately they enlist the aid of Hildy Frederiksen, an archeologist ("We used to call that grave-robbing"), and a couple of ethonic spirits. It should all be just another simple quest, except for minor obstacles like werewolves and the SAS. At last Terry Pratchett has some serious competition (or maybe a pseudonym).

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NIGHT by Ursula K. Le Guin; Ed by Susan Wood; The Women's Press; 210 pp; £5.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Wendell Wagner, Jr.

This is a revised edition of a collection of Le Guin's essays on the writing and criticism of science fiction and fantasy that was first published in 1979. Many of these essays are brilliant statements on how fantasy should best be written, and have justly become classics since their first magazine publication around fifteen years ago. Even when I think Le Guin has overstated a position in one or two essays, she has made an important, provative point. In this revised edition she has added a number of footnotes clarifying or modifying her earlier opinions. Most of these are sharpening of her feminist positions.