

BRUM GROUP NEWS

September 1993

Issue 264

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,
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ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVACON 23 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON.

This month's speaker is

IAIN (M) BANKS

Friday 17th September 1993 7.45 for 8.45pm

Admittance: Members £2.50 Visitors £3.75

(half-price for 14-18 year olds on production of proof of age)

Iain M(enzie) Banks was born in Fife, Scotland on 16 February 1954. Educated at Stirling University he went on to be an Expediter-analyzer with IBM in Greenock, Scotland until 1978, then a solicitor's clerk in London from 1980 to 1984, after which he became a freelance writer. Iain's first published novel was *THE WASP FACTORY* which was met with considerable acclaim and disgust by the critics, he followed it with *WALKING ON GLASS*, *THE BRIDGE*, *ESPEDAIR STREET* and, the first of his Culture universe books, *CONSIDER PHLEBAS*. His other work includes *THE PLAYER OF GAMES*, *CANAL DREAMS*, *THE USE OF WEAPONS*, *THE CROW ROAD*, *AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND* and the short story collection *THE STATE OF THE ART*. Guest of Honour at Novacon 17 Iain has enlivened many conventions over recent years with his wit, good humour and bizarre antics.

{Many thanks to TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS, third edition, for the above information.}

Please note our **NEW VENUE** is the recently refurbished
upstairs **Function Room of THE AUSTRALIAN BAR**
(corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street in Birmingham city centre).

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs Function Room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove 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, MIKE DAVIES, editor of *WHAT'S ON* for his editorial on the plight of the Triangle cinema - from which I borrowed heavily to write the story in this issue's Jophan Report, ROG PEYTON, STEVE GREEN and *CRITICAL WAVE* for other news in the Jophan Report and to TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

17 SEPTEMBER 1993: IAIN BANKS will be speaking to the Brum Group, 7.45pm for 8.00pm, at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street.



18 SEPTEMBER 1993: IAIN BANKS will be signing copies of *COMPLICITY* (hardback, £15.99) at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 643 1999 for further details.

22-24 SEPTEMBER 1993: *THE TRIAL* directed by David Jones and featuring Anthony Hopkins, Kyle MacLachlan and Jason Robards will be showing at the MAC Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston Road, Birmingham (opposite the County Cricket Ground). Call 021 440 3838 for tickets.

30 SEPTEMBER 1993: WILLIAM GIBSON will be signing copies of *VIRTUAL LIGHT* at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, from 1pm until 2.30pm. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

?? OCTOBER 1993: GERRY ANDERSON will be appearing at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, sometime in October. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

1-3 OCTOBER 1993: *FANTASYCON XVIII*. Midland Hotel, Birmingham, Guests of Honour: Peter James, Tad 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).

4-9 OCTOBER 1993: *A CONNECTICUT YANKEE*
Rogers and Hart's classic musical set in King Arthur's court will be performed by the New Shakespeare Company at the University of Warwick Arts Centre. The cast includes Christopher Biggins Clive Carter and Janie Dee. Call the Box Office on 0203 524524.

4-16 OCTOBER 1993: *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET* by Bob Carlton at the Birmingham Hippodrome, Hurst Street. Monday to Friday 7.30pm and Saturday 8.30pm. Tickets Monday-Thursday £16.50, £14.00, £11.50, £9, £7.50, Friday and Saturday £18.50, £15.50, £12.50, £10.00, £8.50. Wednesday 2pm all seats £8.50 and Saturday 4pm all seats £12.50. Call the Box Office on 021 622 7486.

9 OCTOBER 1993: DAVID GEMMELL will be signing copies of the paperback edition of *WAYLANDER II* and the hardcover of *DRUST THE LEGEND* and along with FANGORN and STAN NICHOLLS copies of the graphic novel *LEGEND* at Andromeda.

15 OCTOBER 1993: BRIAN W ALDISS will be speaking to the Brum Group, 7.45pm for 8.00pm, at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street.

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).

6 NOVEMBER 1993: TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing at Andromeda, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

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).

12-14 NOVEMBER 1993: ARMADACON V sf/fantasy con at the Astor Hotel, Elliot Street, The Hoe,

Plymouth. Attending £20.00 (one day £10.00) to 4 Gleneagle Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, PL3 5HL (tel: 0752 267873).

19 NOVEMBER 1993: DEBATE between representatives of the Brum Group and the Birmingham University SF & F Society, 7.45pm for 8.00pm at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street (to be confirmed).

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.

6 DEC 1993 - 29 JAN 1994: *THE SNOWMAN* the world premiere of a new stage presentation of Raymond Briggs' children's classic, specifically adapted for the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company by Anthony Clark, featuring the original and extended score by Howard Blake. Call the Birmingham Rep Box Office on 021 236 6771.

17 DECEMBER 1993: BRUM GROUP CHRISTMAS PARTY, 7.45pm for 8.00pm at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street.

21 JANUARY 1994: BSFG AGM & AUCTION, 7.45pm for 8.00pm at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street/Bromsgrove Street.

25-27 MARCH 1994: TREK DWARF II combined STAR TREK/RED DWARF convention at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. Attending £30.00. Contact 47 Marsham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 5RN.

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

JOPHAN REPORT #66

by Martin Tudor

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 Maes, 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. The rates were Attending US\$85.00, 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, Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, Glasgow. Guests of honour Samuel R Delany, Gerry Anderson. Attending £50.00 until 30 September 1993, then £60.00 until 30 September 1994. Supporting and Junior (24.8.80) £15.00, Child (24.8.88) £5.00. Contact: Admail 336, Glasgow, G2 1BR, Scotland.

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.

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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.

I'm afraid that I have been unable as yet to get hold of the full list of Hugo winners which were announced last weekend (as I type this) in San Francisco. However I can tell you that the Best Novel was a tie this year between *DOOMSDAY BOOK* by Connie Willis and Vernor Vinge's *A FIRE UPON THE DEEP*. The big shock this year appears to be the award for Best Semiproze which went to Andy Porter's *SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE* - finally besting the perennial winner *LOCUS*, apparently after the various rounds of counting had eliminated the other nominees, *SFC* beat *LOCUS* by 274 to 273! No surprise in the Best Fanwriter category which went yet again to Britain's own Dave Langford. Congratulations to all four of those winners and I should be able to give you the full list next issue.

Radio fans might be interested in learning that on Friday nights at 6.30pm Radio 5 is currently running a *DR WHO* serial entitled "The Paradox of Death" by David Lettz, starring Jon Pertwee as the Doctor.

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda in Birmingham will also hopefully include Robert Jordan, but at the moment it appears unlikely that Anne McCaffrey will be doing her usual session. (For full details of signings which have been confirmed see the Events listing in this

If you read *WHAT'S ON*, or pay VERY close attention to the Birmingham Evening Mail, you may have heard that Birmingham's Triangle Cinema (the only dedicated 'art house' cinema in the city, a venue nationally acclaimed) is under threat of closure by Aston University.

In the 14 Aug/27 Aug edition of *WHAT'S ON* for Birmingham and the Midlands the Finance Director of Aston University, Jim Tunley, says they are considering recommendations to either make the cinema self-financing or close it. Despite the box office taking an impressive £120,000 last year the cinema is losing between £60,000 and £70,000 a year.

You may remember that this is the same people who closed the Triangle Arts Centre a few years ago, in the face of massive public outcry, replacing the successful multi-media centre into parking space and a pretty piazza.

In his defence Tunley claims the Triangle is losing out to the influx of Multiplex cinemas. This is utter crap. Much of the programming offered by the Triangle (foreign, 'art' and 'alternative' films) differs dramatically from the fare supplied by the Multiplexes. Surely the answer to falling attendances would be to raise the profile of the Triangle? Many inexpensive avenues suggest themselves, more reviews in the likes of the Birmingham Evening Mail and Metro News would cost nothing and would considerably raise the profile. Developing the Triangle to the standard of similar centres in Manchester and Edinburgh, organising Film Events such as those in other cities and liaising with publications such as *EMPIRE* and, indeed, *WHAT'S ON* would considerably improve attendance and probably ensure lucrative sponsorship.

You may well ask what are the City Council doing while Aston University pursues this short-sighted campaign of philistinism and destruction? What happened to their plans for a Birmingham Media Centre? Yes, the one which was supposed to replace the original Triangle complex back in 1987... Good questions, do you, like me, begin to doubt the sincerity of the Council's talk of turning Birmingham into an arts and cultural centre to rival London and Edinburgh? What is needed to achieve those lofty aims, aren't even more empty concrete halls (no matter how well endowed with technological gimmicks. What is needed aren't empty promises and endless quantities of hot air from self-serving and self-publicising councillors. What IS needed are substantial amounts of hard cash AND swift action to prevent further cultural barbarism by the management of Aston University.

If you want to prevent Aston University from destroying what little support there is in Birmingham for cinema as an art form, if you want to protect the already seriously beleaguered Birmingham International Film and Television Festival from further disruption, I urge you to write to your local councillor immediately. Demand to know what the Council is doing to promote the cinematic art in the second city. If you really want to put the pressure on a letter to Mr Jim Tunley, Finance Director, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham, B4, tell him that Aston Campus has got lots of parking, but it has only got one 'Art House' cinema and that they should hold on to it!

Meanwhile, in Coventry, the University of Warwick as part of the Open Studies prog-

rament are offering two genre evening courses each running for 10 weeks.

The first is "Frankenstein's Monster and his Descendants" with Lynda Stevens, starting on Tuesday 5 October, 7pm-9pm. After first dealing with Mary Shelley's masterpiece, this will go on to examine "technological abominations within the robot and cyborg and ... the doppelganger or the beast within our evolutionary heritage" exploring both viewpoints and asking what actually defines our essential humanity. Fee £34.00 (£25, £10), course number 091.

The second is entitled "Sword and Sorcery? The Quest Novel" again with Lynda Stevens, starting Wednesday 6 October, 7pm-9pm. The introduction states that "heroes, fighting elves, ruined castles set in strange lands are the staple fare of numerous works" in a mission to discover their fascination the course will explore the best of these works. This time opening with *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* and continuing with Mervyn Peake and Michael Moorcock. Fee £34.00 (£25, £10), course number 098.

Both courses will be held at Coventry Council House. For further details, or to register, contact Open Studies, Continuing Education Department, the University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL.

To mark National No Smoking Day 1994, FOREST - Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco - has announced a free competition for short story writers, with cash prizes.

Their press release proclaims that "FOREST is an independent smokers' rights group which helps individuals to defend themselves against persecution, and publishes information which counters the increasingly hysterical claims of the anti-smoking industry. It is financed by donations from supporters and from private tobacco companies; unlike the anti-smoking lobby, it receives no public money.

"What the judges will be looking for: Not propaganda - either pro or anti. We're after mind-opening, sceptical science fiction, fantasy and horror of any kind, on the theme of 'Health and Freedom', to broaden and enliven what is often a narrow, unimaginative, ill-informed debate.

"Will smoking (and other private pleasures) be illegal in the future, and if so how will bans be enforced? Or will scientific fashion turn full circle, with physicians prescribing tobacco as a cure-all? In recent months, nurses have been threatened with the sack for smoking in uniform, even when off duty. Bereaved relatives have been banned from smoking in hospital carparks. Doctors have said they may refuse to treat patients who smoke. At the same time, researchers claim to have found that

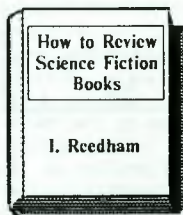
smokers are at less risk than non-smokers of developing Alzheimers disease.

"Perhaps you'll choose to write something less philosophical, a straightforward sf/fantasy/horror tale with a 'health and freedom' background. Above all, feel free to unleash your imagination - if your story also makes the judges laugh, you'll be off to a good start! For more information about FOREST, or the smoking debate in general, to help plan your story, please contact Marjorie Nicholson at FOREST on 071-823-6550 (office) or 081-851-6450 (home)."

Entries should be posted to FOREST STORY COMPETITION, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London, SW1W 0DH, to arrive not later than 16 January 1994. All entries must be the original, unpublished work of the entrant, in English, to a maximum of 2,500 words, typed in double-spacing on white A4 paper, type on one side of the paper only and include your name, address, telephone number and age on the first page. The competition is only open to people over 18 years of age. Five prizes will be awarded of £100, £75, £50 and two runners-up of £25 each. Prizewinning entries will be published by FOREST during March 1994 in an illustrated, A5 booklet, with an introduction by George Hay, after which all copyright will revert to individual authors.

Co-editors Stephen Jones and David Sutton have announced that Robinson Publishing in the UK will no longer continue publishing *FANTASY TALES* in its present format. After 17 issues as a World Fantasy Award and multiple British Fantasy Award-winning small press magazine, Robinson began publishing the title in 1988 as a slim paperback. Along with a "Best from" anthology, it lasted seven volumes (four of which were reprinted in the USA by Carroll & Graf). The title hasn't been seen since the beginning of 1992 while the publisher negotiated with a new distributor as to format, price and frequency of publication.

Jones explains that the low cover price meant that despite respectable sales no one, not the editors, publishers, authors or booksellers made enough money. All this combined with their involvement in other projects led to the editors' decision to scrap the magazine. However, as they wanted *FANTASY TALES* to go out in style they have put together *THE GIANT BOOK OF FANTASY & THE SUPERNATURAL* a bumper anthology published by Robinson's Maggie imprint. It will contain around 40 stories currently awaiting publication in *FANTASY TALES* including work by Parke Godwin, Nancy Holder, Samantha Lee, Nicholas Royle, Brian Stableford, Darrell Schweitzer, Melanie Tem, Steve Rasnic Tem and Birmingham's Steve Green.



Book Reviews

PRIMORDIAL SOUP by Grant Naylor
Penguin, 151 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

With a subtitle "The Least Worst Scripts" and the modest blurb, one could be tempted to think the worst of this latest *RED DWARF* book. However, knowing the gestalt author and "his" humour, I was not put off, particularly as the introduction claims the six chosen "battle plans" were their favourites. The six by some quirk, or perhaps I'm as crazy as them, are also my favourites (OK, one is from a new series not yet seen, but you get the idea). As soon as I began reading the voices of Lister, Rimmer, Cat and Kryten were there in my head, saying the lines, bringing a smile as I careered through the story with them.

For me the interest is in the terminology and writing method used to set a scene as well as the character interaction seen on TV. It works well, but I do wonder how close the images we see are to those the writers imagine. The six, "Polymorph", "Marooned", "Dimension Jump", "Justice", "Back to Reality" and "Psirans" (the new one) show different aspects of Dwarf. We also see, to a degree, how it has evolved over time, both the rapport developed between the characters and the audience, and audience understanding of the plights and situations that arise.

As sf it's technology with puns, as comedy it's farce with futuristic backdrops. Joining the two provides a unique combination that can only be the *RED DWARF* we love.

THE STRESS OF HER REGARD by Tim Powers
Grafton, 605 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter J B Day.

This is yet another vampire story. A young 19th century surgeon, Michael Crawford, wakes on the morning after his wedding night to find his bride lying beside him, gorily slaughtered while he slept. It turns out that he already, inadvertently, has another bride - a vampire - and she is jealous. He flees to the continent to escape the hangman's noose, meeting up with various poets - Keates, Byron,

Shelley - all of whom appear to be similarly afflicted. Together they set about combatting the menace.

I must confess I'm in two minds about this book. It is strangely episodic, with no real sense of forward thrust. For much of its length the action moves arbitrarily from location to location for no reason that I can see save to conform to the poets' known whereabouts at various times. The characters' efforts are curiously desultory, even half-hearted, and the story only gathers any pace towards the end, as it sweeps to its climax, where this author's ingenuity of plotting and mischievous sense of irony come to the fore.

Nevertheless, by general standards this is still an above average fantasy novel. It's well-written, with all Powers' usual mastery of the uneslily grotesque, his graphic evocation of scenarios one would never, ever, wish to find oneself in, and his sly mickey-taking. There are several splendidly gruesome scenes. On the whole, I quite enjoyed it. But it is not vintage Powers.

MERIDIAN DAYS by Eric Brown
Pan, 165 pp, £3.99 p/b

reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It is unusual for a writer's first book to be a collection of short stories. Eric Brown achieved this, which gives an idea of his talent. MERIDIAN DAYS is his first novel, and it is a slim one (but only in the number of pages). This is also the mark of a craftsman - when he has said what he wants to, he stops.

Meridian is an Earth colony which, like Venus, keeps one face always to its sun. The only habitable part is a narrow strip between Brightside and Darkside and comprises a sea dotted with islands. Meridian is very much an artists' colony and is dependent of Earth for most of its food supplies. The narrator, Bob Benedict, is an ex-pilot, having given up the profession when he flew a hundred passengers nose-first into the ground. Though exonerated he spends much of his time drugged up trying to blot out the memories. When he is dragged unwillingly to a party on a neighbouring island he meets Fire Trevellion. Her problem is the opposite to his. She wants him to supply the drugs that will help her remember, to fill the blanks in her memory. Knowing he will regret it, Benedict allows himself to be drawn in and become a pawn in a far greater powerplay.

Brown has designed a rich tapestry which has a background in common with some of his short stories. The flaws it has stem mainly

from the use of a first person protagonist. Anything he is not interested in does not get explained, though there are plentiful hints of a wider world that the author knows but has rightly not thrust down the reader's throat. My disappointment with the ending is a fault of my own curiosity - what the author tells us fits perfectly with Benedict's personality.

Brown is a talented British author who deserves our respect and patronage. Buy this book, it might encourage him to write the next one a little faster.

SIDESHOW by Sheri Tepper
HarperCollins, 467 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Humanity, fleeing entrapment by the Hobbs Land gods, is reduced to living on one planet, Elsewhere. It becomes the last refuge of humanity - in its entire diversity. These people have a cause, to retain this diversity. To this end progress or change is disallowed by law, with Enforcers keeping each custom, however brutal, bizarre or archaic, in its original form. With each custom separated and segregated into provinces little changes, but events unfold that cause lifestyles and customs to be questioned. Tied up with the arrival of Siamese Twins from 20th century Earth, and an appalling rise in death rites within custom, change begins to tell.

The main characters, Enforcers Zasper Ertigon and Fringe Oldwark, discover that something is afoot and initially set about trying to right it, to return custom to its original status quo. This however proves incredibly difficult, and the revelation of "The Core" and its evil influence completely upsets the balance as new gods try to intervene. The administrator Boarmus, fearful as the killings continue unabated, sends the "heroes" to Panubi to solve the problems, unaware of the scale of the problems or what the outcome will be.

A well told story of diversity, stoicism, evil and fear. The setting is well constructed and the segregation and isolation of the provinces is cleverly built in to give a continually changing backdrop and situation for the main characters to deal with. Adding the prophetic Jory and the Arbai takes the plot further and enriches the whole. Numerous plots and subplots are brought together expertly in a superb climax that surprises.

The fate of Man, the great question of the "Ultimate Destiny of Man", the *raison d'être* of Elsewhere as set up by Brannigan is all found, and leaves a far more important question. Read it to discover the outcome.

UNWILLINGLY TO EARTH by Pauline Ashwell
Tor Books, 280 pp, £2.99

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the story of Lysistrata (Lizzie) Lee, a young woman born and raised on a frontier mining planet who, after an accident to her father, finds herself alone in the city where he is hospitalised. She is befriended by the staff and customers of one of the roughest inns in the city, and becomes something of a little sister/mother confessor to them. In time the pub becomes almost a haven of respectability. In doing this she falls foul of a Cultural Engineering student, whose task it was to study the patrons of the Royal Arms pub and try to produce just the effect Lizzie had. He complains to his tutor who manages to con Lizzie into reluctantly attending college on Earth to take a Cultural Engineering degree. Trouble always seems to follow Lizzie wherever she goes and she becomes mixed up in sabotage and murder on the moon, freeing stranded aliens on a planet whose civilisation is on the verge of collapse and with her year mates attempting to prevent world war.

The style of this novel reminds me in many ways of early Heinlein, especially the narrative style of the main character. It is essentially a lightweight whimsical yarn that does not require too much in the way of concentration but entertains nonetheless. It is also the first book I have seen at the Brum group that has come from an American publisher.

A TASTE OF BLOOD WINE by Freda Warrington
Pan, 581 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter J B Day.

It seems to be the season for vampire stories, everybody's at it these days. This one, Freda Warrington's contribution to the genre, is superb. Never mind the boringly conventional cover, what we have here is an original, imaginative and skilfully-written version of the familiar legend, one which contemptuously dismisses all the traditional trappings as superstitious rubbish and gets right down to the nitty-gritty.

The setting is the 1920s. A Cambridge scientist, Dr Neville, engages a new research assistant, Karl von Wultendorf, and soon all the women of his family are flocking around the compellingly handsome Austrian. In particular his daughter, Charlotte, is fatally smitten, developing an obsessive passion for Karl while he, likewise, finds himself drawn to her. But Karl is a vampire, and only by

denying their love and abandoning Charlotte can his passion for her blood be overcome.

This is an unashamed romance, full of dark Gothic horror, but there is much more to it than that. The vampires are treated as sympathetically as the human characters, being shown as individuals in their own right, with a complex society of their own. This story is as much about Karl's attempts to escape the domination of Kristian, the chief vampire who tyrannically rules them all, as it is about Charlotte's impossible dilemma.

The imagery is often hauntingly poetic, and even the moments of horror have a macabre, compulsive beauty of their own. The action never falters, the story grips the reader right from the start and carries him effortlessly through to a thoroughly satisfying conclusion. I have no hesitation in strongly recommending this book.

MAGICIANS OF THE NIGHT by Barbara Hambly
Grafton, 411 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

MAGICIANS OF THE NIGHT completes the story began in *THE RAINBOW ABYSS*. In the first volume the mage, Jaldis, had created a Dark Well. This is a passageway between worlds across the void. He had discovered a world that had lost its magic and was determined to help them restore it. As volume one finished, he and his apprentice, Rhion, attempted the crossing. At the start of *MAGICIANS OF THE NIGHT* we find that only Rhion has made it, and the people he has come to help are members of the Nazi Occult Bureau and they are looking for a way to prevent enemy aircraft hindering the invasion of England. Rhion quickly realises that these people are not the altruistic people he had expected to meet and is horrified to find that they care so lightly for the lives of those they consider inferior, killing Jews and gypsies to try and extract magical power from them. All Rhion wants to do is return to his own world, but is thwarted by the political situation there, and the Nazis who keep him prisoner using threats against the girl he befriends to make him work for them.

Barbara Hambly is an excellent storyteller so can be forgiven the few faults that creep into the writing. For instance, she has a tendency to use long convoluted sentences which lose the reader, and makes small factual errors, like plants flowering out of season. A bigger problem is one of plot construction. Early in the book we are introduced to Tom Saltwood, an American who is directed to kill Rhion. He does not reappear for another two

hundred pages. Similarly, there is an awkwardness in returning to scenes in Rhion's, home world yet it is important to know why he is left stranded. However, too much more from this side would have meant that the work would have been too long for two volumes but perhaps not enough for three. As author, Hambly has had to make decisions. Maybe not everyone will agree with them.

THE GALAXY GAME by Phil Janes
Millennium, 212 pp, £7.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

This book comes billed as an engaging, absurd and very funny sf series, and invites comparison with *HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY* and *RED DWARF*. There are some common elements, for instance humanity as pawns of extraterrestrials of unimaginable power, and a crew entirely composed of idiots (frequently used, John Major's cabinet springs to mind), and a computer next to which Hal seems a welcome and confidence inspiring life support controller.

I shan't say much about the plot, such as it is, as it takes a distant second place to jokes, of which there are many. These range from a few that made me laugh out loud, through the distinctly lavatorial (still some laughs), to the completely pointless and unfunny, even non-Richards find it difficult to laugh or even smile at one obvious contraction of the name, let alone the seven or eight used in the book.

Unfortunately the poor jokes win by a positively Australia v England margin, and I was left with a feeling of complete dread at the idea of a series of these novels. I began the novel hoping to find an original to replace the fading Douglas Adams, but finished it thinking how good Janes has made him look. Save your money for the next Pratchett.

SHADOW HUNTER by Will Baker
Viking, 536 pp, £9.99 "C" format

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

As a debut novel this is very impressive, a well constructed, well told post holocaust story. There are two sides, the high-tech Humans who live life as they always have, using technology and advancements to survive, and the Ginks, supposedly sub-human underground dwellers with only animal instinct and little intelligence.

Unsurprisingly the Humans hunt the animals, especially the Ginks, to eradicate any species harmful to themselves. Nature, being what it is, intercedes and the high-tech systems

begin to fail and break down. This causes the Humans to panic, and the additional crisis of a young boy, Ronnie, being kidnapped by the Ginks adds to the rising paranoia.

Somewhat reminiscent of Patrick Tilley's "Amtrak" series, we have a Human subverted to the Ginks' cause after his abduction, coming round to their way of thinking as he grows into their ways. The difference is the boy's father, scarred both physically and emotionally by the events that led up to the abduction, and driven only by thoughts of revenge. His alliance with Danielle Konrad, leader of a political party seeking the total elimination of the Ginks, provides each with a means to further their own ends. This pressurises the President to deploy forces to destroy the Ginks in an attempt to find Ronnie. Events come to a head as Ronnie, with assistance, is returned home. Not the end of the story, but a chilling scenario of a possible future.

Well told, well thought out, Baker has produced a good novel. Influenced by Tilley and others, but well worth a read.

RED ORC'S REVENGE by Philip José Farmer
Grafton, 282 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

An unusual story, extending Farmer's "World of Tiers" books into a new theory. Jim Grimson, an adolescent finding himself in serious trouble, slips over the edge and is admitted to a therapy unit. Here treatment involves choosing a character from "World of Tiers" that they relate to, and explaining their experiences in communal talk sessions. Having had the idea for this form of therapy Dr Porsena, the psychiatrist in charge, urges Grimson to enter the same treatment. Thankful for a chance to stay out of prison, Grimson keenly embarks on a strange journey as he becomes Red Orc. He believes he passes through dimensions to inhabit Orc's body.

Orc's story, in this book taking place prior to the events in "Tiers", is one of decadence and anger against his father. Finding similarities in his own life, Jim is drawn deeper into the fantasy. The bizarre happenings which befall Orc both fascinate and repel him, but he can't stop returning to discover what next. Orc goes through much, including banishment to an uninhabited barren world, being crucified and being turned into a serpent. Jim finally evokes Orc's anger and is again in trouble, with an unusual outcome.

Farmer introduces the novel as being based partially on Dr Giannini's work in psychiatry, using just such a treatment method, known as "Tiersian Theory". This, together

the village. Even so there is no shortage of volunteers for the pilgrimage. Poilar Crookleg, a descendant of the First Climber, is chosen in his year group and leads the pilgrimage to the summit. They pass through many strange kingdoms in their journey up Kosa Saag, discovering along the way just why so few ever successfully complete the return trip and just exactly who or what their Gods are.

This is a very strange novel, some of the kingdoms that the pilgrims go through are very bizarre, mind you I thought *DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH* was also pretty weird at first, but it has become one of my favourite books, so maybe there is hope for this one too. On the surface it is a novel of one young man's determination to overcome his handicap of a crooked leg and to become just the same as any able-bodied person. But the underlying tale is of a race stagnating, of one man's questioning his beliefs and trying to improve the lot of his people by contacting his Gods with a view to getting help from them. I don't know if I can recommend this to you, the best thing to say is try it for yourself, if you are a Silverberg fan you may love it.

SORROW'S LIGHT by Freda Warrington
Pan, 257 pp, £8.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Once again, Freda Warrington has ventured outside the universe created in her "Blackbird" books and produced something excellent. The story in *SORROW'S LIGHT* is narrated by Iolithie Gaeifir-daughter and encompasses a number of themes. Although related to the royal family, Iolithie has been raised in a farming village and hence has more independence of spirit than a city-born girl would have. When Prince Tykavn's intended bride is killed by the Unseen, Iolithie is married to him instead. She soon discovers that he is mentally ill and deteriorating. When no-one will help him, she resolves to cross the Stolen Lands to seek help from the king, his father. The world she knows is divided by the territory of the Unseen, implacable enemies of humans who will kill anyone that ventures into the Stolen Lands. As she discovers, this is a simplification of the situation.

One of the themes of the book is prejudice. Neither the Unseen or the humans understand each other, neither do they make any attempt, each side insisting that the other is evil. For the humans this has gone far beyond the realm of mere hatred but has polluted their whole way of life, with rituals and rites designed to purge the evil that

with a different approach to telling the story, makes the novel entertaining and emotive. It is well told, well balanced, the characters interacting believably within the circumstances, and the counter balance of the "pocket universe" provides stark contrast.

MAGICIAN by Raymond E Feist
Grafton, 681 pp, £6.99 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

In 1982 a novel burst on to the Fantasy scene that stunned not a few folk by its epic scope and ambition. That it was also a first novel amazed people even further, myself included. The novel was *MAGICIAN*, and the writer Raymond E Feist. Now I loved *MAGICIAN*, but some of its sequels did tarnish the memory of the original tale and I wondered just what the heck Feist could do to revise such a gem. It was with trepidation that I approached this new revised edition remembering some of the hatchet jobs done in the name of "revision" on a few of my favourite yarns.

I need not have worried. This edition seems more polished, and the story flows smoothly, with the additions seamlessly in place, and even a few minor niggles I had with the original have been removed. On the whole it is well worth forking out seven quid to read the story of Pug the orphan boy who becomes the most powerful Magician on two worlds, and of Thomas, who yearns to be the best warrior in the world and who achieves his ambition but not quite in the way he expected. This story is well known to fantasy fans, but if you are one of the rare few who have not yet read this tale, do yourself a great favour and go out and buy this version, you'll love it.

KINGDOMS OF THE WALL by Robert Silverberg
Grafton, 348 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Kosas Saag is a tremendous mountain dominating the skyline of at least half of its world. The people who live in the shadow of the mountain believe that their Gods live on the summit. In their ancient past a pilgrim, now known as the First Climber, made the return trip to the summit and brought back fire from the Gods. In remembrance of the First Climber, an annual pilgrimage is made by forty especially selected and trained young people from the Village of the Wall, the closest village to the mountain. Very few ever return and those that do are changed emotionally. They will not tell of their experiences and live apart from the rest of

might contaminate a person by only looking out onto the night. Prince Tykavn believes that it is only the perfection of his obsessive and all-consuming rituals that keep the Unseen in their own lands. Another theme explores how myths can be rooted in fact and the ways truth can be distorted. This is not the kind of book where everything is solved by the last chapter and everyone realises their mistakes and lives happily ever after, it is more a story of exploration, discovery and hope. Just maybe, something positive will come from Iolithie's experiences but don't speculate what they might be, read the book and find out.

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS by Clive Barker
Fontana, 230 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Harvey, a ten-year-old boy, escapes the cold dreariness of winter by passing through a magic gate into a wonderful land. It's a place where all seems perfect, with tempting food, presents, and the best of the four seasons packed into each day. Harvey lives in a fascinating old house and plays with a boy called Wendell. But danger and illusion hover just behind the facade of normality. This is a tale reminiscent of *PETER PAN*, but with a sharp edge of horror grafted on. Is it a book for children? Probably, and for adults too, although Barker's writing style is occasionally too clever for younger readers. The book is embellished with dozens of Barker's horrific black & white drawings - very atmospheric.

I found this a riveting read, mostly, though, the bad guys are overcome too easily and the background details are so unspecific as to make it unclear whether Harvey lives in Britain or the U.S.A. This is entertaining fantasy-horror, well worth trying.

HEART READERS by Kristine Kathryn Rusch
Millennium, 250 pp, £7.99 "C" format

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The line of Kings of the desert kingdom of Leanda have always produced twin sons and the offspring of the present King, Pardue, are no exception. Pardue killed his brother so that he could rule alone but he does not want this to happen to his sons so he determines to have their hearts read by a heart reader when they are old enough, and to give the crown to the son with the pure heart in the hope that this will prevent civil war.

In the outlying reaches of Pardue's kingdom there is a small village which is

occupied by the forces of Pardue under the command of Tarne. Tarne butchers a youth Tylee and rapes his young sister Stashie. Stashie rebels against Tarne's edict that Tylee should be left to rot and tries to bury him. For this rebellion Tarne gives Stashie to his men who almost rapes her to death, but she survives and swears vengeance on Tarne for the murder of her brother, mother and baby sister.

Years later Stashie is a heart reader in partnership with Dasis. They are in the capital city when the King, who is dying of consumption, calls for all heart readers to present themselves at the palace for testing, and the best ones will read the twin Princes' hearts. Tarne has risen in power and become one of Pardue's advisors, but with the death of the King imminent he tries to suborn the twin Princes to his cause so he can stay in power. Stashie hears of Tarne's position at court and reasons that this could be her chance for revenge.

This novel is very lightweight with a plot that does not amount to much and there is no depth of characterisation. In fact the character of Tarne has the most depth, which makes the novel seem lopsided as Stashie comes over as shallow. There are several gory scenes which, though necessary to the plot, are overdone, almost as if the writer was reveling in the bloodlust. The concept of heart readers is a good one and should have been described in more detail but that part of the plot was skimmed over, which was a disappointment. In fact the novel left me with a feeling that can best be described by using that old line from school reports, could have done better.

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