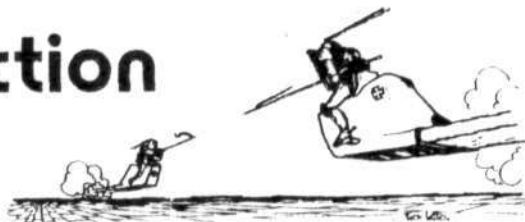


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 118

JUNE 1981

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the ~~third~~ Friday of each month in the upstairs room of THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at THE GAIETY pub, on the corner of Church Street and Warwick Street, Birmingham 3 (just round the corner from the Grand Hotel). New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-month subscription is £3.50 per person.

JUNE MEETING - Friday 19th June 1981 at 7.45 pm

HUGH WAITERS is our speaker. You must have read a novel or two by this Birmingham SF author—but probably not since you left school. All his novels have been aimed at a juvenile audience. They have included such titles as Blast Off at Woomera, Destination Mars and The Caves of Drach. His talk will be accompanied by slides.

MAY MEETING

Garry Kilworth talked about aliens he has known and loved, and then a panel of young writers (Garry Kilworth, Rob Holdstock, Dave Langford and Diana Reed, chaired by your newsletter editor) discussed various questions from the floor. The meeting just about broke even (which is what we aim at). Expenses were: Room Hire £15.00, Speaker's Expenses £15.18 and Raffle Prize £1.50 = £31.68. Income was: Entrance Money £24.40 and Raffle Ticket Sales £7.00 = £31.40.

FORTHCOMING

- * On June 27th will be our 10th Anniversary Party. There's just time for you to join if you haven't already done so. See the final Progress Report enclosed with this newsletter.
- * July - details not yet worked out.
- * August - Diana Reed (a BBC producer) with an illustrated talk on Radio science fiction.
- * September - Bob Shaw - presumably giving us one of his well-known serious lectures.
- * October - a speaker from The Aetherius Society.

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY has temporarily suspended its activities, due to a lack of cash to pay for film hire. Attendance has been decreasing throughout this year, due to the awkwardness of the programme time. There are high hopes of a re-start in the late autumn, with programmes being shown at a more convenient time than Sunday mornings. More details in a few months. FILMCON '81 is still going ahead, of course—at the Grand Hotel on 27th-29th November. You can register by sending £5.00 (supporting membership) or £13.00 (attending membership) to Filmcon '81, 75 Willows Crescent, Cannon Hill, Birmingham 12.

Informal meeting venue changed to The Gaiety - see details on page 3.

...NEWS...

NEBULA AWARDS for 1980 are now available in detail. They are as follows: Best Novel - Timescape by Gregory Benford, Best Novella - "Unicorn Tapestry" by Suzy McKee Charnas, Best Novelette - "The Ugly Chickens" by Howard Waldrop, Best Short Story - "Grotto of the Dancing Deer" by Clifford D. Simak, and the Grand Master Award went to Fritz Leiber.

BALROG AWARDS have also been announced; these cover fantasy mainly, though some SF does seem to have crept in: Best Collection/Anthology - Unfinished Tales by J.R.R.Tolkien, Outstanding Professional Achievement - George Lucas for the Star Wars saga, Outstanding Amateur Achievement - Paul and Susan Allen for Fantasy Newsletter, Best Amateur Publication - Fantasy Newsletter, Best Poet - H.Warner Munn, Best Artist - Frank Frazetta, Best Short Fiction - "The Web of the Magi" by Richard Cowper, Best Professional Publication - The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, 1981 Science Fiction Film Hall of Fame Award - The Empire Strikes Back (1980), 1981 Fantasy Film Hall of Fame Award - The Wizard of Oz (1939!), Best Novel - The Wounded Land by Stephen R.Donaldson, and Special Balrogs were awarded to Fritz Leiber and Jorge Luis Borges.

JAMES H.SCHMITZ has died at the age of 69. Best known of all his SF are the stories about the girl telepath Telzey Amberdon, and also the Hugo-nominated novel The Witches of Karres. He produced six novels and about 60 shorter pieces, writing sporadically between 1943 and the mid 1970s.

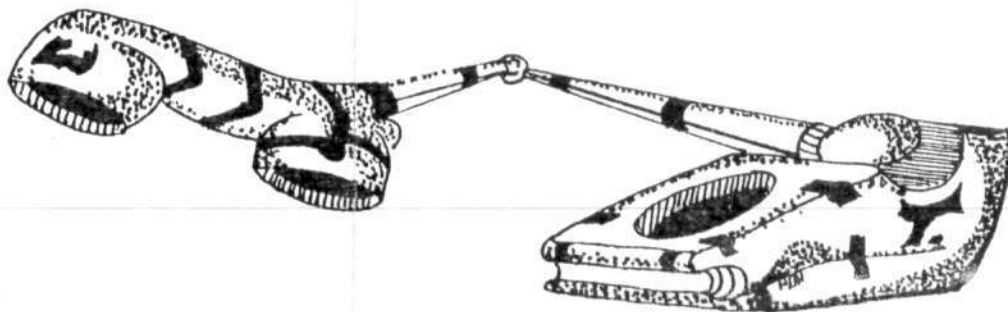
ROBERT AICKMAN has died at the age of 66. He was one of the best British writers of horror stories. Seven collections of his work appeared, and one story, "Pages From a Young Girl's Diary", won a World Fantasy Award in 1975. He also edited 8 volumes of The Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories.

KIT PEDLER has died at the age of 53. His 1970 TV series Doomwatch, with Gerry Davis, led to the novel Mutant 59: The Plastic Eaters (also with Davis) and a couple of other SF novels.

SOLIHULL SF GROUP ~~has died at the age of~~ has just produced its first newsletter. Entitled Overmatter, and produced by the indefatigable Steve Green, it includes a Bob Shaw article and a list of forthcoming cons. The group meets on the second Friday of each month at the Mason's Arms pub in High Street, Solihull.

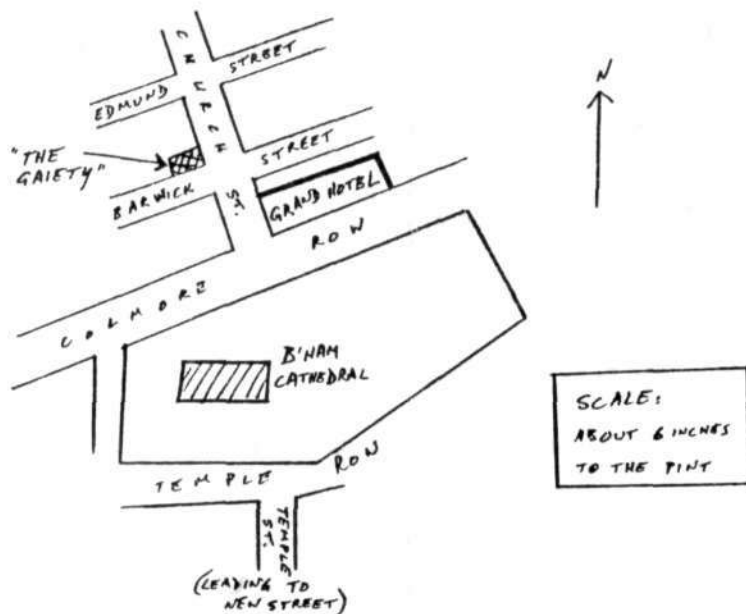
ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP's top ten best selling paperbacks for May were:

1.The Ringworld Engineers - Larry Niven, 2.The Snow Queen - Joan D.Vinge, 3.The Master of the Five Magics - Lyndon Hardy, 4.The Priests of Psi - Frank Herbert, 5=Wheelworld - Harry Harrison, 5=Golem 100 - Alfred Bester, 7.The Space Machine - Christopher Priest, 8.The Best of Eric Frank Russell, 9.The Prisoner: A Day in the Life - Hank Stine, 10=The Oak and the Ram - Michael Moorcock, 10=The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle - Michael Moorcock, 10=Somewhere in Time - Richard Matheson.



FACTS AND FALLACIES is a new book by Chris Morgan (your newsletter editor) and Dave Langford, which has nothing much to do with science fiction but is a guide to the definitive mistakes and misguided predictions of the famous (and the not-so-famous). It includes lots of funny (but wrong) statements by people like Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, Fred Hoyle, George Bernard Shaw and Barbara Cartland. It is published by Webb & Bower at £5.95, and it gets a mention here due to the bare-faced immodesty of one of its authors...

BSFG INFORMAL MEETINGS have changed their venue. They'll still be on the first Tuesday of each month, but as from July 7th they'll be at THE GAIETY, an M & B pub on the corner of Church Street and Barwick Street, Birmingham 3 (just round the corner from the Grand Hotel in Colmore Row). Any time from 6.00pm onwards. See you there?



CONVENTION NEWS

FANTASYCON VII Jul 10-12 at the Birmingham Centre Hotel, New St, B'ham. G-o-h Peter Tremayne. Supporting £1.00 and attending £8.00. Contact Mike Chinn, 99 Solihull Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham B11 3AE.

FAIRCON '81 Jul 24-27 at the Ingram Hotel, Glasgow. G-o-h John Brunner, Ken Slater. Supporting £5.00, attending £9.00. Contact Faircon c/o 200 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6LN.

BECCON '81 Jul 31-Aug 2 at the Essex Centre Hotel, Basildon. G-o-h Barrington J. Bayley. Supporting £2.00, attending £5.00. Contact The Beccon Committee c/o 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4BU.

BABELCON Aug 8-9 at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Hitchhiker's Guide con, with guests from the programme, inc. Douglas Adams. Attending £6.00. Contact Babelcon, 11 Rutland St, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

THE MERMAN'S CHILDREN by Paul Anderson, Slickwick & Jackson £7.95, 319pp
Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

This is the highly successful expansion of two stories, "The Merman's Children" and "The Tupilak", which originally appeared in Lin Carter's Flashing Swords anthologies. The narrative comfortably includes the two episodes in the quest of Tauno and his sister Eyjan for their tribe of merfolk who have been banished from their homes by exorcism. Anderson's mermen are vibrant characters, contrasting strongly with the joyless, pious Christians. The pace of the narrative never lags. The atmosphere created fits in well with the intense emotion of religious fervour found in the Middle Ages. Highly recommended for those who enjoy good fantasy novels.

SURVIVOR by Octavia Butler, Sphere £1.25, 187 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Here is the usual high standard of writing from Octavia Butler, in her story of an adopted missionary girl who finds she has more in common with Amerindian type aliens than with her own people, and is caught up in intertribal warfare which threatens to destroy the Earth colonists. Alanna is a typical Octavia Butler female character: strong and sympathetic but entirely credible, providing a perfect foil for the alien characters. Although a little confusing initially, the flashback narrative related by Alanna and Diut, the leading alien, is superbly handled, filling the reader in on customs and attitudes of both humans and aliens. This novel is even better than Mind of My Mind. Read it!

TETRARCH by Alex Comfort, Wildwood House £6.95, 309 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

The author of The Joy of Sex has produced a fantasy novel which includes a good deal of sex (though less than might have been anticipated). An extremely sensible young couple are magically transported from our world to the Fourfold World, which has been based in large part upon the writings of William Blake. They undergo certain adventures both to help good triumph over evil and to learn about the fantasy world and themselves. That world is a strange place, where primitive barbarism goes hand in hand with advanced technology. It is an erudite novel, allowing the author to show off his knowledge of psychology, sometimes at too great a length. It is sporadically brilliant, with many original features. Best among these are psychological weapons which can kill or stun by appropriate visual patterns. An uneven novel but worth reading.

SONGS OF STARS AND SHADOWS by George R.R. Martin, Coronet 95p, 240 pages

Reviewed by Martin Longley.

This is Martin's second collection, and is a firmly engaging read. The basic theme of the stories is (so says the author at the beginning) the continuous battle fought between romance and reality---the latter coming out on top with alarming frequency... The tales are composed mainly of a solid plotline with a fair quota of suspense and gratuitous excitement (better than gratuitous sex any day, guv). Two particular criticisms are that the characterisation is rather unsubtle and that the ends of the stories are marred by such statements as 'Chicago 1974' and 'Kansas City, Missouri...' which tend to dissipate the atmosphere that may have been built up for the reader.

SILENCE IS DEADLY by Lloyd Biggle jr, Millington £5.95, 184 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Jan Darzek, Terran and First Councilor of the Galactic Synthesis, which federation spans the galaxy, does a Captain Kirk and goes to the primitive world Kamm in search of twenty G.S. agents who have disappeared there while hunting for a rumoured deathray that kills without a mark!! Luckily, the natives are human except for a sixth digit and no ears---all animals there are deaf---so, after a bit of lopping and grafting, he travels round the planet by matter transmitter and oxcart until he finds what he seeks. "And on the Silent Planet no one would hear the cries of terror." (Shades of Greek philosophy.) Ignore this one!

SHIKASTA by Doris Lessing, Granada £1.95, 448 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

The first of a series, Shikasta encompasses a wide spectrum of views from universal to intimate. Recreated from archive material of the Canopus empire, it tells of the initial hopes for a new planet, Shikasta, which crumble as cosmic disturbances cut its life-line with Canopus, leading to degeneration of the inhabitants and infiltration by agents of a rival empire. It is only two-thirds of the way through that we are told Shikasta is Earth, in its death-throes. In a world virtually controlled by the Chinese, famine, disease and warfare reduce the population to a handful who can start again, once more in close contact with Canopus. The are elements of myth and prophecy in this novel, which is very ably written even though the pace is broken by dry, explanatory passages. It's a satisfying novel for those who appreciate depth and fine characterisation.

ON WINGS OF SONG by Thomas M.Disch, Magnum £1.50, 315 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

In a rather grim future USA the latest craze is "flying"---the release of one's spirit from one's body through the power of song. Most states have outlawed it and all references to it, yet Daniel Weinreb makes it his life's ambition. His wife manages it, and Daniel has to struggle to keep her body alive during the years she is absent from it. At the same time he tries to learn to sing in order to fly. In this marvellous novel the plot is partly an excuse for Tom Disch to satirise the American way of life, showing up religious bigotry in the Iowa farm belt and the way in which one must be black to succeed in New York (so whites disguise themselves as blacks). It's the author's best work to date.

INVITATION TO A HOLOCAUST by Rene Noorbergen, NEL £5.95, 200 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

World War III will start on 2nd August 1987. So said Nostradamus almost 450 years ago, but any interpretation of his quatrains must be, due to their enigmatic nature, the opinion of the individual translator. Rene Noorbergen has mapped out the entire course of the holocaust of the late 20th century, drawing verses from all books of Nostradamus' prophecies, but giving no explanation for his choice. In some places the verses are interpreted very literally and minutely examined; in others the treatment seems sketchy. Some precise dates are given, others ignored. Although my knowledge of 16th century French is sketchy, some translations struck me as suspect. The author has obviously done a lot of research to produce his material, but it lacks sparkle and sometimes feels forced.

JUPITER LAUGHS by Edmund Cooper, Coronet £1.10, 220 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

Apart from a reference to the mid 1950s in his Introduction (in which, interestingly, Cooper admits to have been writing SF for over 20 years ---despite his protestations to the contrary elsewhere!) there is no chronological sequence given for these short stories. This is an annoying omission. They may appear great to new readers, but to the seasoned SF fan this is pretty tame and, now, often hackneyed stuff. The stories themselves range from soft fantasy to Cooper's version of hard space fiction.

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME by Richard Matheson, Sphere £1.50, 260 pages

Reviewed by Steve Green.

Matheson's tenth published novel, this afterlife odyssey attempts to be both a dramatic portrayal of one man's love bridging the void of death (a quest reminiscent of that in his earlier Bid Time Return, now filmed as Somewhere in Time) and a fictionalised synthesis of religious beliefs, but is truly successful at neither. Instead, the book reads like a meta-physical travelogue, with Matheson merely paying lip service to his protagonist's alleged humanity.

THE AFFIRMATION by Christopher Priest, Faber £6.25, 213 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It is only through writing your autobiography that you can come to know yourself---and even then your knowledge will inevitably remain subjective while the "you" of the autobiography can easily become a substitute for reality. That seems to be the main theme of Chris Priest's fascinating new novel. I say "seems to be" because it is a complex work, full of deliberate ambiguity. The book's narrator, Peter Sinclair, is a young man who suffers a series of misfortunes and goes off to live alone in a dilapidated Welsh cottage. Ostensibly he is decorating it; in fact he writes his autobiography. The first version is too mundane, so he fictionalises it, creating an imaginary life for himself in an imaginary country. That's the subjective view, which Peter Sinclair wants the reader to believe. In fact Sinclair is going insane, ignoring unpleasant facts and retreating into his fantasy world. The latter is none other than various islands of the Dream Archipelago, already used as the setting for several of Chris Priest's stories. Here, despite being most sensitively and realistically described, it is intended as a metaphor both of Sinclair's life and of his retreat into madness. In the Dream Archipelago Sinclair has won a lottery of which the prize is immortality. Much of the book is taken up with his relationships with three women---Gracia and Seri whom he loves, and his sister Felicity, who dominates him. I notice that the novel is not being marketed as SF. In places The Affirmation is infuriatingly enigmatic, yet it is so beautifully written that even its introspective passages are gripping. A major novel.

THE SPACE MACHINE by Christopher Priest, Pan £1.50, 363 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is a new paperback edition (indeed, a change of publisher) of Chris Priest's most popular novel. It is partly a delightful pastiche of H.G.Wells---and is dedicated to him---being a sort of prequel to The War of the Worlds. The writing is very carefully moulded after Wells' early, vivacious style, as from the 1890s, though it is lighter and more humorous than most of his SF, achieving the same feeling as in The Wheels of Chance, Wells' very early cycling novel. The whole thing, set on Earth and Mars during the 1890s, is great fun.



REVOLT IN 2100 by Robert A. Heinlein, NEL £5.95, 207 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

When Robert Heinlein began writing SF in 1939 he set most of his stories in a future history of his own devising. Revolt in 2100 includes three of those earliest stories, from 1939 and 1940. The longest, "If This Goes On---", shows the overthrow, by an underground movement, of a military dictatorship which disguises itself as a religious organisation. It's a fast-moving tale of a future USA, with many of the Heinlein trademarks already in evidence in its background and characterisation. In other words, it's good early Heinlein. This is the first time a UK hardcover edition of the book has been available for 17 years, and this one has a nice Tim White cover.

THE EMBEDDING by Ian Watson, Granada £1.25, 185 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

Watson believes that science is moving relentlessly towards a vision. The mating of empiricism and mysticism will produce a new child of the mind. In this re-issue, alternatives to reality are being sought. Chris Sole is searching for "universal grammar", Pierre is seeking enlightenment through mysticism, and the alien Sp'thra mean to grasp what they term "other-reality". The three sub-plots of language, perception and alien mentality are interwoven skilfully, the whole being a stimulating blend of tense narrative and profound ideas.

PANGLOR by Jeffrey Carver, Arrow £1.60, 268 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

There are interesting alien characters here, but the overall tone is of a juvenile Hans Solo adventure, without the humorous verbal by-play. Had it been released as a juvenile it would have been more acceptable. The story of an ace pilot being blacklisted and framed, and consequently making a discovery that clears his name and benefits the human race is all too obvious.

THE GROTTO OF THE FORMIGANS by Daniel Da Cruz, Ballantine Del Rey distributed by Futura 95 pence, 185 pages

Reviewed by Paul Oldroyd.

This novel starts like a fourth-rate copy of Frederik Forsyth, then lurches unsteadily into fantasy. It attempts to attract the reader by offering violence, lust, greed, a threat to humanity and double dealing, yet still fails, perhaps because of the quality of the writing---or should that be 'lack of quality'? The considered verdict is that it lives up to its title and cover illustration.

THE OAK AND THE RAM by Michael Moorcock, Granada 95 pence, 157 pages

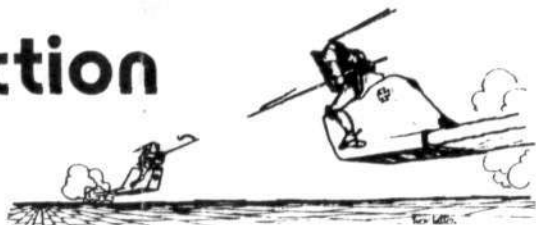
Reviewed by Steve Green.

Moorcock has been variously described as an epic fantasist and a worthy successor to Peake and Cabell; if so, he has created an art form from the fabric of pulp fiction. This novel, fifth in the Corum cycle, is typical of his prolific output: strong, heroic fantasy with only style to distinguish it from its pulp ancestors. I sometimes get the impression Moorcock has only ever written one novel, simply substituting new characters and place-names for each incarnation: The Oak and the Ram does little to shatter that suspicion.

Editorial Notes

If this issue seems to contain a disproportionate number of book reviews, that's only because YOU haven't provided me with any articles, artwork, news items or letters of comment. Many thanks to contributors, including Locus. Art credits this issue: Ivor Latto (p.1), Phill Probert (p.2), Dave Hardy (p.7). This June 1981 issue has been edited and produced for the Birmingham Science Fiction Group by Chris Morgan (famous co-author of Facts and Fallacies) at 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX.

Birmingham Science Fiction Group



10TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

FINAL PROGRESS REPORT & TRAVEL DETAILS

Just two weeks to go, and counting... (Probably less as you read this.) The party date (of course you haven't forgotten, but you like to be reminded, don't you?) is Saturday 27th June 1981, and the place is Birmingham's Royal Angus Hotel (venue of several successful Novacons).

TICKETS: Just in case you haven't yet registered (or you've got friends who want to come) there are still some tickets available at £2.00 per person. Please make out cheques to the Birmingham Science Fiction Group and send them to Pauline Morgan at 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX. If you've got any queries phone her on (021) 476-0458.

HOTEL ROOMS: The party will persist until after 3.00am on Sunday morning, so those of you coming from outside Birmingham will probably want to book a room at the Royal Angus. Rooms are still available at specially negotiated discount rates:

£10.50 per person for a twin or a double

£13.00 for a single room

(both prices including full English breakfast, VAT and service charge). If you haven't yet booked, fill in your booking form and hotel booking card and send both of them at once to Pauline Morgan. If you've mislaid your booking form, write or phone for another. (Address and phone number as in the paragraph above; don't contact the hotel direct.)

ARRIVAL AT THE HOTEL: For car parking use the NCP multi-storey car park beside the hotel. It's open but not staffed on Sundays, so you should be able to get out without paying their extortionate charges. If you've reserved a hotel room, book in at hotel reception first. Then proceed by lift to the 2nd floor, turn left and you'll find the 10th Anniversary Party registration desk at the top of a wide flight of stairs. Collect your badge (which must be worn) and souvenir booklet, deposit auction material and buy raffle tickets. (We'll be making a loss on the party, but we don't want to make too much of a loss!)

TRAVEL DETAILS

Although most of you have attended Novacons at the Royal Angus Hotel, it's not the easiest place to find even if you live in Birmingham. The map opposite has been specially drawn to help you get lost more efficiently.

By Train: After coming through the ticket barrier at Birmingham New Street Station (not Birmingham International) go up the escalators and turn left, following the signs to New Street, via a ramp. Then, to your left, is Stephenson Street, where there is a bus stop (labelled C 7) for the Centre Bus. This bus, number 101, will take you to the Royal Angus Hotel, going past Summer Row (stop C 10) for Andromeda Bookshop. For the Royal Angus get off half way along Snow Hill Queensway (stop C 13). The hotel entrance is now back and round the corner to your right. Note: this bus doesn't run after 6.00pm or on Sundays.

If you walk from New Street Station, the map opposite should get you to Andromeda Bookshop and the Royal Angus Hotel. It's about $\frac{1}{2}$ of a mile to either.

By Car from the North: Leave the M6---particularly if you happen to be on it---at Junction 6, following the A38(M) towards Birmingham City Centre. After you leave the A38(M) carry on over the flyover. Then get into the left hand lane immediately, and you'll see the Royal Angus Hotel on your left.

By Car from the South: This will probably be an approach from the Stratford-upon-Avon direction, up the A34. If so, follow Birmingham City Centre signs until you reach St Martin's Circus, with the Bull Ring Shopping Centre clearly visible on your left as you go round the roundabout. This, on the map opposite, is the oval roundabout near New Street Station. Follow the dual-carriageway inner ring road system anticlockwise via the roundabouts marked (on the map opposite) as A47 and M6 etc, to the Royal Angus Hotel.

By Parachute, Throat or Enterprise transporter: See full details on page 9.

(Maps by Phill Probert)

