

BRUM GROUP NEWS

December 1993

Issue 267

*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,
TREASURER - RICHARD STANDAGE, REVIEWS EDITOR - BERNIE EVANS, PUBLICITY OFFICER - STEVE JONES,
ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVACON 23 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON.

BRUM GROUP CHRISTMAS PARTY at the Australian Bar Friday 17th December 1993, 7.45pm for 8.00pm Tickets £5.50

This year the Birmingham Science Fiction Group's Christmas Party will be in the upstairs function room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street in Birmingham city centre. Featuring: An Amazing *ENORMOUS* Finger Buffet! With such delicacies as: Plated Turkey with crusty bread and butter, Pork and stuffing finger rolls, Pork Pie, Quiche, Sausage Rolls, Prawn vol-au-vents, Pickles, Savouries (crisps, nuts etc), Mince pies and Gateaux or Trifle. Along with: Competitions! Prizes! Raffle! More Prizes! Party Games! Silly Prizes! Tombola! Even More Prizes!

NB: PLEASE BOOK BY 11th DECEMBER

Payment should be sent to: Richard Standage, 116 Shireland Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4QJ (tel: 021- 558-7591).
Cheques etc. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group".
Please complete the coupon enclosed in this newsletter.

Merry Christmas to all BSFG members!

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.

This publication was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. Contact the editorial address for details of WAVE's competitive prices.

Many thanks this issue to STAN ELING for his puzzle, BERNIE EVANS for typing the Book Reviews; STEVE GREEN and CRITICAL WAVE for the news in the Jophon Report and Events listing and, of course, TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

11 NOV 1993 - 29 JAN 1994: *PETER PAN* adapted & directed by Anna Farthing at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Tickets on sale now £4.95 (£3.95 concessions) call 021.440 3838.

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. Tickets available for the subsidised price of £5.50 per person until 11 December.

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

BEER & SKITTLES

Many thanks to everyone who responded to our appeal for suitable venues. Helena is checking out which of them will be most suitable. If you are interested in joining us please contact HELENA BOWLES on (021) 558 7591.

4-6 MARCH 1994: MASQUE III the third British costume convention, Shakis Victoria Hotel, Nottingham. Membership until 30 December 1993 is £20.00 attending, £5.00 supporting. Contact: c/o Mike Percival, 4 Ednaston Court, Yeldersley Lane, Ednaston, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 3BA.

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. Attending was £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" until November 1993. 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 650BF, Supporting 500BF until 31 Dec 1993, then Attending 750BF, Supporting 650BF until 31 March 1994, children up to 6 free, age 6-12 half-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. Contact: Helen McCarthy, 147 Francis Road, London, E10 6NT.

11-13 NOVEMBER 1994: **UNIFICATION '94** multimedia convention at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. *QUANTUM LEAP, STAR TREK, DR WHO, ROBIN OF SHERWOOD, STAR WARS, V, TIME TRAX, DS9* and many more, plus guests, quizzes and games. For further information write to: Unification, Clifton House, 27 Clifton Place, Newton Bar, Wakefield, WF1 3JH.

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. 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 £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.

4-6 NOVEMBER 1994 (?): **NOVACON** 24 the BSFG's own convention. GoH Graham Joyce. Venue and date still to be confirmed, but attending membership costs just £20.00 until Easter 1994. Contact: CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

27 Dec 1999 - 2 JAN 2000: **MILLENNIUM**. 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 **BRUN GROUP NEWS** when replying to listings or advertisements.

SOMETHING
LIKE A
LOGICAL
PUZZLE

by Stan Eling

I revisited the planet Oughtred this year for the fishing in lake Lippershey, caught two cetaceans the first day, but after that not a thing. Each evening you would find me in the little inn, drinking and chatting with the new Innkeeper and four regulars who I had not met before; this is what I learned about them:

Gaius is 70 years old.

The one called Ploddy is a flute player, his favourite book is not *A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ*.

The juggler is 200 years old.

The escapologist's favourite book is *MAKE ROOM, MAKE ROOM*, he is not named Johann, and his pet is not a cat.

Gaius is not a printer, nor does he have a cat.

Tarus who is 42 years old is great friends with the juggler.

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ is the favourite book of the 35 year old.

Ortus likes *FAHRENHEIT 451* best out of all books and his pet seal is never far away.

The 42 year old keeps tortoises.

The printer's favourite book is *A CANTICLE FOR FOR LEIBOWITZ*.

The one who is 25 years old does not like *CAMP CONCENTRATION*, nor is he the printer with the pet beetle.

One of them keeps a pet yak.

If the Innkeeper's name is not Tarus, whose favourite book is *NON-STOP*.

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Answers to Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG by the 5th of January 1994. The first correct entry out of the hat will win an Andromeda book voucher. The solution will be published in the next newsletter.

JOPHAN REPORT #69

by Martin Tudor

Graham Joyce, guest of honour at next year's Novacon, may soon be in the money as his second novel *DARK SISTER* has been optioned by the company who made *LEON THE PIG FARMER*.

Vincent Price, the last of the great American horror movie stars, died on 25 October, aged 82. He had suffered for several years from lung cancer and only accepted a cameo role in 1990's *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS* as a personal favour to director Tim Burton.

Born to a relatively wealthy Missouri family in May 1911, Price studied both at Yale and at the University of London, but despite his MA in Fine Arts, decided in 1935 to pursue a stage career rather than paint. After performing in three Broadway productions, two of which were with Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre Workshop (although he left before the infamous 1938 "War of the Worlds" broadcast), Price won his first film part, in the comedy *SERVICE DE LUXE* (1938).

A string of supporting roles followed, including supplying the disembodied voice in *THE INVISIBLE MAN RETURNS* (1939), which he would reprise in the closing moments of *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN* (1948, aka *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET THE GHOSTS*). Price progressed to playing the villainous lead roles in *SHOCK AND DRAGONWYCK*, both released in 1946, but Twentieth Century-Fox allowed his contract to expire in 1947 and his career suffered a year-long hiatus.

By 1948, he was faring little better at Universal, although *THE BARON OF ARIZONA* (1950), an independent production directed by the maverick auteur Sam Fuller, remained a personal favourite. Given his general lack of success on-screen, it was no surprise to see Price return to the stage in the early 1950s, and it is possible he might have abandoned celluloid were it not for the unexpected success of Warner's *HOUSE OF WAX* in 1953. A remake of the 1933 Lionel Atwill chiller *MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* using the then-popular 3-D technology (although, ironically, director André de Toth only had one eye), it gave Price his first real chance to shine, as the homicidal sculptor Professor Jarrod.

It opened to lukewarm reviews (the News Chronicle commented that even without the 3-D gimmickry, the film "might have been in the running as one of the great silly films"), but established Price in the horror genre. He appeared in *THE MAD MAGICIAN* the following year, another foray into 3-D from *HOUSE OF WAX* producer Bryan Foy, then played the Devil in Irwin Allen's hilariously inept *THE STORY OF MANKIND* (1957)

and the brother of mutated scientist David Hedison in both *THE FLY* (1958) and - sans Hedison - *RETURN OF THE FLY* (1960). Far more memorable, however, were his two collaborations with legendary producer-director William Castle: *HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL* (1959), which introduced the "Emergo" process (a model skeleton swung over the audience), and *THE TINGLER* (1960), which featured "Percepto" (members of the audience receiving mild electric shocks).

Price was the first choice of both producer-director Roger Corman and AIP executive James Nicholson for *THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER* (1960), the first of a series of loose Poe adaptations which would redefine American gothic horror. It was rapidly followed by *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM* (1961), *TALES OF TERROR* (1961), *THE RAVEN* (1963), *THE TERROR* (1963), *THE HAUNTED PALACE* (1963) and *THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH* (1964); only one of the Poe productions, *PREMATURE BURIAL* (1961), did not feature Price, as it was initiated with the newly-formed Pathé and Price was under exclusive contract to AIP.

Indeed, so successful were the Corman films that the British movie *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* (1968), in which the tragically short-lived director Michael Reeves gave Price one of his most chilling roles, was re-titled *THE CONQUEROR WORM* for US distribution and disguised as a Poe adaptation. A further collaboration with Reeves on *THE OBLONG BOX* (1969) was blighted by the director's drugs overdose and indifferently completed by Gordon Hessler, who also cast Price alongside Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee in that same year's *SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN*.

Both *TALES OF TERROR* and *THE RAVEN* had demonstrated that horror could be mixed with humour, and the theme was carried into *grand guignol* territory with *THE ADMIRABLE DOCTOR PHIBES* (1971) and *DR PHIBES RISES AGAIN* (1972), both directed by Robert Fuest, reaching a crescendo under Douglas Hickox in the splendidly grotesque *THEATRE OF BLOOD* (1973, aka *MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER*); one scene, in which Robert Morley is fed his own pet poodles, must have appealed to an actor who was equally famous for his gourmet tastes.

Following *MADHOUSE* (1974), which AIP padded out with scenes from earlier films, Price largely quit both the horror genre in particular and film in general, and it's difficult to understand why he chose to make a rare appearance in the limp apocalyptic sex comedy *PERCY'S PROGRESS* (1974, aka *IT'S NOT THE SIZE THAT COUNTS*). A handful of fairly forgettable projects dot the subsequent two decades, including *THE MONSTER CLUB* (1980) with John Carradine as author Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes, whose stories it adapted, *HOUSE OF THE LONG SHADOWS* (1982) with Carradine, Cushing and Lee, *BLOODBATH AT THE HOUSE OF DEATH* (1983) and *FROM A WHISPER TO A SCREAM* (1987, aka *THE OFFSPRING*), the last a compèring role originally written for magazine editor and archivist Forrest J Ackerman.

Lindsay Anderson, who directed Price in *THE WHALES OF AUGUST* (1987), described him as "a good and

intelligent actor, [who] remained what he had always been, a real artist, truthful to the end".

The administrative and departmental structure of the 1995 world science fiction convention has been extensively restructured in the wake of co-chair Vince Docherty's resignation due to a two-year posting overseas. Docherty has been succeeded by Martin Easterbrook, responsible for the reorganization of Intersection's membership services division (formerly administrative services); the other original co-chair, Tim Illingworth, remains in position.

Following widespread complaints about unexplained delays in setting up the convention bank account and processing membership applications, with a number of cheques held for more than six months (by which point British cheques had expired), Intersection has set up a new central address; Admail 336, Glasgow, G2 1BR. Correspondence will then be distributed to the appropriate departments, with membership registration based entirely in London.

Although a number of division heads have yet to be recruited, several key positions have been filled, among them publicity (Chris O'Shea), art show and fixed exhibits (Sylvia Starshine), main programme (James Steel), science programme (Amanda Baker), fan programme (Jenny and Steve Glover) and publications (Kees van Toorn); Theresa (T R) Smith is dealing with the North American departments and Patty Wells will head operations, Kathy Westhead handling general volunteers, Kim Campbell and Malcolm Reid running finances, Fiona Anderson co-ordinating the network of agents and Bridget Wilkinson acting as liaison with the group Fans Across the World.

The first two editions of an internal newsletter, TEACHING NESSIE TO TAPDANCE, appeared in May and August, whilst the second progress report was mailed in late October from Maryland, USA (discounts offered by the US Post Office outweigh local savings). The deadline for the third progress report is 31 January.

Penguin released three omnibus editions of Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's "Dragonlance" fantasy sequence on 4 November, each including three novels.

DRAGONLANCE CHRONICLES, priced £13.00, contains DRAGONS OF THE AUTUMN TWILIGHT, DRAGONS OF THE WINTER NIGHT and DRAGONS OF SPRING DAWNING. DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS, priced £12.99, includes TIME OF THE TWINS, WAR OF THE TWINS and TEST OF THE TWINS. Finally, DRAGONLANCE TALES, priced £10.99, contains THE MAGIC OF KRYNN, LOVE AND WAR and KENDER, GULLY DWARVES AND GNOMES.

HarperCollins has signed a four-book deal with Robert Holdstock, whose most recent novel THE HOLLOWING continues the themes of his award-winning MYTHAGO WOOD [1984].

November titles from HarperCollins include CLOVEN HOOVES by Megan Lindholm, TIMELIKE INFINITY by Stephen

Baxter, MINING THE DIRT by Frederik Pohl, INDIA'S STORY by Kathlyn Starbuck, THESES OF THE HUNDRED GATES by Robert Silverberg and DARK AND HUNGRY GOD RISES by Stephen R Donaldson. Among December's releases include FLUX, also by Baxter, THE DRAGON AT WAR by Gordon R Dickson and THE KING'S BUCCANEER by Raymond E Feist.

Melvin Litton's GEMINGA, described by William Burroughs as "very interesting", is now available from Counter Productions, price £7.95. For the current catalogue, send a reply-paid envelope to Post Office Box 556, London, SE5 0RL.

L Ron Hubbard's fantasy novels SLAVES OF SLEEP and THE MASTERS OF SLEEP were released in a single-volume edition by Bridge Publications on 18 October, price US\$49.95. A six-hour audio version, performed by STAR TREK; DEEP SPACE NINE star Rene Auberjonois, is available for the same price.

The third volume of THE AURUM FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA, devoted to horror cinema, was released in a new edition on 29 October, priced £35.00. Edited by Phil Hardy, it details 1800 movies and includes more than 550 photographs, 50 in colour.

The entries are placed by year of release and the size of each decade charts the growth of the horror movie industry, from the 1950s (110 entries) through the 1960s and 1970s (309 and 475 respectively) to the 525 films listed for the 1980s. Among the new elements since the 1985 edition is Japanese animation, with entries for such films as UROTSUKUJOUJI [1989].

North American reading skills are being sabotaged by unchallenging texts, according to a report by Professor Donald Hayes of Cornell University.

His investigation was launched after tests showed current teenagers' command of English is substantially below the 1950s average. Professor Hayes concluded that simpler textbooks were at least partially to blame after discovering material for 17 year-olds was being "dubbed down" to the level of that issued to 13 year-olds before World War Two.

"When it comes to sports or the school band, we push our children very hard," he told the Guardian's Washington correspondent. "But with serious intellectual work, we don't. It's very curious."

Two of Terry Pratchett's pre-"Discworld" novels, STRATA and THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN, are being reissued as £14.99 hardcovers by Doubleday on 28 April.

Other forthcoming releases from Doubleday and Bantam Press include STAR WARS, THE TRUCE AT BAKURA by Kathy Tyers (6 January), LYON'S PRIDE by Anne McCaffrey (the fourth volume in her "The Tower and the Hive" series) and THE FIRST CHURCH OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM by Brian Appleyard (3 February), GUARDIAN by John Saul (3 March), THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT SINGS

THE BLUES by Harry Harrison and RAIDERS OF THE LOST CAR PARK by Robert Rankin (31 March), STAR WARS, THE COURTSHIP OF PRINCESS LEIA by Dave Wolverton (30 June) and DEATH GATE, INTO THE LABYRINTH by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman (28 July).

COMIC WORLD #21, cover-dated November, features interviews with David Gemmell, Stan Nicholls and Chris Baker (the team behind the graphic novelization of Gemmell's LEGEND, who reveal an adaptation of WOLF IN SHADOW is in the pipeline), Barry Windsor-Smith, John Byrne and members of the RED DWARF cast, as well as a free packet of TSR collector cards.

Virgin celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of the first DR WHO episode with David J Howe's TIMEFRAME, an illustrated history of the series; £15.99 in hardback, which features stills from many of the classic episodes and newspaper clippings recording the show's chequered career.

D F Lewis, Wayne Allen Sallee, Lucy Taylor and t.Winter Damon are among the horror writers showcased in BIZARRE SEX AND OTHER CRIMES OF PASSION, scheduled for publication by Masquerade in January.

The anthology was originally released by the small press imprint Tal Publications, which launched a second volume during the third week of October, with a US\$8.50 cover price.

Prospective comics writers and artists may save time and effort with the Comics Creators Guild's COLLECTED SUBMISSION GUIDELINES, which includes submission outlines from Marvel USA, DC, Marvel UK, Dark Horse USA, Tundra/Atomeka and Dark Horse International.

Copies cost £1.90, plus an A4 envelope, from CCG Publications, 4/394 Streatham High Road, London, SW16 6HX. A guide to contracts and a selection of sample scripts are both currently in preparation.

Leigh Kennedy, Sara Maitland, Jane Yolen, Patricia A McKillip and Ellen Kushner are among the contributors to THE WOMEN'S PRESS BOOK OF NEW MYTH AND MAGIC, edited by Heien Windrath and published on 4 November, price £6.99.

Featuring short fiction and extracts from longer works, the anthology aims to explore both the relationship between women and myth, and its influence upon their interaction with the "real" world.

John Clute and Peter Nicholls, editors of the revised ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION, have reportedly severed their editorial ties over the planned fantasy sequel.

Nicholls, who received a Hugo Award for editing the sf volume's first edition, has reportedly set his own imprint with his wife, the Australian editor Clare Coney; Peppertree Books will package his version, tentatively called THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FANTASY AND

SUPERNATURAL FICTION, to run 625-750,000 words.

Clute's rival, according to the October edition of LOCUS, would be much shorter than either the current reference work or Nicholls' planned sequel, probably under 500,000 words. Unlike his former colleague, Clute has a publisher on line, the British wing of Little, Brown.

FORGOTTEN FUTURES is a new "Scientific Romances" role-playing game released as shareware by author Marcus Rowland; the disk includes rules, Rudyard Kipling's original "ABC" stories, a worldbook for the anthology and a sample adventure.

"To view it," Rowland explains, "you'll need a PC compatible computer with about 1MB of disk space, and programs to view ASCII text and GIF files. The files should work on any type of computer that can read PC disks, but at the moment they're in a compressed format, and you'll need a PC to get them apart."

Registration costs £5.00/US\$10.00 or the equivalent of £10.00 elsewhere; registered users will receive the second collection, scheduled next Easter, which is based upon stories by George Griffith (all six of which will appear on the disk) eventually rewritten into the novel HONEYMOON IN SPACE. For full details, contact Marcus Rowland at 22 Westbourne Park Villas, London, W2 5EA.

WARLOCK: THE ARMAGEDDON, Trimark's sequel to 1989's WARLOCK, took a disappointing US\$1.7M across 1320 US screens during its first week; a straight-to-video UK release seems likely. In comparison, THE FUGITIVE took US\$161.4M in its first eight weeks, 1993's top box office hit behind JURASSIC PARK, which has grossed US\$324.2M over 16 weeks in America and £4.1M over 11 weeks in Britain.

The Super Nintendo JURASSIC PARK spin-off was released in the UK in October, priced at £54.99.

Kingsley Amis' supernatural black comedy THE GREEN MAN took tenth place in BBC drama series sales over the past five years, a list headed by the political thriller HOUSE OF CARDS, which brought in more than £500,000 worldwide. BBC Enterprises raised a total of £60 million last year through foreign sales.

In a bid to beat video piracy, Warner Home Video reintroduced the Macrovision copy protection system on its lead releases from mid-September, promising to absorb the extra cost rather than passing it on to the video trade.

November's UK video rental releases include OCTOBER 32ND, CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT and MINDWARP (all Columbia TriStar, 3 November), FUTURE KICK (CIC, 5 November), MATINEE and TC 2000 (both Guild, 10 November), WITCHBOARD: THE RETURN (20,20, 10 November), BLOODSTONE; SUBSPECIES II (Full Moon, 24

November) and PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT 2 (PolyGram, 24 November). December's include CTHULHU MANSION (First Independent), LIFEPOD (ITC) and the fantasy comedy GROUNDHOG DAY (20, 20).

British sell-through releases during November include two DOCTOR WHO adventures from the BBC archives, RESURRECTION OF THE DALEKS and THE TWO DOCTORS (rrp £10.99 each), and PolyGram's UNIVERSAL SOLDIER (rrp £12.99).

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda include Jonathan Carroll and Tom Holt in January and Anne McCaffrey in February. For full details, telephone the shop on 021 643 1999.

Bernie Evans, newly-appointed assistant to Intersection's co-chair Martin Easterbrook, is seeking volunteers to run a "fan fayre" at the 1995 world science fiction convention in Glasgow.

"We have this enormous empty hall," she reports, "which we have to fill with all sorts of interesting items, like food areas, bar areas, comfy seats, static displays, interactive items, signing sessions, moon-shots, well, perhaps not moon-shots but I'm sure you'll be getting the picture.

"It's never been done at a British worldcon, and we're all very excited by it, and keen to make it work. So, I need your brains, your ideas, your bodies, especially your bodies. Eventually, we'll be choosing a division head and staff to put ideas into action, obtain sponsorship, blackmail the Scots Marines Pipe Band, or whatever. If you'd like to be a part of all this, or know a man who will, or have any ideas, however outrageous, contact me at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel. 021 558 0997).

"If you can't get involved right now, but would like to do so nearer the day, let me know. Right now, it's all in a state of flux, and you won't be dragged into anything without further consultation; I just want names of willing victims (I mean volunteers), so I have a pool of bodies to call on. If you want to volunteer generally, rather than for the Fan Fayre specifically, then please contact Kathy Westhead at 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex, UB5 4BU (tel. 081 422 9895).

"By the way, if you're one of those saying 'They're doing it all wrong', then get in touch as well, and tell us *why* and *how* we're doing it all wrong; we'd like the benefit of your experience and your ideas."

Warner Home Video was named distributor of the year at the British Videogram Association Trade Awards on 6 October, whilst the "marketing campaign" category was won by Disney's promotion of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

William Nygaard, the Norwegian publisher of Salman Rushdie's fantasy novel THE SATANIC VERSES, was shot in the back and seriously wounded in Oslo on 11

October, an attack which is strongly suspected to be linked to the Iranian *fatawa* ("death order" against Rushdie and his collaborators. The book's Japanese translator was attacked on camera in 1991 and stabbed to death shortly afterwards.

Lavinia Carey, formerly with the Cotton Council International, succeeded Norman Abbott as director general of the British Videogram Association on 1 November.

Congratulations to Linda Lancaster and Andromeda's Chris Monk, who were married at the Mount Zion Baptist Church, Rossendale, on 9 October. Guests included the horror writer Joel Lane, DR WHO artist Peter Welbank, Steve and Ann Green.

Richard Standage and Helena Bowles' Smethwick home was targeted again by burglars on 10 October. This time, they were able to pinpoint the time of the break-in with some accuracy - between 3pm and 9pm, whilst they were at Tony Berry's home in nearby Oldbury, helping Martin Tudor collate the final print run of CRITICAL WAVE #32.

Fortunately Berry, a master locksmith, installed new locks following their first burglary earlier this year; having gained access through a small upstairs window, the intruders were unable to exit through any of the downstairs doors or windows and left through the same window after stealing a telephone answering machine and VCR. They also emptied rubbish on the floor, apparently in frustration.

Both devices are replaceable, but the VCR contained a tape of the closing episodes of DROP THE DEAD DONKEY's second season. Anyone able to help replace this is asked to telephone them on 021 558 7591.

Christian Nyby, whose official directorial debut was the 1951 sf classic THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD, died on 17 September, aged 80. His son and grandson, Christian Nyby II and III, are both tv directors.

Although the film's producer, Howard Hawks, denied for many years that he had directed most of the film himself and given his former editor the credit, Hawks admitted the truth shortly before his death in 1977. Nyby directed four further films during 1957-67, the last, FIRST TO FIGHT, a World War II drama intended to bolster the morale of troops in Vietnam.

First Independent, whose current releases include TOM & JERRY: THE MOVIE and LAWNMOWER MAN; DIRECTOR'S CUT, has announced the death of its production manager, Lorraine Phillips. She joined the company in 1987.

Bob Shaw had to cancel the latest of his infamous "serious scientific talks", due at Novacon 23, after being admitted to Wakefield General Hospital in October with bowel cancer. To fill the gap, the BSF6's Al Johnston was drafted in to present his first live "Phannish Fizzicks".

**BOOK
REVIEWS**

THE BROTHEL IN ROSENSTRASSE By Michael Moorcock
Phoenix, 191 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Set in Mirenburg circa 1900, Moorcock takes us on a tour of the senses. This era, envisaged as a prosperous, cultured, civilised time, hides the truth of the class divide. Moorcock chooses the easy option with his rich Count enjoying the pleasures money buys. Hiding behind the sensuality and diversity obtainable to the well off, Moorcock explores these pleasures to the full.

The obvious setting of a brothel, with its unique surroundings and discreet atmosphere, provides Moorcock's base. Von Bek (the Count) enjoying the delights of his sixteen year old mistress, Alexandra, expands both their horizons at Frau Schmetterling's house. This becomes home as civil war shatters the peace of Mirenburg and the populace feels the distress of a siege.

Complex, diverse and exploring the sensual, the story expresses the shallow nature of the well to do; their concern with themselves and their pleasures outweighing the needs of others. Moorcock fools the reader with his elaborate prose explaining the delights. One must avoid the pomp and see below his rich drappings to the ordinary folk - those Von Bek looks on as amusing or there only to serve him - to see real life. Moorcock's fantasy may prove popular for its well conceived characters; those of the fashionable society, the noble lesbian, the revolutionary - all appear and are fitted into their niche. However, if life existed like this it only explains the rise of revolution and the anger of the masses. A poor excuse for a sex romp.

VIRTUAL LIGHT by William Gibson
Viking, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

With its haunting opening image of aerial gunships hovering over a chaotic Mexico City, this masterly novel plunges us into a near-future world of high plausibility, evoked in prose that seems to effortlessly combine hip slanginess with the coolest elegance and precision.

The USA has fallen apart, North and South California existing as separate entities. The rich lead lives of designer self-indulgence, largely oblivious to the growing squalor and poverty that surround them. Cigarette smoking is illegal and a cure for AIDS has been developed, indirectly giving rise to a bizarre religious cult. Yes, things are pretty grim, but the novel itself isn't. In fact it is the most straight-forwardly enjoyable book Gibson has yet produced.

The plot, concerning a female motorcycle courier's accidental theft of a pair of computer enhanced sunglasses containing the key to a possible remodelling of San Francisco, and a suspended cop's pursuit of her, is far from original. Surprisingly little is made of the technology. What makes the book so good is Gibson's absolute sureness of touch, whether in the grittily poetic descriptions of urban landscape or the consistently sharp and funny dialogue. The scenes of physical action and suspense are as well-judged and electrifying as one might expect, but even more impressive is the considerable cast of eccentric yet wholly believable characters, from a kind-hearted cultist "excommunicated" for watching David Cronenberg movies to a bemused Japanese researcher attempting to understand the decline of America.

Some critics have suggested that Gibson's work is becoming increasingly trivial as it becomes increasingly stylish, and it is true that there is nothing here terribly profound. Nonetheless, within its limitations one could hardly imagine a more superbly artistic achievement. The late Graham Greene used to describe some of his novels as "entertainments", works recycling themes from his weightier books in a more relaxed and populist manner. *VIRTUAL LIGHT* is just such an entertainment - and a brilliantly diverting one at that.

THE LAST OF THE RENSHAI by Mickey Zucker Reichert
Millennium, 518 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The blurb on this book states "...A new fantasy epic begins...", it is certainly an epic but new? Not really. It is a fairly formulaic story concerning a prophesy that a Renshai warrior will become the Champion of the Great War. The Renshai are a race of Warriors who live only for glorious death in battle. They are under sentence of execution for their over zealousness in battle. It is believed that the Renshai were wiped out when their tribe was attacked by Northmen but one lone boy, Rache, escaped. Rache grew up a

hunted man, the last of his tribe. He found a home with Santagathi, the Westlands master strategist, eventually becoming Captain of the guard. Rache's chance of becoming the Great War's Champion suffers a major setback when he is attacked by Garn, a rebellious slave-gliadiator, and is paralysed from the waist down. The Renshai believe that anyone who possesses their skills at swordplay becomes Renshai themself, so when Rache begins to teach Mitrian, the Daughter of Santagathi, the Renshai swordskills he places her under sentence of death, as she becomes a very skilled swordswoman and hence Renshai.

Mitrian craves excitement and adventure and when her Father won't take her skills seriously she frees Garn in a fit of pique, and they flee Northwards. Rache blames himself and follows, vowing to bring Mitrian home. But the other players in the game of the Great War take a hand. The Northlands have always been guarded or overseen by four wizards; North, South, East and West. The wizard of the South, Carcophan, is the one who wants all Renshai dead because he wants his Champion to be the victor of the Great War. Trilless of the South is in direct conflict with Carcophan but chooses no champion. The wizards of East and West are traditionally neutral, tending to look after the interests of all the people. When Carcophan pre-empts the Great War Trilless has to quickly find a Renshai to be her Champion, but neither a cripple nor a woman could possibly rally her armies, so who is the mysterious Renshai Champion?

As I said a fairly formulaic fantasy, good wizards, bad wizards, a hunted hero, a petulant spoiled girl becoming a heroine and a mighty battle to decide the fate of the Northlands. Nothing really original but told with a lot of style, it has believable and sympathetic characters and it certainly is an epic in scope and size, a massive volume that could have benefited from a little judicious pruning in places to tone down the prose, which tends towards the purple in places. Nonetheless a story worth reading.

ANTI-ICE By Stephen Baxter
HarperCollins, 280 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A novel, written with some verve, in the style of "Scientific Romance" popularised by Wells and Verne; Baxter expounds the Victorian ethos. The gentlemen's club attitude prevalent among English explorers or governors provides ample ammunition for Baxter's startling scientific achievements from the Anti-Ice of

the title. Proving harmless if kept cold, this volatile element explodes with phenomenal force reminiscent of nuclear power, giving the British world dominance through technology - and fear. Who could stand against weaponry of such power?

The initial point is, as such force is unleashed to curtail the Crimean war Britain is feared, yet the power is developed for technological marvels: monorails speed the populace between the cities of the world, vehicles of all sorts are thus propelled, industries power their machinery this way. Sir Josiah Traveller's ingenuity in the application of Anti-Ice provides many uses.

Partly the story of Ned Vicers (who grew up with the knowledge of what Anti-Ice did to Sebastopol, and its more peaceful luxuries) and his development as a civil servant in the Foreign Office, and his involvement with Traveller. Their chance meeting leads to startling adventures which involve war and the flight aboard the Phaeton to the moon.

Scientifically well thought out, superbly set in the period of, and explained in terms of, Victorian expansionism (politically and technologically) Baxter reveals a sparkling creativity that ignites the imagination. The characters, whilst self-indulgent (Victorian England?) interact in cleverly abstract ways - Vickers imagining the "perfect" Francoise to be a victim, whilst she proves something else entirely; Travellers' constant mix-up with Vickers name (Wickers) all prove entrancing.

After the well built climax leaves us questioning mankind's lot, Baxter leads us into his final irony which fittingly concludes the adventure. Here Baxter adds another feather to his cap.

A MILLION OPEN DOORS By John Barnes
Millennium, 314 pp, £14.99 h/b (£10.99 c format)
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A witty and expansive story telling the diverse nature of the mankind as new planets are colonised, each culture developing uniquely according to its own criteria. So, with the invention of instantaneous travel the numerous cultures are reunited - but too quickly, it seems, as differing worlds must come to terms with each other.

The story opens on Nou Occitan, a world whose culture encompasses the troubadour and where art is the expression of breeding. This overbearing position produces people of narcissistic shallowness, concerned with clothes and the beauty of the moment. They are brought down to Earth with the arrival of

the springer, allowing instant movement to any other springer on any world. The hero Giraut Leones becomes involved after his lover is unfaithful and to prove himself, suicide or exile being the cultural expectation, he chooses to leave for Caledony. Caledony proves archaic, ruled by religious zealots who believe work is what God wants from us: "Work is how He teaches us reason and become thinking beings, because in a moral society the morally correct choice always gets the largest rewards". If it doesn't appear to be rational you can't do it!

Settling down to this Leones decides to set up a Nou Occitan centre for the Arts, giving courses in his own cultural background. Once he has persuaded the authorities that it's rational, he begins work. Several things occur - he realises the Caledony people have been taught to suppress irrational behaviour, such as art, music and poetry and they are fearful of showing emotion. To make things worse radical elements, who also chose to enrol at the Centre, begin to cause trouble by preferring Leones arts to their own and expressing themselves. The authorities clamp down and oppress the people, thus causing further revolutionaries to come out into the open and civil war to occur.

An excellent story, and superbly told. I loved the counter balance between the societies, and Leones slow realisation of his pomposity and shallow character. The handling of the crises on Caledony is marvellously written: the take over by the hidebound traditionalists and their subsequent dogmatic stance against change was a joy. The opposite reactionary movement based on the Arts wanting more freedom but unsure just how to get it is delightful. Overall a witty, well balanced and compelling novel.

MORNINGSTAR by Peter Atkins
HarperCollins, 287 pp, £4.99, p/b .

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

A man fights for his life against a knife-wielding assailant in a grim corrida played out on a polythene sheeted killing ground. Mutilated corpses appear with a frequency seemingly too great for a lone killer, yet all marked out by the word "morningstar" in their own blood. A reporter begins to follow a trail which may reveal the murderer. So far this could be just your run-of-the-mill serial killer next door, but soon other disturbing factors emerge which indicate a supernatural element - death caused by a sharp impaling pole, and mouths stuffed with garlic (well

okay, I suppose they could have fallen on their chopsticks in a Szechuan restaurant, but professor Van Helsing has to be high on the list of suspects too).

Just when you expect a drawn-out search for the crazed vampire killer the emphasis shifts and, in a manner which strained my belief somewhat, the reporter comes face to face with the killer and hears his story. From that point on the supernatural elements come into focus and a struggle is played out in dreams by the victims' ghosts, with a final showdown on top of a skyscraper.

So, does it work? Nope - well at least not for me. The elements fail to come together despite frequent bits of decent writing - although the author is clearly trying for ambiguity rather than the good versus evil monochrome. The multiple viewpoints throughout the book are not effective in building identification with any individual and the killer, who should be one of the most interesting characters, comes across as one dimensional and strangely boring. There are plenty of better vampire/detective novels to choose from. Try Lucius Shepard's *THE GOLDEN*.

THE CHRONICLES OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey
Bantam, 256 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is a series of five short stories chronicling those events in the history of Pern which don't warrant a full novel. The first story, "The P.E.R.N. Survey", details the original survey team's landing on a newly discovered planet and passing it as fit for colonisation. We even learn how Pern got its name. The second story, "The Dolphin's Bell", tells of the mass evacuation from the southern continent when the volcanoes erupted at landing. The story is told from the point of view of James Tillek and goes into detail about the relationship between the meta-synth enhanced dolphins and their partners. Now this is the one story in the whole anthology that I would like to see expanded into a full novel length. I would like to know more about those wonderful dolphins.

Thirdly we have "The Ford of Red Hanrahan". This covers the period when Fort Hold is becoming overcrowded and people start to branch out on their own. It also gives us a small insight into the life in the first weyr. More detail of the first weyr is given in the fourth story, "The Second Weyr". This story details the foundation of Benden Weyr as told from the point of view of Torene, Gold Alaranth's rider.

The final and longest story, "Rescue Run", tells us just why Pern has not been officially contacted by the Earth Federation since its colonisation. The reason is that survivors of the mass evacuation from landing sent a probe to the federation and a ship was diverted to Pern on a rescue run. The team found eleven colonists who said they were the only survivors after attacks from thread.

As I have said, I feel only one tale "The Dolphin's Bell", deserves expanding, but the other tales give us a little more insight into the early years of Pern. This prequel (as opposed to *MORETA*) is well worth the journey back into Pern's past. *Don't* miss this if you are a fan of Pern and its dragons.

NEW WORLDS 3 Edited by David Garnett
Gollancz, 219 pp, £6.99, Magazine

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Garnett and Gollancz between them are attempting another revival of the influential magazine which in the sixties almost created the New Wave on its own. In fact, this is identified on the flyleaf as Vol. 62 No. 219 in a continuous, if hardly unbroken, series.

In times gone by *NEW WORLDS* was dedicated to the new, the experimental and the avant-garde. Times have changed, so has changed with them, and there is precious little avant-garde here. What is here instead is a handful of very forgettable stories, recycling dull unoriginal ideas in dull boring prose. Fortunately there are a couple of worthwhile exceptions; a near cyberpunk story by rising star Paul J McAuley and a contribution from an author new to me, Peter F Hamilton.

Then there is John Clute's review "Science Fiction Novels of the Year", in which he appears to be telling us what happened that was worthwhile in 1991. It is difficult to be sure what he is trying to tell us, as what he says takes second place to the way he says it, so that the thin veins of approval are buried deep beneath the strata of self-consciously intellectual prose, making the useful information very hard to extract.

Incidentally, I notice that each issue of the new *NEW WORLDS* is priced a pound more than the last, and number three is conspicuously thinner as well. We have been promised "at least four" issues - if the trend towards less and less costing more and more continues beyond four, what could and should have been a worthwhile project will be liable to disappear in two directions simultaneously from a market which was precariously limited to start with. A pity in some ways, but maybe for the best.

THE VOR GAME by Lois McMaster Bujold
Pan, 342 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This episode in the career of Miles Vorkosigan is set between "The Mountains of Mourning" in *BORDERS OF INFINITY* and *ETHAN OF ATHOS*. It covers the period immediately following Miles' graduation from the Academy. Miles hoped he would be given a ship-board posting but he is given the post of Chief Meteorology Officer on an Infantry training base up in the Arctic Circle of his homeworld of Barrayaran. On this posting he manages to loose a very expensive piece of equipment, discover a victim of accidental death and take a major role in a mutiny. This last action, although officially has Miles dismissed from the service, unofficially has him attached to Imperial Security.

Miles finds himself on his way to persuade his former colleagues in the Dendarii Mercenaries to remove themselves from the Hegen Hub area. This would then prevent the system being annexed by the Cetagandans, enemies of Barrayaran, and give them a direct route to the Barrayaran homeworld. A simple enough mission that gets a trifle complicated when Miles comes across his cousin Gregor. The problem being that Gregor is the Barrayaran Emperor and has managed to get himself sold as a slave. Miles must complete his mission, rescue his cousin and get him home in one piece. And all this taking place in an area under threat of interstellar war.

I must admit I really like the stories of Miles Vorkosigan they combine action with humour, all told in a very stylish manner by a deserved Hugo and Nebula winner.

HOST by Peter James
Gollancz, 475 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

Even the front cover of this novel reveals the author's (or at any rate the publisher's) desire to attract readers of Robin Cook style medical thriller-chillers, and indeed they will find it fairly indicative of the contents.

Joe Messenger, a scientist involved in the study of cryonics (the science of freezing living things - see the Government papers on VAT for fuel bills for an ambitious treatment of this) and artificial intelligence, is seeking a breakthrough to resolve the dilemmas of cell damage and memory storage. A brilliant and terminally ill research student comes into his life, and he indulges in an extra-marital fling, against the advice of ARCHIVE, his very human

computer programme. The student believes she possesses a possible way round the preservation of memory.

Inevitably disaster strikes, Messenger finds himself plunged into an ominous turn of events as ARCHIVE takes on a more sinister aspect and begins to threaten both his and family's safety against a background of cryonics work and legal argument. He begins to accept the unimaginable truth, and is forced to fight for his son's life against faceless forces.

Peter James declared at the beginning his intent to set the novel in the present to give it greater authenticity, and he produces some of his better writing in detailing the lives of the central characters. However, I felt strongly that the sf elements were merely plot devices, and was left thinking that I had seen John Varley and William Gibson tackle similar themes much more convincingly. There isn't much of a feel for the strangeness of artificial intelligence from the human tones and very mechanistic glitches of ARCHIVE. I should declare a personal bias, I dislike writers who "borrow" science fictional elements in order to liven up their story without going beyond the props to examine issues with sensitivity.

All things considered, if I describe this as "Hal 9000 meets FATAL ATTRACTION" (quite some parallels there!), in the words of Robin Cook, you have a fair idea of what to expect of this. Me, I hoped for more but, despite some competent writing, was disappointed.

**BIRMINGHAM
SCIENCE FICTION
GROUP:
COMMITTEE POSTS
1994**

by Bernie Evans

With the A.G.M. looming on the 21st of January 1994 it's time for all you enthusiastic members to send in your nominations for Committee posts. You can, of course, nominate from the floor at the meeting if you wish, but if you KNOW you will be standing, send in your written nomination (and platform

of no more than 250 words) so it can be printed in the January edition of BRUM GROUP NEWS for everyone to see.

Written nominations must reach Martin Tudor by the 5th of January 1994. He can be contacted either at the Christmas Party or by post to 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

So, what positions are there?

CHAIRMAN

Will chair and keep order at all meetings, and will also hold regular committee meetings (currently on the Wednesday following the Brum Group meeting). Will contact speakers, arrange accomodation where necessary and ensure they get to the meeting on time.

SECRETARY

Should be able to type, attend all committee meetings and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee Members. Likewise the A.G.M. or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

TREASURER

If you don't know what a treasurer does, don't bother to apply!

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Has to produce the newsletter every month. Access to a computer and desktop publishing software and/or a word processor is an advantage, but not a necessity, a typewriter and a pair of scissors will suffice. The ability to type AND meet a monthly deadline ARE a necessity, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

PUBLICITY OFFICER

Will produce A4 posters, A5 flyers, and so on for meetings, and arrange for them to be displayed in local shops, libraries, and as many other outlets as possible. Will also produce general publicity for the Group, and contact radio and tv if necessary. Enthusiasm and the ability to produce new IDEAS are an important factor.

In addition two other ORDINARY MEMBERS may be appointed by the Committee any time during the year at the discretion of the Committee.

So, that's who we need. Which do YOU want to do?