

July 1994

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

Issue 274

*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, NOVACON 25 CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON.

This month's speaker is

## ANGUS WELLS

who will present a talk entitled

**"SF EDITOR VIA WESTERNS TO FANTASY"**

on Friday 15th July 1994, 7.45 for 8.00pm

Admittance: Members £2.50 Visitors £3.75  
(half-price for 14-18 year olds on production of proof of age).

Angus Wells was born in 1943, previously a paperbacks editor, he has written Westerns and fantasy as well as editing a series of collections of the "best of" various sf writers. Most of his novels have been Westerns under the names of Charles L Pike, James A Muir and others. As Ian Evans he wrote *STARMAIDENS* (1977) an sf tv tie. Under the house name Richard Kirk, which he shared with Robert Holdstock, he contributed to the "Raven" fantasy series *SWORDMISTRESS OF CHAOS* (1978) with Holdstock and, solo, *THE FROZEN GODS* (1978) and *A TIME OF DYING* (1979). Under his own name he has written the "Book of the Kingdoms" fantasy sequence - *WRATH OF ASHAR* (1988), *THE USURPER* (1989) and *THE WAY BENEATH* (1989) - and begun a second sequence, the "Godwars" books, with *FORBIDDEN MAGIC* (1991) and *DARK MAGIC* (1994). In 1973-75 he edited a series of collections assembling for British readers the "best of" various sf writers, including: *THE BEST OF ISAAC ASIMOV* (2 volumes 1973), *THE BEST OF ARTHUR C CLARKE* (2 volumes 1973), *THE BEST OF ROBERT A HEINLEIN* (2 volumes 1973), *THE BEST OF JOHN WYNDHAM* (1973), *THE BEST OF FRITZ LEIBER* (1974), *THE BEST OF A E VAN VOGT* (1974), *THE BEST OF FRANK HERBERT* (1975) and *THE BEST OF CLIFFORD D SIMAK* (1975). His latest novel, *LORDS OF THE SKY* (Millennium, £14.99, £8.99), concerns a world where warring sorcerers take to the skies in awesome ships, and has earned praise even from Roger Peyton of Andromeda Bookshop, who exclaimed "Yeah, I know it has got a dragon on the cover - but it is still a really good cover, very eye catching that red...".

*[Many thanks to the ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF for most the above information.]*

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.

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Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for her Chair's Bit and for typing the book reviews, STEVE GREEN, CRITICAL WAVE, MATRIX and WHAT'S ON for the news in the Jophan Report and Events listing and, of course, TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

15 JULY 1994: ANGUS WELLS, SF editor, western writer and fantasy author will speak to the Group, 7.45pm for 8pm in the upstairs room of the Australian Bar on Hurst Street.

16 JULY 1994: ANGUS WELLS will be signing copies of *LORDS OF THE SKY* at Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk street, Birmingham, from noon. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

UNTIL 16 JULY 1994: *THE LAST SHOT*, the untold story of the Three Musketeers. "Athos feels she has been misrepresented; now is her chance to put the story straight... It is 1666. The Great Fire rages in London. Plague sweeps through the city and a plot is hatching to bring war to the whole of Europe. Only three people can help and they have retired. Can Porthos, Aramis and Athos be persuaded to ride again? This is the Three Musketeers' final, most secret and challenging

adventure... only now can the truth be revealed, of a mission so secret it has been languishing in the vaults of a French castle for 300 years. From vicious man traps to giant spiders and evil magicians, the Three Musketeers must run, jump, juggle and bounce their way through the show, helped by any members of the audience who dare! This wonderfully original adventure for 7 year olds and over and their families has all the colour and humour of the circus; fire eating, juggling, stilt walking, pyrotechnics and crazy battles with swords and sea food!" The Mac Open Air Arena, tickets £4.95, call 021 440 3838 for further details.

15-16 JULY 1994: *THE WRONG TROUSERS*, *CREATURE COMFORTS*, *A GRAND DAY OUT* by Nick Park and Steve Box, plus the Oscar nominated *ADAM* directed by Peter Lord. The Mac cinema 6pm Friday, 2.30pm Saturday. Call 021 440 3838 for tickets.

16, 17 & 24 JULY 1994: *THE EAGLE HAS LANDED* the Apollo 11 Silver Anniversary of Man on the Moon will be celebrated at the Museum of Science and Industry, Newhall Street, Birmingham, by a series of illustrated talks starting at 2pm each day and on the 24 July a chance to see BSFG member and space artist David Hardy create a lunar landscape. Call 021 235 1661 for details, admission free.



Both Apollo Astronauts. Lunar Landing, Rover, painted by David Hardy

26 JULY 1994: DR D H TWISS, Chief Physicist, Royal Hospital, Wolverhampton will deliver a lecture on a subject to be announced at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham city centre. Part of the Handford Science lectures, call 021 236 3591 for further details.

29-31 JULY 1994: WINCON III sf convention at King Alfred's College, Winchester. Theme: "Science Fiction - Ideas in Focus". Guests of honour: Algis Budrys, James P Hogan and Norman Spinrad. Writers' Workshop with Colin Greenland. Attending £23.00, supporting £16.00. Day rates £5.00 (Friday), £15.00 (Saturday), £15.00 Sunday. Accommodation: £18.00/night B&B. Contact: Keith Cosslett, 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants., PO10 7TS.

7 AUGUST 1994: SUMMER IN SPACE Sunday afternoon talk from 2pm at the Museum of Science and Industry. "Comets, signposts in history, guide us around the Earth and the solar system in the Planetary Society's regular talk given by Andy Lound - who also stops off at the planet Uranus." Call 021 235 1661 for further details, admission free.

9-11 AUGUST 1994: TALES OF TRANSFORMATIONS - stories and myths from around the world tell why things are made in the way they are. Hear tales of magical and cunning transformations, and of costumes and disguises. Museum and Art Gallery, 11.30am and 2pm. Call 021 235 2834 for further details, admission free.

11-20 AUGUST 1994: COUNT DRACULA by Ted Tiller, a Gothic thriller in three acts based on the story by Bram Stoker. At the Old Rep Theatre, Station Street from 7.30pm. Proceeds in aid of Birmingham Childrens Hospital I.T.U. Fund. Adults £6, children £4. Advance booking via Town Hall Box Office on 021 236 2392, tickets also available from Theatre Box Office on the evening of the performance.

13 AUGUST 1994: RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARCHIVES 2 - media event, 10.30am to 10.30pm at Stourbridge Town Hall. Contact: Kaleidoscope, 93 Old Park Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 3NE, for further details.

19 AUGUST 1994: CHRISTOPHER EVANS author of *AZTEC CENTURY* will speak to the Group, 7.45pm for 8pm in the upstairs room of the Australian Bar on Hurst Street.

SUMMER 1994: Beer & Skittles Evening call Helena Bowles on 021 558 7591 for 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: Heien McCarthy, 147 Francis Road, London, E10 6NT.

16 SEPTEMBER 1994: ROBERT HOLDSTOCK science fiction and fantasy author will speak to the Group, 7.45pm for 8pm in the upstairs room of the Australian Bar on Hurst Street.

17 SEPTEMBER 1994: ROBERT HOLDSTOCK will be signing at Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 1999 for further details.

26 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER 1994: *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET* at the Birmingham Hippodrome. Monday-Thursday 7.30pm, Friday 5pm, 8.30pm, Saturday 4pm, 8pm. Prices Monday-Thursday £17.50, £15, £12, £10, £8; Friday & Saturday evenings £19.50, £17, £15, £11, £9; Friday 5pm all seats £7.50; Saturday 4pm £14, £12, £10, £8, £7. Call 021-622-7486 for further booking information.

30 SEP - 2 OCT 1994: FANTASYCON 19. Annual British fantasy convention, Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Attending £30.00, supporting £15.00. GoHs Katherine Kurtz and Brian Lumley, MoC Graham Joyce. Contact: 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0TG.

21-24 OCTOBER 1994: ALBACON '94. Central Hotel, Glasgow. Attending £25.00, supp. £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 £25.00, supporting £8.00. 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. Guests include: Harlan Ellison, Sylvia Anderson,

Annette Andre, Sophie Aldred, Victor Pemberton, Barry Letts, Deborah Watling. For further details call: 0772-622555, or send a SSAE to CULT TV, PO Box 1701, Peterborough, PE1 1EX.

18 NOVEMBER 1994: BSFG VS BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY SF & FANTASY SOCIETY in the annual debate. If you're interested in representing the BSFG please call Bernie Evans on 021 558 0997.

28 NOVEMBER - 3 DECEMBER 1994: *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW* 21st Birthday Party, Birmingham Hippodrome. Call 021 622 7486 for bookings.

14-17 APRIL 1995: CONFABULATION 46th UK National sf con at the Britannia International Hotel, London. GoHs Lois McMasters Bujold, Bob Shaw and Roger Robinson. Attending £20.00, supporting £10.00 before 31 December 1994. Contact: Confabulation, 3 York Street, Aittrincham, 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, Vince Clarke. 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.

3-5 NOVEMBER 1995: NOVACON 25 the Brum Group's own sf convention at a new venue - the Chamberlain Hotel, Alcester Street, Birmingham. Guests of Honour: Brian W Aldiss, Harry Harrison and Bob Shaw, with Special Guest Iain Banks. Currently membership is only available to members of NOVACON 24, who should send £20.00 to CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9

8SS, cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 25". Memberships will rise to £23.00 at Novacon 24 and will be available to non-members of NOVACON 24 from 7 November 1994 for £25.00. Room rates are £20.00 per person per night in twin/double and £40.00 pppn in a single, prices include full English breakfast.

5-8 APRIL 1996: EVOLUTION 47th UK National Convention, Metropole Hotel, Brighton. Guests of honour: Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Jack Cohen. Attending £20.00, supporting £12.00. Contact: 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

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.*

*If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them of) please feel free to write a report/review and send it to the editorial address.*

## EXCLUSIVE OFFER TO MEMBERS OF NOVACON 24

Join Novacon 25 now at £20

FOUR Guests of Honour: BRIAN ALDISS, HARRY HARRISON, BOB SHAW and IAIN BANKS have all agreed to come celebrate the event.

A new location with superb facilities/function space and bar. Room rates have been negotiated at £40.00 per room per night including full English Breakfast, this means two people sharing a twin or double will only pay £20.00 per person per night.

The reason we need your support now is to secure this excellent hotel for our exclusive use and as a new hotel they require a deposit for us to do this.

Send cheques made payable to "NOVACON 25" to: CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

This offer is only available to members of Novacon24

THE VIEW FROM THE CHAIR  
by Bernie Evans

It's now half-way through the year (not counting the A G M), my sixth meeting as Chairman, so it seems a good time to stop and think, take stock, decide if we're going in the right direction etc etc.

In my platform published in the January issue of the newsletter I had the following to say:- "One thing I do intend to do is get the *INTERSECTION* people along to give a presentation, partly because I think we should know what they're up to, and partly because, as the oldest established and largest sf group in Britain, I think we should be getting ourselves involved in some way."

Well, I did that, and far from becoming involved, many members didn't even attend the meeting to find out what getting involved might mean. In my last stint as Chairman a few years ago we could depend on members turning up whoever the speaker was, simply to *support the Group*. It seems that support is no longer to be depended on.

I also said in my platform:- "On the nature of meetings: this Group is for the benefit of ALL its members. I will be willing to hear suggestions from any and everyone of you. I won't listen to complaints from anyone who has no ideas of their own to put forward. I particularly won't listen to those who complain there are no "hard sf" writers coming to speak. There are, and if you choose to believe otherwise then it's your problem. We could have more if there were more, but short of holding a seance there's no way of getting more."

Nothing much has changed there either. I've had a few suggestions, and acted on some of them, and for future meetings we'll be welcoming Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans. Another suggestion I was given was to look on the shelves in Andromeda and invite some of the authors I saw there. I did look, and I'm in the process of preparing a chart showing whether those authors write sf and, if they do, checking if they're still alive and well enough to travel, and if they live in the U K. I'll be publishing the results in a future newsletter.

Meanwhile, I'd like to remind you all that when authors *do* come to speak to us, they are professionals who could legitimately charge an appearance fee. They don't. They give their precious free time gratis, and we

should appreciate this. We should show our appreciation by being welcoming and polite, by opening and closing the door *quietly* if we have to enter or leave the room during the formal part of the meeting. I'd be grateful if you would all remember this.

The following are quotes pulled from two book reviews, which I'd like to deal with here. "Sometimes you just want to make authors cry." -- Agreed, but not at the meeting at which that author is our guest, again on the grounds of politeness.

"Yah boo all you treacherous wenches and sorry men, insecure in your masculinity - sf is supposed to be liberal and free-thinking: you people sure as hell didn't live up to that." -- I'm not sure what's being said here, but if the writer would care to attend more meetings and take a hand in the proceedings, perhaps even help run the Group, (it doesn't run itself), instead of being vaguely insulting in writing, then maybe the problem, if there is a problem, could be addressed.

"One more point - this stuff does not qualify as sf in my book. I do believe the name of this little club is the Birmingham Science Fiction Group? This is fantasy. If we choose to review books similar to this (thank - insert deity or other good thing of your choice - for more imaginative writers, concepts, editors, publishers!), then the name of our group should be changed to Birmingham Speculative Fiction Group. Why? Because the figuring media still persist in lumping all of the above and the best sf under the eternally hell-bound label of Sci-fi! That term is so benighted (at this point the reviewer convulsed, frothing, over the keyboard, and is now feeling just dandy after making up her missed electro-shock session)." -- Some good points here, why don't we give up, give in to the flood of dross coming out from the publishers these days, and do what the woman suggests with our title?

I'll tell you why not. The stated aims of this group include supporting and furthering SCIENCE FICTION. Apart from supporting those publishers who do still show an interest in sf, we are all still hoping that the rest will one day wake up to the fact the accountants are not genre experts, and once again use real sf editors in their decision making processes, and that our voice, small though it is, will ultimately influence publishers. If we join them in copping-out we can't do that, neither will we be here to reap the rewards when it does happen.

56 hours of continous film/video - information desks of fans from different countries - a well stocked dealers' room - an art show - the traditional banquet - presentation of the King Kong Award for Dutch language SF - meet well known authors and fans from various countries - a kiddy programme stream - writers workshops - role playing, silly and other games - panels - the masquerade - the bar - and lots more...

**November in the Netherlands. Hillcon time!**

Join

**Hillcon V:**



**Hillcon V: *ConSeal* an international SF-convention**  
**25-27 november 1994 Dorint Hotel, Eindhoven, The Netherlands**

**Dutch Guest of Honour: Tais Teng**

Professional author of SF books and childrens books, illustrator, artist, King Kong Award winner, fan... to cut a long story short: a man of many talents worth meeting and listening to.

**Foreign Guest of Honour: Bruce Sterling**

Cyberpunk writer from the beginning and internet guru; he is the author of *Schismatrix* and *The Hacker Crackdown*; together with William Gibson he wrote *The Difference Engine*; and he is the editor of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*.

**Some programme highlights:**

- **Continuous video programme**  
From Friday 18:00 uur until closing time Sunday evening; including a special film night on Saturday with a 'Life Beyond the Bomb'-theme (eight hours of horror, excitement... We hope you're not afraid of "things that go Kra-ka-BOOM in the night").
- **A continuously open games room**  
Role Playing Games, board games, and whatever else we might come up with. Take part whenever you want. Take along your own favorite game. On Saturday an AD&D tournament, sponsored by the American Bookshop.
- **Masquerade**  
On Sunday the traditional costume parade for those who are handy with needle or sewing machine, or who always fantasied parading as a Science Fiction or Fantasy character.

(programme may change without notice)

**Membership price: f 55,- p.p.\* , after October 1<sup>st</sup> f 60,- p.p.\***  
**Children aged 4-12: f 25,- p.p.+**

+ Children need to be accompanied by adult members; younger children free of charge.

\* Membership price for members from Currency Restricted Countries is f 25,-

Convention hotel prices, including breakfast: for a single room f 150,- per night; for a double room f 180,- per night; we can also offer cheaper alternatives nearby, if you require it.

**contact address: *ConSeal*, c/o Richard Vermaas,**  
**James Wattstraat 13, 1097 DJ Amsterdam**

**internet email: richardv@htsa.aha.nl**

## JOPHAN REPORT #76

Roger Corman, the prolific producer-director responsible for such classic "b-movies" as *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* (1961) and a string of Edgar Allen Poe adaptations featuring Vincent Price, headlines the guestlist for the first Festival of Fantastic Films on 9-11 September. Joining him at Manchester's Sacha's Hotel will be James Bernard, composer of many of Hammer's more memorable scores, and animation legend Ray Harryhausen, guest of honour at the first festival in 1988.

Movies already scheduled include *THE PHANTOM CREEPS* (1939), adapted from a serial starring Bela Lugosi, *THE MAN WITH TWO LIVES* (1942), *THE RAVEN* (1935), with Lugosi joined by rival Boris Karloff, and *THE MUMMY'S HAND* (1940). In addition, director Norman J Warren and author Stephen Gallagher will again be judging entries in the festival's amateur film contest; prospective competitors should contact Harry Nadler on 061-792-0991 (evenings only).

Attending membership is £35.00, rising to £40.00 on 1 July (with a £5.00 discount for members of the Society of Fantastic Films), with twin/double room rates set at £40.00 per night. For full details, send a reply-paid envelope to Tony Edwards at 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is investigating the market dominance of Sega and Nintendo over UK video game pricing and distribution. Its report is expected in late October.

Simon Clark has sold two novels to Hodder Headline, *NALIED BY THE HEART* and *BLOOD CRAZY*. Clark's "Salt Snake", originally published in *PEEPING TOM* #12, has meanwhile been picked up by Karl Edward Wagner for his next *YEAR'S BEST HORROR* anthology.

The British Science Fiction Association has restructured its research facilities following the resignation of longtime information officer Phil Nichols. The new BSFA Information Group will be headed by Paul Billinger, in association with Paul Ailwood and Keith Walker; enquiries should be directed to 82 Kelvin Road, New Cuddington, Leamington Spa, CV32 7TQ.

Thanks to Steve Green and *CRITICAL WAVE* for the above news.

## BOOK REVIEWS

GREAT IRISH STORIES OF THE SUPERNATURAL ed by Peter Haining  
Pan, 378 pp, £5.99, "B" format p/b

Reviewed by Chris Ridd.

This is a collection of 28 old and modern Irish stories by various authors: Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, W B Yeats and James Joyce amongst others. The book is split into six sections: ghosts, hauntings, faerie, leprechauns, devils and revenants. Each section is preceded by a short set of biographies by the editor.

Like most anthologies, there is good and bad stuff. Unfortunately, most of the stories the editor rated as "classics" in his introductions turned out (to me) to be amongst the worst of the tales.

This book wasn't really my cup of tea. Some of the stories just didn't make sense, and they weren't good enough to make me re-read them. Still, if you're into supernatural Irish stories, you'll probably enjoy this book; personally I'd hate to read what the editor decided weren't "great" stories.

*[This next review, and the Dragonlance review further on, have been cut slightly in the interest of space. I've used the parts I've cut on the Chairman's page elsewhere in the newsletter. I'm not sure who wrote the reviews, Sharon or Elaine. Please will reviewers note in future, I NEED YOUR NAME, especially if more than one person in a family has signed for review copies - Bernie Evans.]*

FLOWERDUST by Gwyneth Jones  
Headline, 249 pp, £16.99, h/b

Reviewed by Elaine and/or Sharon Pendorf.

Look at the title. Go on, look at it again. *FLOWERDUST?!*

Again, I debated whether or not to buy and read *DIVINE ENDURANCE* - the book supposedly not needed to be read to make any sense out of this gem of a molluscular irritant (yes, I am a clam).

I am sure Ms Jones is a very nice person, and that you all had a wonderful time in May. I however am kicking myself that I couldn't get my scathingest brain in gear to deliver this review to Bernie before that date.

My first question to Ms Jones would

have been: "Is the sodding peninsula Korea?, Vietnam?, Peninsular Malaysia?, Portland Bill?, or What?!" This was tough going. It had none of the pleasure of Graham Greene and all of the angst of any war/spy thriller that doesn't take your fancy.

But *FLOWERDUST*. We already have one narcotic that is directly derived from flowers and I don't think we need a parallel one. Why couldn't she have used some imagination to think of a new substance, cultivated in the puddles of ink that bios produce after roasting in window-focused sun, mixed with old toner powder and tippex? Called it, perhaps, Expungent or something?

I really do advise you to read *DIVINE ENDURANCE* before *FLOWERDUST* (achoo), and if you liked that, I'm sure you'll like the further adventures of cat and mannequin.

It's easy to be ambivalent about stories within novels. I like the filling-in aspect, the answering of questions left that way because of space or time. I enjoyed *Gildenfire* (Stephen Donaldson's x-thousand words snipped from one of his novels), Nerilka's Story is sublime. Both of those, if I'd read them before *THE CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT* and *MORETA, DRAGONLADY OF FERN*, I would then have chased up the bigger stories immediately. I think I can wait a few years for this one.

This is sf, though, as opposed to the Dragonlance post JRR wagonjumper. And the female writer did produce some interesting female protagonists in difficult situations who coped with them uniquely. SF is not a man's world wholly. Gwyneth must be praised for adding her voice to her other sisters.

*FOOLS* by Pat Cadigan  
HarperCollins, 299 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

If there is such a thing as the cutting edge of Science Fiction then Pat Cadigan is at it. If you like nice, cosy adventure stories with well defined characters and boring but comprehensible plots perhaps you should be reading fantasy. This book is for those who like to be made to think.

The setting is a future where virtual reality is a substitute for sex, where addicts feed on other peoples' memories and where stealing memories and bootlegging them is big, criminal, business. The story is told in several voices because the narrator is a multiple personality. She is Marceline the memory junkie and Marva the actress, and Mersine the Brain Police cop. But which is the real one? As each takes a turn in ascendance even the

reader cannot be sure. At the start of the story she is Marva attending her celebration on becoming Famous. Now everyone who can afford it can buy her memories and be Marva for a time. But over there is someone wearing her face, getting all the attention. Something, she realises, is wrong and the only thing she can do is to disappear into the Downs - the sleazy end of town - to try and work it out.

Cadigan cleverly cuts between voices, differentiated by using different type-faces, changing the perceptions of the reader with those of the narrator as the plot is gradually unravelled. And at the end? Do any of us really know who we are?

*ONLY FORWARD* By Michael Marshall Smith  
HarperCollins, 455 pp, £4.99, p/b original

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A powerful debut from Smith. The story is well told and leaves you guessing not only what will happen next, but also to whom. We are introduced to Stark, a sort of private detective in a future where The City occupies most of the country, each country's capital city having grown to assimilate its neighbour. Instead of separate towns there are Neighbourhoods, where like minded people set up their ideal environment. Moving through these neighbourhoods is difficult - each has its own laws and regulations, some not allowing entry at all!

Stark is given the job of finding a missing specialist from Centre (where people "do things" and are called "Actioneers"). It transpires that Alkland, the missing Actioneer, has been kidnapped and moved to a no entry Neighbourhood. This provides Stark with complications but, being resourceful, he does find Alkland, only to stumble into something he hadn't counted on - Rafe.

The interaction between the characters, introduced into the story as enhancements to the plot, all work well. Each suits his chosen Neighbourhood, giving a taste of what such a life could provide. The differences between Zenda (Actioneer) and, say, Ji (gang leader in Red) only further emphasise the plot and feel of the story.

An excellent story that smoothly moves between violence, surrealism and emotion to exhilarate the reader. Smith's clever addition of wit and the changing plot always force you to read on, never wanting to put the book down. The revelations along the way leading to the dynamic climax create a superb roller coaster of a read. I hope to see more from this talented author soon.

DRAGONLANCE TALES ed by Margaret Weis + Tracy Hickman

Penguin, 698 pp, £10.99, "C" format p/b

DRAGONLANCE LEGENDS by Margaret Weis + Tracy Hickman

Penguin, 905 pp, £12.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Elaine and/or Sharon Pendorf.

The reason why this review is late is because of a simple untruth: the self-contained blurb. "Oh no" spout the authors, "it's a story within a story" or "These are within the Krynnian world but it's not necessary to have read all 98 other titles." -- Rubbish.

Who actually reads all the Dragonlance (and I'm not going to dignity it with its twee little "™") stuff? Yes, when I was twelve to sixteen I did experiment with RPGs - twice. Yes, up to the age of eleven I did "read" Livingstone and Jackson Fighting Fantasy. The best Weis, Hickman and all the other collaborators in the short stories anthology do is produce bastardised Tolkein for those who can't handle the hard stuff, the good stuff, the 200% proof shots that grab your throat and your stomach and tie knots in both of them, decorated with your tear ducts for a bow.

That having been said, I had previously read *TEST OF THE TWINS*, number two in the second Dragonlance trilogy, and, at the time, I did want to know what happened to Raistlin and Crysiana after all the mangling involved in opening the portal. Well, no shock, no horror (attention: Plot Warning - if you really can't guess and want to find out for yourself, read someone else's more reverent review, better still, read it and write one yourself). Weiss and Hickman kill him off. But they take a whole sodding book to do it! Aagh! That is sloppy writing and I will gladly debate the point in correspondence. Just think of all the little alchemistic chinless Erics who pedestalled Raistlin as their role model - how are they going to sacrifice themselves and renounce the utter evil that was so alluring?

Read the Twins book first. Then you can get thoroughly irritated at the collection of short stories that is equal in size, because of all the little hints and snippets that ooh, maybe Caramon's wizardly son is actually Raistlin reborn.

But really and truly, if you want to get the most out of this Dragonlance shimola, then read *THE WAR OF THE LANCE* first. I wanted to but decided better late than shelling out £14 for the more pabulum. Like pabulum, the stuff will fill your gullet, but some of us have outgrown it.

The collection of short stories was more interesting fare. Definitely one for the completist compulsives and aficionados who

think they'll get invited to Dragonlance trivia sessions. However, whoever decided - Hey, let's bung in the rip-off of Hiawatha right at the beginning of the book to impress everyone how literary we are - is obviously the same sad git who sets the English bit of the National Curriculum. For the sake of completeness I went through the whole Riverwind saga by the line and my conclusion was, someone should round up Conan, Riverwind, Beowulf and Cerebus, lock 'em all up in Wulfie's meadhall with no food and plenty of drink and see who lasts the night. I'll take bets on Cerebus.

THE LAST AUGURY by Jonathan Wylie

Corgi, 381 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The final volume in *THE ISLAND AND EMPIRE* series find Fen, Dsordas, Nason and his brother, the hostage Sagar, returning to Zalys, leaving Bowen and Gaye behind in the city Xantium, which was covered by a red dome of fire by Chancellor Verkho. But it is a return to a Zalys that is constantly attacked by the screamers, sea going manta rays that have somehow been given the power of flight and venomous barbed tails. The returnees tell of Verkho's struggle against the talisman that houses the spirit of the banished God Gar and his bid to subdue the God. If Verkho manages to overcome the God then he will have power enough and more to rule the world. Vengeance would fall first on Zalys and her people. But if Gar is triumphant then the whole world must despair as he will be more powerful than his brother and fellow Deities.

Emperor Southan and Empress Ifryn, along with Kerrell and other courtiers, fled the city intending to find a base where they could rally an army to attack Xantium, kill Verkho and set up a new Empire. But Verkho's reign of terror follows them until they reach a village which guards the way to an Abbey which only females may visit. Ifryn and her daughters go into this Abbey, where Ifryn discovers an ancient relic of the Goddess Zidon, sister to Gar and Meyu - who imprisoned his brother Gar. From Zidon Ifryn discovers that only the twins without magic will together triumph against Gar/Verkho but only after Ifryn's son has been given to him. Ifryn is the one twin, Fen the other, but they are half a world apart and Verkho is behind an impenetrable barrier in a city now peopled by his creatures. How can they all get back to Xantium and stop Gar before he manages to overcome Verkho?

An impressive ending to one of Wylie's

best series so far. A series that held the reader throughout with impressive characterisation and plotline. But this final volume was easily the best of the trilogy, a grand read, unputdownable. If you have not yet tasted the fruits of Wylie's labour you would do well to start here.

THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER by Ramsey Campbell  
Headline, 290 pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Peter J B Day.

This is a reprint of Ramsey Campbell's first novel, originally published in 1977. Clare Frayn is driving her brother home late at night. A man steps out into the road, she swerves, and hits a tree. Now her brother is dead, slumped in the passenger seat. But something looks strange. His right arm is missing. Someone has taken it. . . .

Thus begins a story that develops from this point on, getting stranger and stranger all the time. It says a lot for Campbell's strength as a writer that, even at this early stage in his novel-writing career, he could take such an implausible - and, at certain points, risibly over-the-top - plot and hold a thoroughly unconvinced reader's attention to the very last page. This book should be in the library of every Ramsey Campbell completist.

UFO AND SPACE: 1999 by Chris Drake  
Boxtree, 95 pp, £9.99, limpback

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The husband and wife team of Gerry and Sylvia Anderson progressed from puppets, via a little-known and long-forgotten feature film, to real live action in the 1970 TV series *UFO*. That lasted for only one season, but an idea for the never-made second series became the basis for *SPACE: 1999*. Thus they enjoy the rare distinction of having been responsible for both one of the best and one of the worst (certainly one of the daftest) sf series ever shown on TV.

However, the present purpose is not to give a critique of the programmes but of a book about them. It is, I suppose, typical of such books, comprising a brief documentary account of the making of the programmes, together with an account of the fictional background presented as though it were fact. Then there are brief bios of the main characters, a lot of evocative pictures, and short synopses of each episode - 26 for *UFO*, 48 for *SPACE: 1999*. It is all pleasantly done and quite nicely presented, but rather slight, and the author

is too enthusiastic to allow any critical note to intrude.

All in all its value would seem to be mainly as a nostalgic retrospective, enabling those who watched and enjoyed the programmes when they were new to recapture the feeling of those days twenty and more years ago when they were fresh and exciting. But even that was spoiled for me by the inadequacy of the episode summaries, which cover only the beginning of each, setting-up the problem but failing to provide the resolution. Probably this is the only book there will ever be, but it leaves room for a better one.

BYZANTIUM ENDURES by Michael Moorcock,  
Phoenix, 392 pp, £6.99, "B" format p/b  
THE LAUGHTER OF CARTHAGE by Michael Moorcock  
Phoenix, 502 pp, £6.99, "B" format p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The first two books in the Colonel Pyat series telling a tale or, to be more accurate, an autobiographical account from Pyat's own stories. For me the initial introduction in *BYZANTIUM ENDURES* sums up these two novels: "At first, because of his evident anti-Semitism, his hatred of the local people, his vicious and reactionary opinions of modern life, I found it difficult to respect his age and his suffering. . ." Absolutely. It is bigotry such as is found in the pages of these books that causes much of the world's woes.

Ironically Pyat's faith in the monarchy, which remains resolute throughout, causes his downfall and the lowly life of his early days. The consequences of the class system, as operating in Russia at that time, are little different from others: a ruling class, whilst tolerant of lower classes, only uses them to retain their own power, and this Pyat seems to discount in pursuit of his own glory. Can we believe his story?, and why the constant changes in fortune?

I hoped to discover something of life in Russia before, during and immediately after the Revolution, and there is a smattering of this. The difference for Pyat between Kiev and Odessa points the way to life at that time, yet he glosses over the problems and inadequacies of the system, only to emphasise them later, when they are still unaltered by the revolutionaries. It is the inconsistency that makes both the books difficult to read, and leaves you unsympathetic to Pyat's plight.

In the first book, *BYZANTIUM ENDURES*, Pyat grows up in the slums of Kiev, inventing a flying machine (which he crashes). After a brief trip to Odessa - where he, so to speak,

reaches maturity, with a cousin's aid, discovering sex, cocaine and the good life - he finds himself enrolled as a student at a college in St Petersburg. Through his usual luck, Pyat ends up with an upper class patron (Koliya, a Russian count) and his dissertation causes a sensation. Is this fact? Can we believe his genius? Or is it all pure cocaine fantasy? Who knows? To be honest I didn't particularly care, considering his self interest.

He goes on to be caught up in the Revolution, purely because of its scale and what he chooses to do. However, his being on each side promotes disbelief - even with his technical knowledge, would he survive so easily? One realises his sink into poverty and practical starvation may seem suffering enough, but his escape leaves his courage and loyalty to be questioned.

The second book, *THE LAUGHTER OF CARTHAGE*, continues the tale with Pyat initially in Constantinople and again forced to flee due to circumstance. This time with a new love, Esme, he finds himself via adventure in Rome. Here he meets (again!) people willing to support him because of his intellect and ideas. Finally they move on to Paris, where Pyat and Esme hit hard times until he meets up with Koliya (the Russian count) who has lived there for some time. Setting up a company to produce commercial airships, Pyat seems, at last, to be about to make it. Disaster strikes forcing him to flee alone to America.

Mixing with his fellow first class passengers, Pyat is taken in by two Americans who feel his ideas sound and suggest a partnership. The naivety shown by Pyat is unbelievable, he not only agrees to set up a company with complete strangers without any checks on them (gentleman's agreement?) but later, when they realise he is not the soft touch they expected (actually having no money), he still fails to see the scam, assuring himself and others of his friends' good intentions. The other aspect of his American experience has him touring the country as a member of Kiu Klux Klan, clearly agreeing with their ideals.

The continual up and down social and financial movement do not make a good read. Pyat, himself a victim of bigotry, suffering and in places ridicule, is neither a hero nor a person to grieve for or to feel sorry for. The reader has to seek solace in the background, that is the supporting cast, who are varied and of some interest, and with only the locales and their ambience to appreciate, and while both of these aspects provide some interest and distraction from the monologue, they are not enough.

*CATSPAW* by Joan D Vinge  
Pan, 454 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter J B Day.

Cat, a street-punk, half-alien, burnt-out telepath, is kidnapped by Braedee, Chief of Security for Centauri Transport, one of the mighty dynastic combines that dominate Man-kind's affairs. He is given drugs to temporarily restore his telepathic abilities and, under threat, transported to Earth, ostensibly to act as bodyguard to an important member of the TaMing family who own Centauri Transport.

Once on Earth, he gradually finds himself enmeshed in a network of lies. There are wheels within wheels, and nothing is quite what it seems. He begins to realise that, far from being a bodyguard, he is merely a catspaw, expendable bait.

This is exactly the sort of fast-paced, many-layered action-packed story, set in a richly-textured future society, that we have come to expect of this author, and she doesn't fail to satisfy. It is a good, exciting read, with many twists and turns, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

## GOOD FOOD GUIDE

MARTIN TUDOR is STILL trying to put together a GOOD FOOD GUIDE to the restaurants, pubs and cafés in and around Birmingham city centre.

The idea, as has been mentioned several times before, is to update and reproduce it each year for use by Novacon attendees and Brum Group members.

Given the average fan's preference for Chinese and Indian food at reasonable prices, Martin envisages that the GUIDE will concentrate quite heavily on the China 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 other cuisine.

Reviews should be about 50-150 words in length, and should include the name (and telephone number if possible), details of location, price range, acceptable methods of payment and comments on quality of the food, standard of service, etc. Please contact Martin at the next BSGF meeting and/or send your reviews to him at 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG. Come on, astound your friends - be the first to reply!

It's DEFINITELY time to join...

# NOVACON 24

Guest of Honour : GRAHAM JOYCE

Date : 4, 5 and 6 November 1994

Venue : The ROYAL ANGUS  
THISTLE HOTEL  
BIRMINGHAM

Rates to Join :	Up to 1st October	£25.00
	On the Door	£30.00

For Further

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 : 0384-825386  
(Before 8.30pm please)