

BRUM GROUP NEWS

February 1994

Issue 269

*The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss & Harry Harrison)*

GROUP CHAIRMAN - BERNIE EVANS, SECRETARY - RICHARD STANDAGE, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
TREASURER - HELENA BOWLES, PUBLICITY OFFICER - STEVE JONES,
ORDINARY MEMBERS - MICK EVANS & DAVID HUNTER, NOVACON 24 CHAIRMAN - RICHARD STANDAGE.

This month's speaker is **MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN**

who will deliver a talk entitled
"Fantasy versus SF: Round 3"

on Friday 18th February 1994

7.45 for 8.00pm

Admittance: Members £2.50 Visitors £3.75

Michael Scott Rohan is half-French and half-Scottish and lives in Leeds with his wife.

His first novel, *RUN TO THE STARS*, was followed by the *Winter of the World* trilogy and the first three novels in the *Spiral* series, *CHASE THE MORNING*, *THE GATES OF NOON* (VGSF, £4.99) and *CLOUD CASTLES* (Gollancz, £15.99, £8.99).

See inside for further information about the work of Michael Scott Rohan and reviews of *THE GATES OF NOON* and *CLOUD CASTLES*.



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 £10.00 per person, or £13.50 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the treasurer Helena Bowles 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 GOLLANZ SF PREVIEW #3 (Autumn, 1993) for the details about Michael Scott Rohan on the cover and to BERNIE EVANS for the information used inside this issue; thanks also to BERNIE for typing the Book Reviews; STEVE GREEN, LOCUS, MATRIX, WHAT'S ON and others for the news in the Jophan Report and Events listing and, of course, TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

14-19 FEBRUARY 1994: *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET* Grand Theatre, Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton. Call the Box Office on 0902 29212 between 10am and 8pm.

18 FEBRUARY 1994: MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN will deliver a talk entitled *"Fantasy versus SF: Round 3"* to the BSFG in the upstairs function room of the Australian Bar, 7.45pm for 8.00pm.

18 FEBRUARY 1994: *GROUNDHOG DAY* and *THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN* will be showing at 4.15pm, 8.30pm and 2.00pm, 6.10pm respectively at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277. The late night show at 11.00pm features David Cronenberg's adaptation of Burrough's *THE NAKED LUNCH*.

19 FEBRUARY 1994: *CAT PEOPLE* Paul Schrader's remake of the 1941 classic starring Nastassia Kinski will be showing at 11.00pm, followed by *THE HUNGER* starring Catherine Deneuve at 1.15am, at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

22 FEBRUARY 1994: *ROGER CORMAN'S FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND* based on the novel by Brian Aldiss and starring John Heard and Bridget Fonda will be showing 3.25pm and 6.50pm at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

23-25 FEBRUARY 1994: *DEMOLITION MAN* starring Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes will be showing at the Midlands Art Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 021 440 3838 for details.

24 FEBRUARY 1994: *THE BEAST* Walerian Borowczyk's reworking of Beauty and the Beast will be showing, in its reissued, uncut form at 2.30pm, 4.30pm, 6.30pm and 8.30pm at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

24 FEBRUARY 1994: MOLLY BROWN reading at The 3R's, 2 Crouch End Hill, London, N8. £3.00 (£2.00 concessionary). Call 081 691 7481.

26 FEBRUARY 1994: *CATCH 22* and *SLAUGHTERHOUSE 5* form the late-night double bill (11.00pm and 1.15am respectively) at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

26 FEBRUARY 1994: *INTERSECTION PARTY* at the Carrick Hotel, Glasgow, 8pm. Contact: Jacky Grüter-Andrew, Intersection, Admail 336, Glasgow, G2 1BR.

27 FEBRUARY 1994: *THE SACRIFICE* Andrei Tarkovsky's tale of a pact with God to save the world from nuclear destruction, showing at 4.25pm and 8.30pm at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

1-5 MARCH 1994: *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: the musical fairytale* starring Kim Hartman (Helga from 'Allo, 'Allo) and Ian Williams (Adam from Neighbours). Grand Theatre, Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton. Call the Box Office on 0902 29212 between 10am and 8pm.

2-3 MARCH 1994: *BRAVE NEW WORLD* by Aldous Huxley, adapted by Roger Parsley, will be performed by the Snap Theatre Company at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon. Prices £4-£9. Call 0789 295623 for further details.

4-6 MARCH 1994: **MASQUE III** the third British costume convention, Shakis Victoria Hotel, Nottingham. £25.00 attending, £5.00 supporting. Contact: c/o Mike Percival, 4 Ednaston Court, Yeldersley Lane, Ednaston, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 3BA.

5 MARCH 1994: **THE LOST BOYS** and **THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS** form the late-night double bill (11.00pm and 12.55am respectively) at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

5-6 MARCH 1994: **MICROCON 14** Exeter University. GoH Geoff Ryman, attending £5.00. Contact: 6 Clifton Hill, Exeter, EC1 2DL.

5 MARCH 1994: **DRAGON ISLAND** a new show from the All Electric Theatre Company, featuring the recorded voice of Toyah Willcox as the Sea Hag. Call 0789 295623 for details.

11 MARCH 1994: Herzog's **NOSFERATU THE VAMPIR** and Polanski's **DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES** form the late-night double bill (11.00pm and 1.00am respectively) at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

12-13 MARCH 1994: **SEDUCED AND ABANDONED: THE BODY IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD** Pat Cadigan and Bruce Sterling at the ICA, The Mall, London, SW1. Call 071 930 3647 for further details.

13 MARCH 1994: **METROPOLIS** Fritz Lang's 1926 classic vision of a future world will be showing at 2.00pm, 5.10pm and 8.30pm at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

15-16 MARCH 1994: **BOUNDARY** presented by IOU at the University of Warwick Arts Centre. "Take a step into another world, where disembodied heads glide through canvas ponds, fists fall, figures fly, kings crumble and necks crane. **BOUNDARY** strides across 300 million years in three acts - from before the beginning of anything, through the first experiments in the evolution of life-forms, to the impenetrable rituals of courtly etiquette." Call 0203 524524 for details.

16 MARCH - 9 APRIL 1994: **WILDEST DREAMS** by Alan Ayckbourn will be playing at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon. "This is Real Life, and there are Dreams, where we hide when Real Life gets too much. But if those Dreams ever come true, would we still want to hide? And if so, where? Ayckbourn turns the spotlight on to a seemingly familiar and unexceptional middle England to expose

hobgoblins, elves, dragons and sprites, spirits, bogey men, imps and spooks. A literally fantastic play of the everyday, in turns hilarious, frightening, sad and uplifting." Call 0789 295623 for details.

18 MARCH 1994: **DEMOLITION MAN** and **BLADE RUNNER - THE DIRECTOR'S CUT** form the late-night double bill (11.00pm and 1.10am respectively) on Screen One while Screen 2 shows Russ Meyer's **FASTER PUSSYCAT KILL KILL** and **MUD HONEY** (11.00pm and 12.40am respectively) all at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

19 MARCH 1994: **AUKCON**. Animé con at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Attending £10.00 cheques to "Animé Subscriptions", contact: *Animé UK*, 70 Mortimer Street, London, W1N 7DF.

24 MARCH 1994: **WINGS OF DESIRE** Wim Wenders' tale of an angel who chooses to become mortal will be showing at 3.00pm and 8.30pm at The Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham, tel: 021 643 7277.

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.

26-31 MARCH 1994: **LES VISITEURS** the largest grossing film of all time in France. Described as a cross between Monty Python and Blackadder this comedy tells how Knight Godefroy in 1122 returns from the war and due to a witch's curse, accidentally kills his future father-in-law. Eager to rectify this mistake he seeks third rate magic help and finds himself and his faithful squire in an incomprehensible 20th century with only Old French in which to communicate. Showing at the Midlands Art Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 021 440 3838 for details.

1-4 APRIL 1994: **SOU'WESTER**. 45th UK national sf con. Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. GoHs: Diane Duane, Neil Gaiman, Barbara Hambly, Peter Morwood. Attending is £27.00 (£25.00 for paid-up pre-supporting), Supporting £13.50, children aged 9-14 (on 1 April 1994) £13.50, £2.00 for "babies & beasts" until 14 March 1994. Contact: Chris Bell, 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

25-30 APRIL 1994: **GODSFELL** at the Grand Theatre, Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton. Call the Box Office on 0902 29212.

30 APRIL - 1 MAY 1994: **COME-BACK CON.** The first Belgian BeNeLuxcon in a long time at the Rubenianum House, Antwerp, Belgium. Attending 750BF, Supporting 650BF until 31 March 1994, children up to 6 free, age 6-12 half-price. Contact: Alfons J Maes, Zand-kapelweg 18, B-2200 Noorderwijk, Belgium.

20-22 MAY 1994: **MEXICON 6 - THE PARTY.** 10th anniversary celebration of the first Mexican and the 20th of Tynescon 1. Friday night is party night, the formal programme begins on Saturday and finishes in the early hours of Sunday morning. The Hertford Park Hotel, Stevenage. Attending £9.50, room rates £19.50 per person twin/double and £22.50 single. Contact: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

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) before 1 May 1994 then £25.00 (£23.00). 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.

21-24 OCTOBER 1994: **ALBACON '94.** Central Hotel, Glasgow. Attending £25.00, supporting £15.00 until 31 April 1994. Contact: M. Drayton, 10 Atlas Road, Springburn, Glasgow, G21 4TE.

4-6 NOVEMBER 1994: **NOVACON 24** the Brum Group's own sf convention at the Royal Angus Hotel. Guest of Honour Graham Joyce. Attending membership £20.00 (before Easter). Cheques payable to "Novacon 24" should be sent to: CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

11-13 NOVEMBER 1994: **UNIFICATION '94** multi-media convention at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. *QUANTUM LEAP, STAR TREK, DR WHO, ROBIN OF SHERWOOD, STAR WARS, V, TIME TRAX, DSG* 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: Confabul-

ation, 3 York Street, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH.

24-28 AUGUST 1995: **INTERSECTION,** 53rd worldcon, 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.

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 BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor.

THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER

MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN was born in 1951. An Oxford-educated law graduate and author, whose nonfiction books include an introduction to home computing and a study of the Viking era; he also reviews for *OPERA NOW*. He began publishing sf with stories like "The Insect Tapes" in *ARIES 1* (anthology, 1979) edited by John Grant (Paul Barnett). His first novel was *RUN TO THE STARS* (dated 1982 but 1983), signed Mike Scott Rohan, a promising Scots-in-space thriller featuring relativistic weapons and an alien message, with nasty Earth bureaucrats ready to attack their own space colony. Then, like several UK writers of the period, he began genre crossing; most of his fiction since has been fantasy, beginning with *THE ICE KING* (1986, *BURIAL RITES* in the USA, 1987) with Allan Scott under the joint pseudonym "Michael Scot", a supernatural

thriller involving Norse mythology. There followed the more notable *The Winter of the World* trilogy - *THE ANVIL OF ICE* (1986), *THE FORGE IN THE FOREST* (1987) and *THE HAMMER OF THE SUN* (1988) - set in an invented frozen world imagined in some depth; though sometimes floridly rhetorical, it may be his best work. A young smith sets himself against the entropic Powers; quests follow; spring comes, but at a cost. Rohan then made a partial return to sf, in the romantic science fantasy *CHASE THE MORNING* (1990) and its sequel *THE GATES OF NOON*, where real and magical alternate worlds intersect, and a computer program can become a spell. A second collaboration with Scott, *A SPELL OF EMPIRE: THE HORNS OF TARTARUS* (1992), was published under their own names.

[*The above comes from an entry by Peter Nicholls in Clute & Nicholls' THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION (Orbit, £45.00).]*

JOPHAN REPORT #71

by Martin Tudor

I'd like to send best wishes to Novacon 25 Chair Tony Morton who was admitted to hospital as this issue went to press. He will be out of action for a short time undergoing ultra sound treatment for gall stones, and I'm sure all of you will join with me in wishing him a swift recovery.

Congratulations to Peter and Anne-Marie Wright on the birth of Rachel Marie Wright at 7.48 on 8 February, weighing 8lb 15oz. Both mother and daughter are doing fine, but father feeling a bit stressed.

Intersection has announced that it will be hosting monthly public meetings at the Wellington public house, near Waterloo Station, London, on the third Friday of each month. Third Friday eh, funny that date seems to ring a bell...

The Ali Baba restaurant in Ladypool Road have come up with a novel idea to attract more business. If you call them they will collect you from your local pick up point (pub, Brum Group meeting, cinema or home), take you to the restaurant, serve you a Shik Kebab (or samosa), balti of your choice, sweet or coffee, then return you and your party back to your local or a further destination.

All for £10.00 per head! Other menus are available at £12.95 and £15.00 per head. The catch? The minimum is 10 and maximum 60 people... For further details call 021 449 4929.

Joseph Cotton died on 6 February, aged 88. His films included *BARON BLOOD* and *SHADOW OF A DOUBT* and he worked with Orson Welles on the infamous *WAR OF THE WORLDS* radio broadcast.

Telly Savalas died on 22 January, aged 70. His films included *HORROR EXPRESS* and *LISA AND THE DEVIL*.

The March issue of *INTERZONE* #81 includes fiction by Geoff Ryman, Peter Garratt, Cherry Wilder, Larry Tritten and Gary Gibson, along with interviews with Terry Pratchett and Peter Atkins, and Brian Stableford on *DRACULA*.

Faber & Faber are offering free travel for a lifetime in a promotion which started on 1 February and which will run for six months.

Faber are supporting A Lifetime's Free Travel with a £200,000 budget, press advertising and newspaper coverage.

Customers who buy Faber titles at participating bookshops will receive bonds that allow them to enter a monthly draw. Each month four bond holders will win European weekends and five will win £100 worth of books. The four European weekend winners will then have a chance to win trans-Atlantic tickets for two, and these six winners (one for each month of the promotion) will have a chance to win free travel for two for a lifetime, by any normal carrier to any destination.

According to the January issue of *LOCUS* the odds for each of the six monthly winners to win the grand prize are about 500-1. Faber is taking out insurance for protection from such an event (and against the astronomically unlikely possibility of more than one winner).

Bob Shaw has become the editorial consultant for Allison & Busby's new sf list.

Brian Aldiss has sold an sf novel entitled *SOMEWHERE EAST OF LIFE* to US publishers Carroll & Graf for release in the summer of this year. Set in the future it centres around a case of memory-theft and "contains an authentic nineteenth century recipe for Tarantula Schnapps".

FelMail

WORLDS APART!

IT HADN'T been an easy pregnancy, but after five miscarriages she hoped this time there'd be a brother or sister for daughter Marianne.

Three months later she miscarried again and was rushed into hospital. But there were complications. Doctors found she had developed a serious infection.

Anne Gay spent a week on the critical list, and it was a further two weeks before she was allowed to go home, where she spent the next five months coming to terms with the trauma of her loss.

That was ten years ago. Today, divorcee Anne, 41, is a best-selling science fiction author. She works as a language teacher during the day, and shares a comfortable, ramshackle semi-detached house in Acocks Green, Birmingham, with Marianne, aged 14.

International acclaim

She separated from her husband four years ago and the couple were divorced in September last year.

Her first two books *Mindsail* and *The Brooch of Azure Midnight* attracted international critical acclaim, and her latest novel *Dancing On The Volcano* (Orbit, £4.99) has just gone on sale.

And she's boldly gone where few women have gone before as one of only four female sci-fi writers who've succeeded in a traditionally male-dominated genre.

"I nearly died in hospital, says Anne, who works on her books during time off from her full-time job as head of Spanish at Wood Rush School, Hollywood.

"So I thought, right, when I get out of here I'm going to do what I've always wanted to

It took a brush with death to force Anne Gay to realise her dream of becoming a best-selling author. PAM THOMPSON reports.

do — I'm going to try and get some work published.

"Since I was a child, I'd wanted to be a writer, but I'd never had the nerve to send any of my work off to be published. I was just writing for myself."

She plucked up courage and sent off *Wishbone* to the prestigious 1983 Sunday Times Science Fiction Short Story competition, where it won her the runner-up prize.

Next, Orbit snapped up her first book *Mindsail* — only the second publishing house she'd submitted it to.

Anne's books are a mixture of bodice-ripping romance, strong women characters and hard-hitting images of future societies. *Dancing On The Volcano* is about a young girl who destroys enemies on behalf of a futuristic government called the Planet Authorities.

She then falls in love with a young rebel and is forced to protect him from capture. He in turn, has discovered that there is something in the air or earth of the planet which protects its colonists from disease and death.

"I sometimes base my characters on people I know — or someone I've observed on the bus or in the pub, she laughs.

'Now or never'

"And I make sure my future visions are realistic by calling up friends who are either astronomers, biologists and chemists and telling them my ideas. They tell me whether or not they could ever happen.

"Science fiction is about life — it's not just about life round here. I'm fascinated by ideas and this sort of writing lets you explore them externally and internally.

"I suppose in the beginning writing helped me after I got out of hospital. I was very ill for a long time. You never get over a miscarriage, you just feel so guilty that it was all your fault when of course it can happen to anyone.

"But I realised that it was now or never to do something with my life", adds Leicester-born, Anne, who studied French at Manchester University.

There's talk of a television play based on one of her stories, but Hollywood is yet to beckon. "I'm still enjoying myself too much to think of the future. I've met hundreds of people I'd never have got to meet otherwise.

"But I'm not rich by any means! The only treat I've really had is a holiday in France with Marianne.

"I do get a thrill when people recognise me and ask for my autograph, but really I'm just Anne who goes to the pub with her friends!"



■ PAPERBACK WRITER: Science fiction author Anne Gay with daughter Marianne

Romance tops the list

BIRMINGHAM book-worms are more interested in making love than war, their taste in reading has revealed.

Romantic novels have overtaken spy stories as the most popular choice for readers, as a strong sentimental streak has emerged among the nation's book borrowers.

In the popular section Catherine Cookson and Danielle Steel have seen off the challenge of John le Carre and Allstar

Maclean, while Daphne du Maurier reigns supreme in the classics.

Nearly 60 of the 100 most borrowed titles were the work of romantic authors.

Cold War

Experts claimed this change was due to the end of both the Cold War and the hard-hearted 1990s "the era of conquering the world by the shoulder pads and Forsches," according

to novelist and critic Elizabeth Buchan.

It also showed growing concern about the place of love and family values in modern life.

John Carey, professor of English Literature at Oxford University, said: "A lot of people feel lost about moral direction. Literature is traditionally where people go looking for direction."

Even in non-fiction people have shown a passion for books on

human relationships — Andrew Morton's *Diana: Her True Story* was the one most people wanted to read.

'Awful'

Princess Diana's step grandmother, and doyenne of the love story, Dame Barbara Cartland, said: "Suddenly everyone wants real romance. Thank goodness. We have got to get away from that awful sex, sex, sex."

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OFFER ENDS 30th JANUARY 1994

Name: Lorraine Walker who has lost 4 stones and kept it off

ALDRIDGE Friday 6.30pm Aldridge Community Centre Lecture Room, Anchor Meadow, Middlemore Lane	STECHFORD Tues 7.30pm All Saints Ch. Albert Rd
BRIERLEY HILL Tues 7.30pm Brockmoor Comm Assoc, Pensnett Rd, Brockmoor	WARSTOCK Mon 7.30pm Community Centre, Daisy Farm Rd
CASTLE BROMWICH Tues 7.30pm St. Willreds Comm Centre, Shawdale Rd (by Clock Garage)	ACOCKS GREEN Wed 7.30pm Churchill Citizens Club, 1073 Warwick Rd
GREAT BARR Tues 7.15pm Newton St. U.R. Church (Alum Memorial)	BENTLEY Tues 8pm Leisure Pavilion, Bentley Rd North
HARBORNE Thurs 7.30pm Princes Corner Comm Hall, Harborne Park Rd	ERDINGTON Thurs 7.15pm Methodist Centre, Wesley Rd off Station Rd
KIDDERMINSTER Mon 7.30pm Forest Glades Leisure Ctr	HALL GREEN Tues 7.30pm Fox Hollies Leisure Centre, Shirley Rd
KINGSWINFORD Wed 7.30pm Methodist Ch. Market St	QUINTON Wed 7.30pm Quinborne Community Ctr, Ridgeway Rd
PELSALL Mon 7.00pm Comm Centre, Station Rd	SHIRLEY Wed 7.30pm The Welcome Club, Behind Aldi's Stratford Rd
STREETLY Thurs 7.15pm Community Centre, Foley Rd East	SOLIHULL Mon 7.15pm Methodist Ch. Hall Station Approach
SUTTON COLDFIELD Tues 11.00am Methodist Ch. South Parade	TAMWORTH Thurs 7.30pm Mile Oak Hotel, Watling St
	WALSLEY Thurs 7pm "NEW VENUE" Co-op Kenmare Suite 10 Hatherston Rd.

Further information Tel: 021 745 4491 or 353 4663

QUICK BITE

TOP chef Gary Rhodes of The Greenhouse Restaurant, London, often serves this quick and easy treat for his regulars:

Smoked Haddock with Welsh Rarebit
(Serves eight)

8 x 4 oz slices naturally smoked haddock
8 blanched, peeled and sliced tomatoes
Vinaigrette with herbs
Black pepper

WELSH RAREBIT MIX

1lb grated mature cheddar cheese
3 fl oz milk or lager
half oz flour
1 oz dried white breadcrumbs
1 depn dried mustard
2 shakes Worcestershire sauce
Salt and pepper
1 whole egg
2 egg yolks

METHOD

To make the Welsh rarebit mix, mix the grated cheese with milk or lager. Put in a pan and slowly melt together over a low heat, but do not boil. When mixture starts to bubble

CUT OUT AND KEEP

add flour, breadcrumbs and mustard. Cook until the flour has cooked out and the mixture comes away from the side of the pan.

Add Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper. Cool. Combine mixture with eggs and yolks in a blender. Refrigerate for a day.

Cover each slice of haddock with rarebit mix and place under a hot grill to colour slowly. When coloured, cook in the oven for two minutes at 425F/220C/gas mark 7. Lay the tomatoes in a circle on the plate and sprinkle with vinaigrette and pepper. Place haddock on top and serve.

CHAIRMAN'S BIT

by *Bernie Evans*

Hello, we (Martin and I) thought it would be a good idea if I wrote a "Chairman's Bit" this month. Well Martin did anyway, so I agreed, as he is the boss where the newsletter is concerned.

I intend to stand by what I said in my platform last month, and I'm assuming this is what you all want, as no one questioned it or stood against me. The main change (probably the only change) that you will see is in the timing of the meetings. Mindful of what several people have said, as far as is humanly possible the meetings WILL start at 8.00 pm. Of course, if a speaker has travelled a long way and badly needs refreshments, I'm not going to rush him or her through a meal. That wouldn't be fair or very polite, now would it?

Another matter that often raises its head is the question of science fiction, or lack of it, both on the bookshelves and within the Group. I hope to address that problem, and whilst unable to take on multi-national publishers (even my cheek only takes me so far!), I've started by finding a writer to speak to us on that very subject this month, Mike Scott Rohan.

A lot of you approached me after the A.G.M. with ideas for speakers, publicity and so forth. Notes were made, and those I could read the morning after (I was a little drunk) have been taken on board. One thing brought to my attention was that in the past visitors and walk-ins often joined the Group at their very first meeting. Whilst I'm not entirely convinced that this was always the case, the Committee discussed it at some length at our first meeting, especially mindful of the fact that a new Group member is already on the Committee to provide some input. We've decided that a friendly welcome to strangers might help. YOU can do this, yes, YOU. Committee members are often busy at meetings, although we'll be making a special effort in future, but I'm asking you all to keep your eyes open for a newcomer and invite him or her into your conversation.

This is YOUR science fiction Group, not mine, not the Committee's, YOURS. Let's see you all put a little effort into making it grow and develop. Keep those ideas coming in, offer to organise an event, if an event is organised bloody well come to it, tell your friends about us, bring someone along to a meeting, don't behave like a passive recipient of what the Committee provides, be a DOER.

Now all sing the National Anthem, I know that's what it sounds like, I'm a better rabble-rouser in person than I am in print, so don't let me get loose at a meeting, DO IT!

□□□□□

BOOK REVIEWS



THE GATES OF NOON by Michael Scott Rohan
Gollancz, 319 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Perhaps you have looked at a sunset sky and seen the scattered clouds that resemble

Novacon 24

Guest of Honour

Graham Joyce

author of the acclaimed SF novel DREAMSIDE,
the chilling fantasy HOUSE OF LOST DREAMS
and the award winning DARK SISTER.

WHERE? Most likely the Royal Angus Hotel.

When? Probably 4-6 November 1994.

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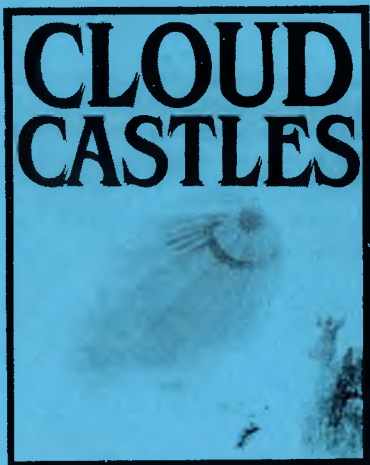
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islands. In *CHASE THE MORNING* Mike Rohan's protagonist, Stephen Fisher, discovered that they did indeed lead to lands of the imagination. Where we live is the Core, solid and dependable, beyond the sunrise is the Spiral and the worlds created by the myths and minds of men. When Steve came back from that first adventure, most of his memories faded and he got on with the business of shaping his career in shipping.

In *THE GATES OF NOON* he is in Bangkok and the Spiral comes to him. He is there because he has run into problems shipping a consignment to Bali. He knew there would be difficulties but he took on the contract because one of the people involved is Jacquie, a woman he once ditched for what turned out to be purely selfish reasons. Steve thinks that if he can ship the first part of the consignment through the Spiral it will break the deadlock. But nothing is quite as easy as it seems in daylight and he finds himself ranged against powers he didn't believe existed.

Although a sequel this is still a cracking and imaginative tale and well worth a read.



CLOUD CASTLES by Michael Scott Rohan
Gollancz, 283 pp, £15.99, h/b, (£8.99 "C" format)
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the third book to chronicle the adventures of Steve Fisher, the first two being *CHASE THE MORNING* and *THE GATES OF*

NOON. All three novels are set slightly in the future and by the time this one starts Steve is a very successful businessman, though his concerns are still shipping and freight. He has devised a system for getting any consignment anywhere in the world far quicker than anyone else. Although this time he has kept contact with the Spiral - the place beyond the sunrise where mythological places exist - again it comes to him where he least expects it. This time it is in the form of a white stallion. Riding into canyons of cloud, Fisher is shot at from a dirigible and his help is requested by a one time associate, Le Stryge. Suspicious, because he had never considered him particularly trustworthy, Steve says no. But unwittingly, he is drawn into the struggle for domination both in the Spiral and in his own world, the social structure of which is beginning to disintegrate.

This book contains some magnificent set pieces (almost Wagnerian in scale) but the links between them are less convincing. This is not the fault of the author, who draws on a wealth of imagination to enhance aspects from earlier novels. The actual writing and characterisation, too, is excellent. The problem lies with the use of the Holy Grail legend as a motif. True, this is indeed an innovative treatment but by choosing it he has automatically put constraints on the shape of the story. This series worked best where the myths were misty and the reader could be tantalised by glimpses through the veil. Here the premise is deeply ingrained and the ultimate interpretation has to remain close to the original. Nevertheless, this is still a powerful fantasy novel and a grand finale for a triptych.

LAST CALL by Tim Powers
HarperCollins, 638 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Brilliant. A compelling story of angst and fighting against odds. Based on the life of the protagonist (Scott Crane) and his struggle to find himself, Powers incorporates the mythology of Tarot to tell the story. His father, in order to become King, uses his two sons to further his influence; but Scott manages to escape with his mother and disappears from the scene. Later, as he grows up, he becomes a professional poker player and learns the truth about the cards and how they control lives. The danger grows as the King chooses to assume the bodies of those he's assumed during a weird Tarot based game leaving Scott little chance but to fight

back somehow. Aided by a neighbour seeking randomness he sets out to seek his stepfather and stepsister to aid him and give him advice. Other would-be Kings (Jacks) intervene by attempting to topple the King - immortal due to his assumption of power, and take his place. The struggle for ultimate power leads to the climax of an exceptional story.

The basic story works well and with the addition of the Tarot and mythologies proves excellent reading. Powers' ability to mix these ingredients - Tarot, gambling, Fisher King, mathematics, chaos theory into one explosive tale leaves the reader applauding his versatility. The whole novel works well, the characters live and breath, so much so you laugh and despair with them as the plots develop. A startlingly good book that leaves you breathless.

THE SPIRIT RING by Lois McMaster Bujold
Pan, 367 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book is a deviation from Bujold's usual offerings, being historical fantasy rather than science fiction. The setting is Montefoglia in sixteenth century Italy, not far from the Swiss border. Fiametta is the daughter of Prospero Beneforte, the best metal smith in the area. She wishes to follow her father's craft and as the story opens she is making a ring which she hopes will reveal her heart's desire. Her father is making a silver salt cellar for the Duke which will neutralise poison. Although in our world, people thought these things were possible, in Fiametta's they could be done and Beneforte could work his magic under licence from the church.

The spirit ring of the title is owned by Lord Ferrante. It holds in thrall an unshriven soul which is forced to obey the owner's commands. When the betrothal feast of Ferrante to the daughter of the Duke of Montefoglia turns into a bloodbath, Beneforte releases the spirit trapped in the ring. Ferrante however desires a replacement and when he hears of Beneforte's death and the fact that his corpse is unburied and unblest he determines that Beneforte will make restitution by his enforced service. In a rash moment, and exasperated by the indecisiveness of Abbot Monreale - the region's spiritual leader - Fiametta, assisted by a Swiss miner, Thur, sets out to thwart Ferrante's plans.

This book is well written, extremely plausible and a good read.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES by Ian McDonald
Gollancz, 248 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A book of short stories from McDonald covering a four year period and eleven very different topics. Somewhat unfamiliar with his work - I only recognised "Rainmaker Cometh" from *NEW EDENS III*. I found some of the stories strange, and uncommunicative. In particular the title story "Speaking in Tongues" proved disjointed and pointless, the pieces not fitting into a recognisable pattern and therefore meaningless.

There are authors with whom people fail to connect, whom they find difficult to follow, and it seems McDonald may prove such a one in my case. Overall the stories are well written and entertain but, for me, an undercurrent kept full enjoyment of the stories away. Each had a point where the narrative felt wrong or proved elusive.

The diversity of the stories in itself provides proof of McDonald's ability, research and his proliferation of ideas; from an unusual use of matter transmitters in "Gardenias", telepathy in "Listen", touching descriptive narrative of Nazism in "Fragments of an Analysis of a case of Hysteria", the future of athletes/athletics in "Winning". He conjures up wonderful vistas. I don't suggest the stories aren't good or entertaining but personal choice leaves this particular reader strangely distant.

GOOD FOOD GUIDE

MARTIN TUDOR is putting together a GOOD FOOD GUIDE to the restaurants, pubs and cafés in Birmingham city centre and the surrounding area. The idea being to update and reproduce it each year for use by Novacon members. Given the average fans preference for Chinese and Indian food at reasonable prices this will be concentrating quite heavily on the "China Town" and "Balti Town" areas, but he would like the GUIDE to include everything from Littlewoods' breakfasts, "greasy spoons", chip shops and pub grub to horrendously expensive Japanese and French cuisine. Reviews should be about 50-150 words in length, include the name (and telephone number if possible) of the establishment, details of location, price range, opening times, acceptable methods of payment and comments on quality and variety of the food, standard of service, etc. Please send your reviews to: 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

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