

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

March 1994

Issue 270

*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, NOVA CON 24 CHAIRMAN - RICHARD STANDAGE.

## THE WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

will be held at the SECC in Glasgow next year. Guests of Honour  
include: GERRY ANDERSON and SAMUEL R DELANEY.

If you want to find out more come to our next meeting on

**Friday 18th March 1994: 7.45 for 8.00pm**

Addressing the Group and answering questions from the floor will be:

JAMES STEEL (Board Member of Intersection, the 1995 British Worldcon,  
responsible for Programming, Fan Fair, Extravaganzas, Operations, and WSFS),

PETER WESTON (Chairman of Seacon, the 1979 British Worldcon,) and

MARTIN TUDOR (Bid Committee Member and Fan Programme organiser of  
Conspiracy, the 1987 British Worldcon).

**Admittance: Members £1.25 Visitors £2.50**

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

The BSGF 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.

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Many thanks this issue to DAVID HUNTER, DAVE WOOD and MICK EVANS for their reports; 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

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.

17 MARCH 1994: *A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT DREAM* the classic version featuring James Cagney, Olivia de Havilland and Mickey Rooney will be screened at the Midlands Art Centre Cinema,

Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 021 440 3838 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.

18-20 MARCH 1994: *GROUNDHOG DAY* showing at the Triangle cinema, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham. Call: 021-359-3979/4192 for further details.

19 MARCH 1994: BOOK SALE at Perry Common Library, Birmingham, from 10am-4pm.

19 MARCH 1994: STAR PARTY hosted by the Birmingham Astronomical Society at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, 7pm-10.30pm. Admission free, everyone welcome. Featuring short talks on Astronomy for beginners; displays by amateur astronomers; advice on telescopes and binoculars; lots of telescopes for you to use; see the Moon's craters and mountains, the great Nebula in Orion, the Andromeda galaxy, star clusters; refreshments available during the evening.

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.

24 MARCH 1994: *I BOUGHT A VAMPIRE MOTORCYCLE* showing at the Triangle cinema, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham. Call: 021-359-3979/4192 for further details.

24-27 MARCH 1994: NATIONAL COMPUTER SHOPPER SHOW at the NEC, Birmingham. For further details call 021-767-4343.

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. Touted

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.

27 MARCH 1994: TOY FAIR at Oak Park Leisure Centre, Lichfield Road, Walsall Wood.

31 MARCH 1994: TOY COLLECTOR'S FAIR at Brierley Hill Civic Hall, Brierley Hill, from 7pm-10pm. Call 021-557-1057 for details.

31 MARCH 1994: *DR STRANGELOVE* showing at the Triangle cinema, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham at 6pm. Call: 021-359-3979/4192 for further details.

1-4 APRIL 1994: *SOU'WESTER*. 45th UK national sf con. Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. CoHs: 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.

2 APRIL 1994: *BRAVE NEW WORLD* the SNAP Theatre production of Aldous Huxley's classic novel premieres at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, B12 9QH. Tickets £6.50/£4.75 call 021-440-3838 for further information.

8-10 APRIL 1994: *BODY SNATCHERS* Abel Ferrara's 1993 remake of the classic paranoid sf tale will be showing at the Triangle cinema, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham. Call: 021-359-3979/4192 for further details.

9 APRIL 1994: *COMIC MART* at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham from midday. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW for further details.

14 APRIL 1994: *TOMMY* showing at the Triangle cinema, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham, 3pm and 7pm. Call: 021-359-3979/4192 for further details.

15 APRIL 1994: PETER F HAMILTON author of *MINDSTAR RISING* and *A QUATUM MURDER* will be

speaking to the Brum Group, 7.45 for 8pm at the Australian Bar, Hurst Street.

16 APRIL 1994: BEER & SKITTLES EVENING at the Hare & Hounds in Redditch, transport laid on from (and back to) Birmingham city centre. Call HELENA BOWLES on 021-558-7591 for further information or speak to her at the March meeting of the Brum Group.

15-17 APRIL 1994: *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* showing at the Triangle cinema, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham. Call: 021-359-3979/4192 for further details.

25-30 APRIL 1994: *GODSPELL* 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, Zandkapelweg 18, B-2200 Noorderwijk, Belgium.

20-22 MAY 1994: *MEXICON 6 - THE PARTY*. 10th anniversary celebration of the first Mexican and the 20th of Tynecon 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.

4 JUNE 1994: *COMIC MART* at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham from midday. Contact: Golden Orbit, 9 Stratford Way, Huntington, York, YO3 9YW for further details.

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.

26 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER: *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET* at the Birmingham Hippodrome call 021-622-7486 for booking information.

30 SEP - 2 OCT 1994: *FANTASYCON 19*. Annual British fantasy convention. Venue and price tba. GoH Brian Lumley, MoC Graham Joyce. Contact: Peter Coleborn, 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT.

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, 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.

11-14 NOVEMBER 1994: *CULT TV* "an appreciation weekend" at Seacroft Holiday Village, Hemsby, Norfolk, from £59.00 per adult. For further details call: 0772-622555.

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.

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.*

## CONVENTION REPORTS

**Misdemeanour: the first MISFiTs Convention,  
Burnham-on-Sea, 4-6 February 1994.  
A report by Mick Evans.**

This small convention made a nice mid-winter break by the sea. There were several interesting programme items and silly games etc. Among these was a discussion on current sf headed by Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller, and a volcanic Greg Pickersgill attempting to get fandom more actively involved in the '95 Worldcon

There were sporting events in the shape of skittles, pool and darts. The pool and darts were both won by (surprise, surprise) Stephen Tudor, who also organised the events. Your reporter was eliminated from the pool tournament by Tracy Schofield, Stephen's fiancé.

The first round game in the pool tournament between Eileen Weston and Catherine McAuley was such a gripping contest that it drew people in from the bar and off the street to witness the event. A special trophy should have been awarded to both these contestants.

The main reason we were all there was for the trial of Mr Steve Green, co-editor of *CRITICAL WAVE* and Active Fan since the late seventies. The main participants in addition

to the defendant himself were: Chris Murphy, the completely impartial and unbiased judge, not forgetting his able assistant Teddy; Prosecuting Counsel Catherine McAuley; Counsel for the Defence Pam Wells. Also in attendance was Simon Dearn, Green's minder and the representative of Group 4 Security.

The chief prosecution witnesses were: Mrs Ann Green, who thought that Steve meant well but was, on the other hand, heavily insured; Mr Martin Tudor, the defendant's co-editor on *CRITICAL WAVE*, who told how, since meeting Green, his fortunes had plummeted from his being a man with prospects to his finding himself homeless, destitute and alone.

Mrs Bernadette Evans told how, since meeting the defendant, she had gone from being a house-proud conscientious wife and mother to being a con-running workaholic fiend. I myself was called to the stand to testify to Ms Lilian Edwards' habit of enticing attention and free drinks from unsuspecting male fans at conventions, the said Ms Edwards having been introduced to Fandom, and thus to these unfortunate male fans, by Green. I fear my testimony may have made me an enemy, but Martin Tudor assures me my popularity will increase, we shall see. Mr Michael D Siddall told how Green callously introduced him to one of the less socially adequate fans (who fear of repercussions prevents me naming), and then abandoned him alone with this person, from whom escape took several hours.

For the defence, Mr Paul R Vincent testified that Green's unfortunate inability to negotiate large (indeed any) amounts of alcohol was in fact a selfless act designed to enable him to remain prone and motionless in doorways at parties, thus becoming a most effective doorstop and allowing a free flow of people between rooms. This will no doubt be a comfort to those among us who have suffered cleaning bills, I'll leave you to decide that one. Mr Kevin Clarke, another blast from the past, also appeared with a grisly tale of a toilet in a British Rail carriage, which we won't go into here.

Mr David Wood also appeared for the defence, claiming that the defendant's literary career should be taken into account, since he had written such classics as *BRIGHTON ROCK* and *OUR MAN IN HAVANAH*.

The jury eventually found Green guilty, though Ms Wells should be applauded for

forcing such a close vote - approximately 32-7! Ms Wells didn't give in even then, she quickly started selling badges appealing to people to "Resurrect the Birmingham One". But to no avail the execution was duly carried out by the Brum Group's very own Ray Bradbury, with a Black and Decker saw. I hope your shirt wasn't completely ruined, Ray. Green later appeared as a Hologram, but was refused service at the hotel bar by the Manager, whose policy was not to serve holograms! ("Dead men don't drink beer!")

As you've probably gathered, the convention was well attended by Brum Group members, and some old faces as well. Come back Paul Vincent and Kev Clarke, the Brum Group needs you!

A vote of thanks is due to Tony Berry, Martin Tudor, Helena Bowles and Richard Standage for a splendid weekend.

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**Misdemeanour: the first MISFiTs Convention,  
Burnham-on-Sea, 4-6 February 1994.  
A report by Dave Wood.**

The revival of The Small British Con at the Royal Clarence Hotel, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, was a triumph for the enigmatic Mr ANTONY BERRY. It was a case, as the art gallery catalogues have it, of "Landscape with Figures". One knew beforehand what the figures were going to say, and could guess pretty shrewdly how they were going to say it.

Science Fiction Where Art Thou lay somewhat lumpen on an audience satiated by the hostelries fine cellar. I don't know whether it his experience of melodramatic methods, but I found Mr PAUL KNICAID as John Clute not quite in the INTERZONE picture. He spoke many of his words as if unsure of his beliefs. But for the interjections of Mr JULIAN HEADLONG, Mr PETER WESTON and other SUNDRIES present he would nevertheless have had his evil way and dragged sf from the gutter destroying its charm along the way.

The raison d'etre of the weekend, billed as *The Trial of Mr Steven Green For Crimes too Heinous to List*, proved a farrago in too many parts, and limped through the afternoon. No one could have wished that *The Beast* (scum of fandom) had more to say: for Mr STEVEN GREEN, who had got himself up after the similitude of William Burroughs delivered his

## JOPHAN REPORT #72

by Martin Tudor

one line with extraordinary feyness of manner, appearing to have no idea what he was talking about. As Perry Mason Ms PAMELA WELLS achieved better effect, despite being hampered by a defence devoid of subtlety or emotion. Bravely, she pointed her humour as if the matter of it were a fresh thing to her audience: and she was certainly justified of this assumption by the spontaneous laughter of certain sections of the audience. Ms CATHERINE MCAULAY on the other hand, in her pleasant rendering of *Rumpole*, did not insist much on the clown's humour, but seemed to take the recognition of it for granted. As for Mr CHRISTOPHER MURPHY as Judge Jefferies, he was irresistible. The audience was helplessly at the mercy of his mobile face, mad voice and gesture. He did not simply interpret; he positively illumined the text.

Come Sunday, as compere of the Film Quiz Mr BERRY gave the best detached performance of his career. In throwing off clarity he appears to have mastered the ability to speak with silence: doubtless achieved by his mastery of the immobile mouth. Bleed, Marlon Brando.

The chief burden of *The Fan Forum*, a churning of the murky depths in which the '95 worldcon sulks, fell upon Mr GREGORY PICKERSGILL as the notorious fixer, *Chippy de Zoete*, which he carried with superb vivacity. It was a pleasant relief to see him back on form in a part which stretched his famed thespian talent.

Finally, I must give good cheer to the committee: the charming and gallant courtiers performed without the pedantry of their kind. Suffice to say, the theme of the convention was admirably selected, and the inevitable banality of some of the proceedings was made as unobtrusive as might be.

Altogether, and not forgetting the fascinating beers, the delightfully obliging staff, and the ambience of the coastal position, the convention was very much *As Everybody Likes It*.

The editor would like to take this opportunity to remind readers (and fill this gap) that reports on cons, plays, films, other events, and, of course, unsolicited book reviews are always welcome.

TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing copies of *JOHNNY & THE DEAD* at W H Smiths, Union Street, Birmingham, from 11.30-12.30 on the 18th March, call 021-631-3303 for details.

SIMON R GREEN (author of the Hawk and Fisher series, *BLUE MOON RISING* etc) will be signing at Andromeda bookshop on the 26 March 1994. Call 021-643-1999 for further details.

Comics writer ALAN MOORE will be signing at Magic Labyrinth in May 1994, call 0533-518178 for further details.

The final ballot for the 1993 Nebula Awards is as follows: **BEST NOVEL: ASSEMBLERS OF INFINITY** by Kevin J Anderson & Doug Beason (ANALOG, Sept-Dec 1993 and Bantam Spectra); *HARD LANDING* by A J Budrys (FANTASY & SF, Nov 1992 and Warner Questar); *BEGGARS IN SPAIN* by Nancy Kress (AvNova); *RED MARS* by Kim Stanley Robinson (Bantam Spectra); *NIGHTSIDE THE LONG SUN* by Gene Wolfe (Tor).

**BEST NOVELLA:** "The Beauty Addict" by Ray Aldridge (FULL SPECTRUM 4); "The Night We Buried Road Dog" by Jack Cady (FANTASY & SF, Jan 1993); "Dancing on Air" by Nancy Kress (ASIMOV'S, July 1993); "Into the Miranda Rift" by G David Nordley (ANALOG, July 1993); "Naming the Flowers" by Kate Wilhelm (FANTASY & SF, Feb 1993 and Axolotl 1992); "Wall, Stone, Craft" by Walter Jon Williams (FANTASY & SF, Oct-Nov 1993 and Axolotl). **BEST NOVELLETTE:** "England Underway" by Terry Bisson (OMNI, July 1993); "The Nutcracker Coup" by Janet Kagan (ASIMOV'S, Dec 1992); "The Franchise" by John Kessel (ASIMOV'S, Aug 1992); "Georgia on My Mind" by Charles Sheffield (ANALOG, Jan 1993); "Things Not Seen" by Martha Soukup (*MORE WHATDUNNITS* and ANALOG, Sept 1992); "Death on the Nile" by Connie Willis (ASIMOV'S, March 1993). **BEST SHORT STORY:** "Graves" by Joe Haldeman (FANTASY & SF, Nov 1992); "The Man Who Rowed Christopher Columbus Ashore" by Harlan Ellison (OMNI, July 1992 and WFC Program Book, Oct 1991); "All Vows" by Esther M Friesner (ASIMOV'S, Nov 1992); "The Good Pup" by Bridget McKenna (FANTASY & SF, March 1993); "Alfred" by Lisa Goldstein (ASIMOV'S, Dec 1992); "The Beggar in the Living Room" by William John Watkins (ASIMOV'S, Apr 1993).

The above ballot was mailed to eligible Science Fiction Writers of America on 22 February, and are due back on 1 April. The



## *Last Month's Meeting*

18 February 1994: Michael Scott Rohan.

Report by David Hunter.

Due to problems with traffic and a "transfusion of gas" Michael was delayed in arriving, but it proved to be a talk well worth waiting for, as well as a chance to linger in the bar downstairs for a little while longer in the best traditions of the Brum Group.

The "transfusion of gas" came about because of a rather disconcerting encounter with his dentist, and the discomfort was just beginning to subside when he arrived.

He opened by saying that he intended primarily to talk about his own work. He felt that it was very difficult for a writer to talk about writing in the abstract - asking a writer to describe writing was like trying to find out about oceans by asking the sea; better to talk to an oceanographer. True, but I would rather read literature than literary criticism personally. Any work of art needs to be directly experienced rather than dissected and explained, but nevertheless it started a lively discussion about the distinction between fantasy and science fiction.

Michael argued that fantasy had started to hold sway over science fiction as a genre, and suggested reasons why this should happen.

Because of the rate of scientific advance, reality often tended to overtake fiction, consequently the element of surprise was lost, and this is a classic ingredient in science fiction. Speculative idea of pure scientists sometimes contain such quantum leaps in thinking that they can seem to invade what was the preserve of purely imaginative writing.

Quite apart from the novelty value, there's plenty of evidence in the modern world of the dangers of unbridled high technology solutions. These often tend to have benefits mostly for the people (usually rich) who control them, and the consequences of commercial greed and folly are usually suffered most severely by disadvantaged groups in the form of famine, pollution, war and pestilence. Hardly surprising that fiction about high technology tends to lose its appeal.

Low technology, magic, mysticism and alternative medicine is moving in to fill the gap

of the disillusionment felt by many young people.

Perhaps the Dune series of novels could be a case in point, although Michael did not mention these specifically. Mysticism, rather than technology is really the key to the power of the leading players in these books and power to control people in the end largely determines who wins.

Our guest also suggested that science fiction had been hijacked by charlatans to camouflage poor writing skills in a way which has not happened to fantasy writing. He suggested that a author could write well in both genre, and use both to full potential. They were after all only two different conventions, where the leading edge of scientific advance could sometimes take on an almost magical, mysterious quality to the uninitiated.

In response to questions he agreed that an element of escapism was a necessary ingredient in sf, perhaps suggesting what is false in our own situation and suggesting "a better path".

Towards the end of the meeting there was some discussion about whether fantasy was primarily aimed at a female audience and whether this was aimed at the lowest common denominator. Views were expressed that it was dangerous to generalise about that, and that at the end of the day it was the quality of the writing that mattered, rather than categories.

The way publishes market books probably has an influence on changes in taste too. If a genre was proving popular, there tends to be a rash of these, motivated simply by commercial reason. Once the market reaches saturation, a change in book buying habits occurs and publishers follow suit.

Paradoxically Michael; suggested that great sf, such as Jules Verne and HG Wells does not become dated, though he felt that in his own work latest technology plays an important role. Towards the end of the session he suggested this has a link with consumer goods of the "black" as opposed to female "white" preoccupations. An interesting thought, which could have probably been agreed about for some length. Certainly "black" goods generally appear to have greater prestige in retail sales - perhaps another case of art imitating life. What would "white" technology sf be like - or fantasy come to that?

**BOOK  
REVIEWS**

LOST SOULS by Poppy Z Brite  
Penguin, 359pp, £5.99, 'B' format p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Brite has been heralded by the like of Dan Simmons and Harlan Ellison as the most exciting new horror writer of the '90s, and on the evidence of *LOST SOULS* I can see why.

This is a moving, disturbing, sensual tale of the deep south, the action focussing for the most part in the dark, mysterious, magical streets of New Orleans' French Quarter. The eponymous lost souls include: Ghost, a haunted, visionary singer; his long-time friend and guitarist, Steve, a broken-hearted, drunken, thieving bum; Steve's ex-girlfriend, Ann; her obsessed father, Simon; Christian the 340+ year-old, lonely vampire; Nothing, the half-breed bastard of a human mother and vampire father; Jessy, Nothing's vampire-obsessed 15 year-old mother; the monstrous vampire Zillah and his two cronies Molochai and Twig. In fact, everyone we encounter in this book, from Jessy's grief-stricken, lunatic father through the murderous, soul-sucking twins to all the leather clad, dyed-hair children in the night clubs are lost souls to a greater or lesser extent.

I cannot recommend this book too highly. It is told in a sparse, economical style which is at the same time almost lyrical in effect. The spell Brite casts over the reader lasts from the first haunting page of the prologue (first published in the summer 1988 issue of *THE HORROR SHOW* as "A Taste of Blood and Altars") to the final vivid and chilling page of the epilogue  $\mu$  and beyond. This is a story which will linger in your heart and mind long after you've finished reading it.

YESTERDAY WE SAW MERMAIDS by Ester M Friesner  
Tor, 155 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a little gem. It starts in a low key but as you turn the pages wonders are piled upon wonders. The story is told by Sister Ana who, with a group of nuns from her order, is sailing towards the New World. She

is a scribe and is writing down everything that happens. Then we discover that there is a genie on board and that the ship is a magic one. And they are sailing towards the fabled land of Prester John. It seems they must reach there before the arrival of the three ships that set sail on the same day under the command of the man that the world has come to know as Columbus. This book has so much in it, in so few pages, that the best recommendation is to read it and experience it for yourself.

HERE COMES THE SUN by Tom Holt

Orbit, 344pp, £4.99, p/b

GRAILBLAZERS by Tom Holt

Orbit, 389pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

At first glance all the ingredients appear to be here for yet another hilarious romp from the author of such classics as *EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER*, *THE FLYING DUTCHMAN* and *OVERTIME*.

Jane, a bored young secretary is hired by a daemon (temporarily seconded to 'the other organization' to help their urgently needed rationalization and modernization) and an angel (or 'public servant' as he prefers to be called). The celestial office have a few problems and they hope Jane will help sort them out. Little things such as ensuring the sun rises on time, that the course of true love never runs smooth and that people's dreams (and nightmares) arrive on time - and are delivered to the right people.

Scandalized by the bad management, shoddy planning and ancient equipment, Jane sets to with gusto and, of course, comes up with some unexpected, but very efficient, solutions. However, she finds herself thwarted at every turn by office politics.

Sounds fun eh? Well I thought so but I was wrong. *HERE COMES THE SUN* is a very disappointing book, somehow it fails to work as well as Holt's previous books. The setting is too absurd and unbelievable, which highlights how shallow the characters are this time. Holt's humour works best when taking the every day world and highlighting its absurdity by juxtaposing it with the truly fantastic. As he did in *EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER* and, indeed, as he does in *GRAILBLAZERS*.

*GRAILBLAZERS* is Holt's humour at its most hilarious. The Knights of the Holy Grail are back - indeed they never went away. This holiest of orders merely found other things to occupy their time, working for pizza



delivery businesses and the like. But with the re-appearance of Boamund (who has spent the intervening centuries sleeping off the effects of a drugged goblet of milk), they are back on the job.

Boamund, with the aid of his faithful dwarf, has received new instructions on how to find the Grail. All they need is a personal organiser from Atlantis, an embroidered apron from the aftermath of the Last Supper and a pair of socks from Father Christmas's castle and, well, and then doubtless they'll receive new instructions... (After thinking has never been a requisite for the position of knight!)

If you've never read any from Tom Holt I'd highly recommend *GRAILBLAZERS*, but even if you're already a big fan of his work I'd give *HERE COMES THE SUN* a miss.

HOUSE OF LOST DREAMS by Graham Joyce  
Headline, 402 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

Mike and Kim Hanson have thrown everything aside in order to go in search of their dream - an idyllic Greek villa, but a Greek *YEAR IN PROVENCE* this ain't! The *HOUSE OF LOST DREAMS* of the title harbours secret powers which slowly turn the Hansons' dream into a nightmare.

The story is full of intrigue, with strange figures such as a militant Angel with metal shoes. As with so much good horror writing, the reader is never quite sure if these strange things are real, or if they exist only in the imaginations of the two protagonists, as their marriage slowly begins to collapse under the strain. They are helped by Manoussos, a local shepherd, who is watching the newcomers, and waiting for history to repeat itself.

Graham Joyce actually wrote his first novel, *DREAMSIDE*, on a Greek island, and he certainly uses the background evocatively in this novel. His second novel, *DARK SISTER*, was an impressive work, surpassing his first, but this third I rate as his most powerful yet. His strength lies in his wonderful gift for characterisation, which made this book quite un-put-downable.

THE FIREBRAND by Marion Zimmer Bradley  
Penguin, 560 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Just before the birth of her son, Hecuba, wife of King Priam of Troy, dreamed that she

had brought forth a firebrand which set fire to the city. As a result Priam determined to expose her son at birth and prevent the tragedy. In a moment of weakness he relented and instead had the child raised by shepherds. The rest is legend.

This novel is a retelling of the fall of Troy as seen through the eyes of *Kassandra*, who here is portrayed as the twin sister of Paris. Most of it sticks very close to the original tales. Where it differs is in *Kassandra's* early life. She is fostered with Penthesilea, the Amazon Queen, and rides with her, learning to use weapons and survive in a world without men - the Amazons keep up their numbers by venturing into the men's villages at intervals, raising their daughters but letting the men have the sons. Also riding the plains are the Kentaurs, men who spend most of their life on horseback, following the herds. The cultures touched on here, including the matriachal society in the city of Colchis, are the most interesting developments in the whole novel and they offer logical explanations for the myths and their passing.

The big question as always with a book like this is: "Why?" Yes there are a few new insights but, unlike purely historical interpretations, there is no attempt to find the truth behind the legends - the gods are still very much in evidence squabbling amongst themselves - and it is a very well known story. At least with *THE MISTS OF AVALON* there was more scope for speculations, as the actuality behind the Athurian myth-cycle is vaguer; there were not the same mechanisms for recounting historical events in that time and place.

THE QUORUM by Kim Newman  
Simon & Schuster, 413 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

*THE QUORUM* is an interesting, but very peculiar, novel, relating the story of four childhood friends: Michael Dixon (tv show host and best-selling novelist), Mickey Yeo (comics artist, rock musician and film director), Mark Amphlett (trendy magazine publisher and style guru author of the best-selling non-fiction work *THE SHAPE OF THE NOW*) and Neil Martin (the loser).

On the way to a party at the out-of-the-way, empty house belonging to Mark's grandparents, the friends get into separate cars. Neil goes off in one car (with Mark's girlfriend, Pippa) and his three friends go in another. Mickey, Michael and Mark get lost and find themselves in a town that

doesn't exist, where they make a deal with the mysterious Derek Leach. A deal whereby they will each get their heart's desires if they cause their absent friend Neil to suffer.

This "suffering" involves, over the next decade or so, destroying Neil's relationships, causing him to be sacked from job after job, and various other things from redirecting his skill to implicating him with National Front-style organizations. As promised by Leach, the more Neil suffers, the more success his one-time friends "the Quorum" enjoy.

The big question is, "Who is Derek Leach?". Unfortunately, although there are hints a plenty, Newman never tells us. The other two questions this absorbing novel raises are also left to the reader to answer: "Would you have agreed to the deal?" And, for the more paranoid, "Which of my so-called friends have made a deal with me as the sacrificial lamb?"

THE HACKER CRACKDOWN by Bruce Sterling  
Penguin, 328 pp, £6.99, "B" format p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Subtitled *LAW AND DISORDER ON THE ELECTRONIC FRONTIER*, this is a true life account of how computer crime started in the USA, and of how the authorities gradually caught on to what was happening and started to fight back. That it is a better book than it might have been is attributable to Sterling's considerable writing skill, coupled with his fascination with the subject, and supported by extensive and detailed research. What in other hands might have been a dull and tedious account becomes a gripping story that is genuinely difficult to put down - something all too rare in a work of non-fiction.

Actually, reading this book is almost like reading a work of sf. Starting with one small social change - the development of modern computers, both large and small - it shows how that change permeates through society to produce unforeseen consequences. As Sterling says in his introduction, cyberspace "has flung itself open like a gigantic jack-in-the-box (and) we do not really understand how to live in cyberspace yet". Until we do, knowledge of what is contained in this book is essential for anyone who wants to understand how the modern world works.

I must say, though, that seven quid is a lot for a book most people will only read once.

SHADOW HUNTER by Will Baker

RoC, 536 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Mike Siddall.

The author, according to the blurb, is a professor of English and Creative Writing. So he knows you have to have plot, characters and descriptive writing in order to write a good novel. Not that this novel is good, it's an overblown, incoherent mess, and I want a medal for wading through all its 536 turgid, soul-less pages.

Take the plot; after a limited nuclear war which was mainly limited to the Southern Hemisphere, a new race (resulting from cross-breeding between experimental chimps and convicts), the Ginks, has arisen and is at undeclared war with the technically advanced humans. The Ginks kidnap the son of a high-ranking official, and convert him to their ways, which involve an approach to life that works in harmony with nature. Their ways also involve cannibalism and some extremely tedious, and endlessly delineated, mysticism. This sets the scene for endless escapes, murders, politicking etc., etc. It sounds fun, but it's all utterly pointless as, by the end of the novel, nothing is resolved. We don't know who's won the battle, let alone been given a hint as to who's going to win the war. I'm sick to death of authors giving vague, indeterminate where's-my-Booker-Prize? endings to novels. They think they're being true to life, but I think they're just being lazy gits.

And the biology is just complete bullshit, everything from mutant viruses to grizzly bears is trying to kill the humans, in which case we wouldn't last a week, let alone be poncing around nature reserves trying to catch one kid. And my cat would like to know why I kept groaning "make up your bloody mind will you?" every time the humans see-sawed between being merciless destroyers and helpless victims of unchained Nature.

There's a hint in the blurb that the author had to overcome his prejudice against sf to write this, his first sf novel. Well, that was dashed nice of him, but really, no need to bother on my account. At least not until he's learnt that there's a lot more to sf than throwing in some high-tech tanks, anarchist hackers and a lot of airhead, New Age philosophy.

RIVERRUN by S P Somtow  
Orbit, 257 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Eleven year-old Theo Etchinson has been plagued by strange and terrible dreams -

hardly surprising with his mother dying of cancer. The Etchinsons, Theo, his older brother Joshua, their father and their dying mother, are on a road trip the length of America ostensibly to take Mrs Etchinson to a Mexican laetrile clinic in the forlorn hope that it might be able to help her. However, the real reason for the trip is a last ditch attempt to bond the fragmenting family together before she dies.

When the family stop at a bizarre Chinese restaurant in the middle of the desert, Theo finds himself thrust into the fantastic realms of his dreams. Hailed as the Truthsayer Theo is told by his vampiric kidnapper, Thorn Darkling, that the fate of the universe is in his hands.

Thorn's father, King Strang, has gone mad and his children Thorn, Katastrofa and Ash fight for control of the River Between All Worlds. Soon all of the Etchinsons, along with Joshua's girlfriend Selina, find themselves pawns in a titanic battle for universal supremacy.

Despite having all of the elements of a formulaic fantasy series, Somtow takes *RIVERRUN* in a different - and far more interesting direction. Raising some fascinating questions about the nature of dreams and reality, *RIVERRUN* is virtually Dickian in its complexity - I eagerly await the next volume in the series.

## BERNIE'S BIT

A comment or ten from our illustrious  
Book Reviews Editor Mrs Bernadette Evans.

A phenomenon which I've often suspected, but never had the time to spend proving, has beautifully revealed itself in this month's review column. Pauline Morgan raves about one of her books in a fairly short review, and damns the other with faint praise in a review twice the length. Mick Evans goes into raptures about the book he read, in another quite short review, whilst Mike Siddall expends almost twice the space trashing the one he was given.

This phenomenon used to appear in the house magazine I edited at one time. On one occasion a twelve word sentence that "wasn't worth the effort of a response" drew a total of five sides of A4 to my in tray. And very inventive and entertaining it all was too, I wished I could have printed all of it.

People write more about things with which they disagree or which they dislike than about things they like or agree with. And the deeper the dislike, the more vehement the disagreement, the more they write.

I've been criticised in the past for "only giving people the books they like". My answer has always been that people won't take the books they know they won't like. The only payment reviewers get is to keep the copy of the books they review, OBVIOUSLY they want one they'll like. The only time we get negative reviews is when someone takes a book they THINK they'll like, but don't.

Yes, there is a point to all this. I'd like you all to think through what I've written above, consider how much EASIER it is to write a review if you don't like the book. Muse upon how much FUN you can have dreaaing up disparaging sentences. Ponder on the fact that I probably won't chop out half your review because you've given away the story or used the word "wonderful" fifty times.

After you've done all that thinking, do something different, next meeting take away a book, any book, you aren't sure of liking, or even one you are sure of hating. You'll have the time of your life letting rip when you write the review. Or you might even like it in the end, and find you've expanded your own horizons - either way, you really can't lose.

## GOOD FOOD GUIDE

MARTIN TUDOR is trying to put together a *GOOD FOOD GUIDE* to the restaurants, pubs and cafés in and around Birmingham city centre. The idea being to update and reproduce it each year for use by Novacon attendees. Given the average fan's preference for Chinese and Indian food at reasonable prices, he envisages that the guide will concentrate quite heavily on the "China Town and "Balti Town" areas, but he would like the guide to include everything from Littlewoods' breakfasts, "greasy spoon cafes", chip shops and pub grub to horrendously expensive Japanese, French and indeterminate 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, acceptable methods of payment and comments on quality of the food, standard of service, etc. Please send your reviews to: 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.



It's time to think of joining...

# NOVACON 24


Guest of Honour : GRAHAM JOYCE

Date : 4, 5 and 6 November 1994

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Rates to Join :	Up to Eastercon	£20.00
	Up to 1st October	£25.00
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(Before 8.30pm please)