

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

August 1994

Issue 275

*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 Science Fiction and Fantasy Author **CHRISTOPHER EVANS**

on Friday 19th August 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).

CHRISTOPHER EVANS, born in Wales in 1951, is a UK chemist who turned to full-time writing in 1979 after some years in the pharmaceutical industry. He has published sf and fantasy novels under his own name and as Christopher Carpenter, Nathan Elliott, Robert Knight and John Lyon, along with some non-genre fiction as Evan Christie and Alwyn Davies. His first published works were PLASMID (a film tie-in, 1980) under the name 'Robert Knight' and CAPELLA'S GOLDEN EYES (1980) under his own name. His other published works under his own name include: THE INSIDER (1981), IN LIMBO (1985), CHIMERAS (1992), AZTEC CENTURY (1993) and OTHER EDENS Volumes 1-3 (1987-89, anthologies edited with Robert Holdstock). As 'Christopher Carpenter' THE TWILIGHT REALM (1985), as 'Nathan Elliott' "The Hood Army Trilogy" of juvenile sf stories - EARTH INVADED (1986), SLAVEWORLD (1986) and THE LIBERATORS (1986), "The Star Pirates" series, again juveniles - KIDNAP IN SPACE (1987), PLAGUE MOON (1987) and TREASURE PLANET (1987). As 'John Lyon' THE SUMMONING (1985). His non-fiction includes: SCIENCE FICTION AS RELIGION (1981, chap book with Stan Gooch), THE GUIDE TO FANTASY ART TECHNIQUES (1984, a picture book with Martyn Dean), LIGHTSHIP (1985, text to Jim Burns artwork), CONSPIRACY THEORIES (1987, chap book), WRITING SCIENCE FICTION (1988, chap book), DREAM MAKERS: SIX FANTASY ARTISTS AT WORK (1988, picture book with Martyn Dean), AIRSHOW (1989, graphic collection, text to Philip Castle's artwork).

*[Many thanks to the ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF & 20TH CENTURY SF WRITERS for the above information.]*

The Brum 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 typing the book reviews, SARAH FREAKLEY and GEOFF COWIE for their video and tv 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

UNTIL 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 Storbidge Town Hall. Contact: Kaleidoscope, 93 Old Park Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 3NE, for further details.

13 AUGUST 1994: **LES VISITEURS** the French medieval time-travel romp will be showing, 6.30pm, at the Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry. Call the Box Office on 0203 524524.

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.

19 AUGUST 1994: **ERASERHEAD** David Lynch's bizarre mixture of black comedy, horror and sf will be showing at the Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 7277 for details.

19-25 AUGUST 1994: **ALPHAVILLE** Jean-Luc Goddard's classic blend of sf and film noir will be showing at the Electric Cinema, Station St., Birmingham. Call 021 643 7277.

21 AUGUST 1994: **FAHRENHEIT 451** Francois Truffaut's interpretation of the classic sf novel starring Julie Christie, will be showing at the Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 7277 for details.

28-29 AUGUST 1994: **TRUCKERS** the U-Matic Video version of Terry Pratchett's children's fantasy will be showing, 4pm on Sunday and Monday and 6.30pm on Monday, at the Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry. Call the Box Office on 0203 524524.

31 AUGUST 1994: **AKIRA** mind-blowing animé from Katsuhiro Otomo will be showing at the Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 7277 for details.

31 AUGUST - 1 SEPTEMBER 1994: **WINGS OF DESIRE (DER HIMMEL UBER BERLIN)** Wim Wenders' tale of two invisible angels eavesdropping on a myriad of mortals; part romance, part comedy will be showing at at the Midlands Art Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Call 021 440 3838 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.

2-5 SEPTEMBER 1994: **KIKA** cult director Pedro Almodovar's incestuous tragicomic thriller. The basic plot revolving around two women, the eternally optimistic naive heroine, make-up artist Kika and the evil Andrea Scarface who, with her futuristic combat gear (costumes by Gaultier) runs an exploitative reality tv show "The Worst of the Day". Showing at at the Midlands Art Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, call 021 440 3838 for further details.



2-8 SEPTEMBER 1994: *FARAWAY, SO CLOSE* Wim Wenders' sequel to *WINGS OF DESIRE* tells the tale of an angel, Cassiel, who tires of being a mere observer and joins the human race. Showing at the Electric Cinema, Station Street, Birmingham. Call 021 643 7277 for details.

14 SEPTEMBER 1994: DAVID GEMMELL will be signing copies of the hardcover *BLOODSTONE*, the graphic novel *WOLF IN SHADOW* and the paperback edition of *THE FIRST CHRONICLES OF DRUSS THE LEGEND*, from 5pm at Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Call 021-643-1999 for confirmation or to order signed copies.

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 copies of his new hardcover *MERLIN'S WOOD* (HarperCollins, £15.99) and the paperback edition of *THE HOLLOWING* from noon at Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk street, Birmingham. Call 021-643-1999 for confirmation or to order signed copies.

20-21 SEPTEMBER 1994: *EARTH PEOPLE* "a Journey of Reflection and Discovery" presented by P.A.L.S Productions. "Journey through the past, present and future of human kind" at the Midlands Art Centre Theatre, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Tickets £4.00 (£2.00). Call 021 440 3838.

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.

29 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER 1994: *FARAWAY, SO CLOSE* Wim Wenders' sequel to *WINGS OF DESIRE* tells the tale of an angel, Cassiel, who tires of being a mere observer and joins the human race. Showing at the Midlands Art Centre Cinema, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, call 021 440 3838 for further details.

30. SEP - 2 OCT 1994: FANTASYCON 19. Annual British fantasy convention, Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Attending £30.00, supporting £15.00. GoBs Katherine Kurtz and

Brian Lumley, MoC Graham Joyce. Contact: 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B26 0TG.

7 OCTOBER 1994: JACK COHEN & IAN STEWART will be guest speakers at the Leicester Science Fiction Group meeting, which, as usual, will be held in one of the upstairs function rooms of the Rainbow and Dove in Leicester's town centre. Call Steph Mortimer or Dave Holmes on 0533 518178 at Magic Labyrinth for further details.

7 OCTOBER 1994: SKYWATCH: THE SKYLAB PLANETARIUM try to spot the rings of Saturn using powerful telescopes, and explore the heavens inside the Skylab planetarium, plus talks, computer simulations and refreshments. Lickey Hills Country Park, meet at the Visitor Centre, 7.45pm-10pm. Call 021 447 7106 for further details.

21-24 OCTOBER 1994: ALBACON '94. Central Hotel, Glasgow. Attending was £25.00, supp. £15.00 until 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.

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 021 556 0997.

28 NOVEMBER - 3 DECEMBER 1994: *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW* 21st Birthday Party, Birmingham Hippodrome. Call 021 622 7466 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, 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, Vint 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, venue to be announced. 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.*

## JOPHAN REPORT #77

Rachel Baker, wife of artist Chris "Fangorn" Baker, has just completed a wall mural for the x-ray department of Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley, West Midlands.

The hospital had originally approached Fangorn to design the mural, but as he was tied up with work on Stanley Kubrick's latest project, Rachel offered her services.

The mural features a design of the interior of a space ship, lots of small aliens and Andromeda Bookshop's space-suited girl looking out of a porthole.

In his latest catalogue (#167, July/August) Rog Peyton, of Andromeda Bookshop in Birmingham, announces that long-time mail order supremo Ray Gibberd has been made a director of Andromeda Bookshop, in Birmingham. Ray has been with the company for 15 years and has been running the mail order side for several years now. Congratulations Ray.

In the same catalogue Rog confirms that negotiations have been reopened for the shop next door to Andromeda. As soon as the current occupiers move out Andromeda will be expanding - astronomers take note.

Stephen Tudor, organiser of snooker and darts tournaments at a number of Novacon's, and Tracy Schofield were married on 11 June this year. Followed a few months later by Dave Holmes, of Magic Labyrinth in Leicester, and Lisa Mortimer on 13 August. Best wishes to both happy couples.

Meanwhile Vicky Evans, daughter of BSFG Chair Bernie, and her fiancé Lee Nicholas have set a date for their wedding - 20 May 1995.

**INTERZONE** #86, cover-dated August, features a pleasingly strong British line-up - and not just in the fiction stakes. As well as stories by Keith Brooke, Peter F Hamilton and Novacon 24 Guest of Honour Graham Joyce (a rare collaboration), Sarah Ash, Chris Beckett and Lawrence Dyer, the issue includes a letter from BSFG member Robert Day, Dave Langford's gossip column (spun off from his



popular news-sheet. *ANSIBLE*, Brian Stableford's twentieth and final essay on "Yesterday's Bestsellers" (rescued from *IZ*'s short-lived sister publication *MILLION*), an interview by Stan Nicholls with Iain M Banks and Chris Priest on ufology (his *IZ* debut, although his column will now alternate with Charles Platt's).

Ramsey Campbell, Mark Morris, Stephen Laws and Steve Gallagher are among the authors signed up for the first issue of *DARK ASYLUM*, a new British horror magazine targeted at the audience once serviced by *FEAR* and its (disastrous) short-lived spin-off *FRIGHTENERS*. Based in Birtley, Tyne & Wear, the first edition is scheduled for news-stand release on 28 September.

*RED DWARF* star Craig Charles reportedly wept at a London Court on 11 July as he was remanded in custody on rape charges. Charles, 30 years old the previous day, was jointly accused with company director John David Peploe, 36, of raping a 38 years-old woman at her Clapham flat on 1 July; a third man is also being sought by police. Reporting restrictions were not lifted.

BSFG Chair Bernie Evans now has an e-mail address, so those of you who are electronically inclined can send your news, book reviews, details of your convention and anything else of interest to her at the e-mail address below. Please make the subject of your message "*BRUM GROUP NEWS*", and make it clear just what you are sending (news, review, etc), stating *CLEARLY* if it is not intended for actual publication, and send it to: [bevansa@cix.compulink.co.uk](mailto:bevansa@cix.compulink.co.uk). Bernie has asked me to point out that she is new to all this, but she thinks that's how you address it, and adds that anyone on e-mail will know all you need is her username (bevansa), and her service (cix). If it doesn't make sense let her know!

Enclosed with this newsletter you should find a GUFF ballot. Unfortunately the ballot distributed last issue contained several errors (made by the people who produced it in Australia). Please use the new ballot when voting - it is the one which correctly states the European Administrator's address as *CZECH Republic* rather than *Slovak*...

The BSFG's Legal Officer, Tim Stannard, recently made not only the local paper, but a national newspaper (the *DAILY STAR* and *Central News*). Turn the page for details...

## ON THE SMALL SCREEN

*BABYLON 5*, C4, Mondays 6pm.

by Geoff Cowie.

I saw the pilot episode of this last year, so was intrigued to see how the tv series would compare when it appeared. For those who don't know, *BABYLON 5* is set on a giant space station, positioned in deep space, with habitats and embassies for humans and aliens of several different races. *Babylons 1-4* were blown up or disappeared without trace.

The pilot had a good story and good dialogue, pitched at a much higher level of intelligence than the stock tv sf fare. The aliens, apart from the comic-opera Centaurians, looked suitably alien.

For the series, it seems that changes have been made. It's all been "dumbed down" a bit, with rather stock confrontations between various characters and heavily underscored morals - and one of the alien ambassadors, who comes over as female, apparently wasn't really female in the pilot. You may be surprised to learn that no models exist for the exterior shots of space stations and spacecraft - it's all done with Amiga computers and a "video toaster".

The plot of the first episode concerned unprovoked attack on a colony, underhand arms dealing and piratical attacks on shipping; the space action scenes (done on the "toaster") looked spectacular. It's all pure space opera, of course, but despite being "dumbed down", it still seems a series worth watching.

## ON VIDEO

*OVER-SEXED RUGSUCKERS FROM MARS*

Reviewed by Sarah Freakley.

A gripping tale of Sex, Passion, Rock Chics, Sex, The Occasional Death, A Tramp, and the Vacuum Cleaner who loves him.

The earth is an experiment run by aliens, who look suspiciously like male and female versions of Morph, with much larger genitals.

The aliens think the human race is too





Some of Tim's rare beer mats including, far left, the first ever British mat, from Watney's in 1922.

# TIM'S BEER MAT BARMY



## He's got half a million of them

By SUZANNE VIRDEE

WHEN Birmingham solicitor Tim Stannard walks into a pub it's only for the beer... mats.

Because Tim, aged 52, from Nursery Road, Edgbaston, has 500,000 of them and collects thousands from all over the world.

But his hoard, estimated to be worth £25,000, is hated by his wife, Doreen, who claims the mats have taken over their house and their lives.

"I'm a beer mat widow. If he's not in front of the TV he's sorting out his beer mats, or he's at a beer mat collector's meeting," she said. "I've told him I'd like to make a bonfire out of the lot of them but he still refuses to sell them." Tim first started collecting the mats in his late teens and had 20,000 by the time the couple married.

But his collection has grown so much over the years he has had to build an extension to house it, and he now has to park his car on the drive because the garage is full too.

Tim also has three tea chests full of sea shells, 4,000 playing cards, around 300 shells, mortars and rockets and a collection of china coasters.

### Quite full

He said: "I admit the loft, garage, extension and study are quite full with my collections.

"But I don't think I'm obsessive. I just enjoy collecting things.

"I know my wife would like me to get rid of them, especially the beer mats, but I'll never do that.

"In time she will inherit the collection and can sell it."

ONLY HERE FOR THE BEER MATS: Tim Stannard with a few of his collection



untidly, so they decide to cross breed a human with a vacuum cleaner and create a race that will clean up after itself.

Anyone who enjoys really bad movies will love this. The acting is worse than that in day time soaps (I'm fairly sure the camera is a camcorder,) and so's the sound. Lights? What lights...

The special effects - what can I say? The hybrid baby - half dust-buster, half cabbage patch doll... It's *BAD TASTE*, only worse and without the splat and gore.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*THE COMING OF VERTUNNUS* by Ian Watson  
Gollancz, 288 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

A varied collection, both in content and quality, which further reinforces my view that many British writers fare worst in the hi-tech subject matters popular amongst American writers, but are formidable on more off-beat or quirky material. Watson's book has both - "The Odour of Cocktail Cigarettes" could have been written for *ANALOG*, "Nanoware Time" likewise, and neither succeed, whilst "The Bible in Blood" gives an occult view of the Holocaust as the power source behind a very different Jewish phenomenon.

Whilst there are a number of out and out turkeys in the book ("Happy Hour" comes to mind), there are three stories I admire for a variety of reasons. "Talk of the Town" appealed to me as a very British slant on the city consciousness/entity as written by John Shirley in *CITY COME A WALKING*, with the powers and actions of the city suitably scaled down (Davenport, of all places). "Life in the Groove" was originally featured in the *IN DREAMS* anthology, and gives a way-out look at a real "Discworld" in which a character, following the catastrophic destruction of his city, becomes tantalisingly close to the truth - "our world is a joke box".

The brilliant title story illustrates Watson's strengths more clearly than anything else in the book. Jill Donaldson, an art historian, is paid to falsely authenticate a set of fake pornographic masterpieces by an artist whose work is much used by the powerful "Green" elements in the world of the story.

I can say little more, save to remark on

Watson's skills at portraying altered states of consciousness - and to recommend you read it, either in this collection or in Dozois' *YEAR'S BEST* anthology, (which contains much more in addition), rather than this rather mixed bag.

*THE GALAXY GAME* by Phil Janes  
Millennium, 212 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Not to beat about the bush, I was extremely disappointed with this book. The jokes are feeble, the plotline weak and the characters thin. Overall, Janes thinks he is far funnier than he actually is. Comparing Janes to Pratchett or Adams (as in the blurb) is rather like comparing the elegant wit of say Oscar Wilde to schoolboy lavatorial humour. Each has its market, but they aren't the same thing. Here the smug narrative detracts from what story there is.

Basically you have Richard Curtis (who is accident prone and lacking in intelligence, but rich through inheritance) in charge of the first expedition to another star. With him go a chosen crew, all equally useless, and Curtis' computer Arnold. The whole thing turns out to be some elaborate game between two megapowerful beings who use the galaxy for a boardgame. Each tries to influence his pieces for his own ends - the Challenger to prevent the ship reaching the star, the Champion for it to succeed.

There is no real hero, Curtis lacks character and none of the others stand out enough, sympathy doesn't mean hero potential. The baddie Vyland, an egotistical scientist who discovers other means to reach the star, fares better - but the baddies often get the best parts.

This is the first instalment of the series, but on the strength of this I wouldn't bother with the rest.

*STAR ASCENT* by Louise Cooper  
HarperCollins, 414 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Yet another visit to the realm ruled in turn by Chaos and Order. This time the rulers are Chaos and the tale is set inside the castle on the Star Peninsula and tells of Benetan, a Chaos rider. He is the leader of the company that rides out at night on winged horses, wresting young men and women from their beds and taking them to the castle, where they may become a Magus, a Chaos rider,

fact "Music With Rocks In". This music, also the name of the band playing it, turns lives upside down; notably for wizards, who start doing outlandish things like painting their bedrooms black and wearing studded jackets.

The clash of the two main themes provides the pivot for the tale, with young Susan aiding the leader of the band Imp (or Buddy) in times of trouble - well attempts to kill him by the Musicians Guild actually. Hence Death (as Imp's stand in) follows "Music With Rocks In" on tour, stepping in to distract assassins, and the band are totally unaware of any of it!

Pratchett has a way with humour that not only amuses (well, okay, causes outbursts of giggles) but is poignant at times, creating comedy with a conscience; you laugh but there is a serious thought provoking side. Here Death (my favourite Discworld character) while being who he is, feels his position and tries to learn to forget. The humour comes from the interaction with the people he tries to learn from: a holy man living on a mountain and the Klatcian Foreign Legion providing the light relief to the serious underlying questions of his mission.

The music side provides ample distraction and numerous gags which Pratchett remorselessly piles on. Their instant success, its repercussions, how and where the Music originated, all provide light hearted fun. Overall an enjoyable romp.

THE LAUGHING CORPSE by Laurell K Hamilton  
NEL, 374 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

Meet Anita Blake, St Louis private eye and animator - not the Walt Disney kind, she raises the dead - featuring in her second yarn, which can be read without reading the first, (GUILTY PLEASURES, which left the heroine with both mental and physical scar tissue). Vampires, werewolves and zombies are now present in the modern world, and the legal system is trying to catch up - vampires face "staking" for taking unwilling victims, and the problems of wills and probates when the deceased is undead will keep lawyers in BMWs for years.

Anita is approached by a disabled multi-millionaire to resurrect an ancestor over 300 years old, but for some reason, the need for a human sacrifice to work the voodoo perhaps, she declines. Shortly after the police department seek her aid when a family are found devoured in rather messy circumstances (Hannibal Lector eat your heart out), and she

a servant, a plaything of the castle staff or a sacrifice. Whatever they become, most do not wish to be in the castle. Benetan was taken this way himself, but his twelve years in the castle, and his privileged position have dulled his memory of his past and of that night.

The death of First Magus and the ascension of the new one means that a new crop of youths and young women are to be brought to the castle, to be used mainly as companions by the Gods of Chaos and their entourage, who will attend the feasting that follows the selection of the new First Magus. Benetan is not unhappy with his given task, but that changes when he is sent to his former home village and he has to take the girl he loved as a youth. He and Iselia had pledged themselves to each other the same day he was taken, and now it is her wedding day. She has married Kaldar, a believer in Order and a member of the rebellion against Chaos. They had planned to journey south to join the leaders of the rebellion, but Iselia is taken even before the marriage is consummated.

Kaldar secretly follows Iselia to the castle and meets Benetan, extracting from him a promise that he will try to get Iselia out of the castle. After his inauguration the new First Magus decides to have the rebellion put down savagely, and gives Benetan the task of infiltrating the rebels to accomplish this end. But how can he cause the death of the husband of the woman he still loves, a man who was once his friend? And does the First Magus suspect that Benetan's devotion to Chaos is weakening?

Cooper does seem to like this struggle between Chaos and Order, this is the third such series. The first one, THE TIME MASTER trilogy, was the best, and the hero Tarrod surfaces again in this tale. I liked the characters of Benetan and his mistress Andraia, but Iselia is a bit wishy-washy. The prose tends to the purple at times, detracting from the plot, which is a bit weak anyway. This series could ultimately be disappointing, we'll have to wait and see what volume two is like.

SOUL MUSIC by Terry Pratchett  
Gollancz, 286 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The latest Discworld novel continuing the saga. This time we have Death's granddaughter (Susan) forced to take over the family business when Death decides to do other things. Intermingled with the story, music becomes a big fad in Ankh-Morpork - in



encounters Dominga Salvador, a formidable Bokor (voodoo magician). The plot is given added bite by Blake's ambivalent feelings towards Jean-Claude, the master vampire to whom she turns for help (again the previous volume is referred to), and the whole thing careers ahead to a satisfyingly neat finale.

This book is just the thing to read on planes and trains, no pretensions to high literary style and occasional tongue in cheek moments punctuating the gore and grit. Anita Blake is a fine character, my only quibble being her ability to cope with any assailant to the point where I couldn't seriously see her as being at risk. Worth a look.

ONLY VISITING THIS PLANET The Art of Danny Flynn  
Text Nigel Suckling, Foreword Arthur C Clarke  
Paper Tiger, 128 pp, £10.95, limpback artbook  
Reviewed by Michael Jones

I must confess to not having known of Danny Flynn before picking up this book, despite the fact of his artwork having adorned the writings of several very well-known authors - not to mention computer games and the odd record or two. Perhaps if all British publishers were as good as some American ones at giving credit for cover illustrations, a few more of our home-grown artists might achieve the recognition they deserve. Instead, it is only through books such as this that the ordinary fan in the street has a chance to find out about artists and their work.

It succeeds admirably. The biographical sections are concise yet comprehensive, and the short paragraphs which accompany each picture are particularly, and pleasingly, informative. Then there are the pictures themselves, many painted specifically for the book. A strongly defined personal style might in lesser hands lead to a degree of sameness about a collection of an artist's work, but in this case a richly inventive creativity dispels any such criticism. These pictures are *gorgeous* and I wish I could have one on my wall. If I were allowed only one art book, this would be it.

SOLIS by A A Attanasio  
Hodder and Stoughton, 184 pp, £16.99, h/b  
Reviewed by Phil Noyse.

The familiar device of this novel is the passage of a human being into the future via cryonics. Charles Outis finds himself in a distant future where the bulk of humanity has evolved past our definition of what is Human.

These, the Maat, have allowed reservations of old-style humans to persist, and it is through those we see the action of the book.

Outis is nothing more than a disembodied brain, but highly valuable as "wet ware" (like Anne McCaffrey's Helva) and, prior to the main story, is repeatedly stolen (once by "Lewdists" - don't smirk, you probably fit the description!) and then placed to run an orbital factory. His distress call reaches Munk, an drone with an additional drive programmed by the Maat to empathise with old-style humans, and a rescue attempt is launched.

The quest is for the Solis community on Mars, where Outis may hope for transplantation into a cloned body, and features numerous intriguing characters and creatures. Why, then, did it bore me to tears?

For all the inventiveness, little effort is made to create believable living characters, and I ended up indifferent to their fate. The nuts and bolts of the book are also loose - why, for instance, can they not land close to Solis, apart from the fact that the book would have been half the size. In addition, the story is told in the present tense, which I found distracting. Basically crud.

A DIFFERENT KINGDOM by Paul Kearney  
Gollancz, 310 pp, £4.99, p/b  
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A story of the meeting of two worlds, the hero being the catalyst, Michael Fay, who lives with his grandparents after the brutal murder of his parents in Belfast. Their remote farm in the Irish countryside hides many things, the old ways of Ireland reluctant to change to the new mechanistic ideas, progress slow. Fay stumbles upon another place in a dark dell near the farm. At first, as a child he is unaware of what it is he has discovered and he is fearful of what he sees. But as he grows towards manhood he is taken into the land by a strange being, Cat, who enchants him with her looks and wiles.

He believes he has a quest, to find his missing aunt Rose, who was taken away while he was still a lad. The other place proves harsh and dangerous, particularly the horse-man, whom all claim as the Devil, the collector of souls. Michael must beware him above all, for if he falls under his spell he cannot return to his home. The quest proves arduous and fails, leaving Fay on returning home bitter and fearful. He runs away finally leaving Ireland. Even this eventually proves not enough as the forest of the other place catches up with him.

A well worked tale that provides a good story. Kearney mingles myth with fantasy to good effect. The theory of a "crossing point" between the two worlds explains a lot and is used to emphasise points in the narrative as it develops. At times reminiscent of *MYTHAGO WOOD*, but in no way copying it. This has its own originality yet has a feel of a not quite remembered myth to it, making it both familiar yet still capable of giving surprises. The characters work well and give good counter-balance to the story without overpowering it. Definitely worth a read.

**ANGEL** by Garry D Kilworth  
Gollancz, 286 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This is a powerful cop story mixed in with the supernatural. San Francisco 1997, a series of fires, white hot incendiary fires, have spread through the city, one of them being responsible for the deaths of Dave Peters' wife and child. Dave Peters is a cop, and one night sees a man walk away from one of the fires unscathed. He sets off on a trail which leads ultimately to a battle between Angels and Demons, with San Francisco the battleground.

Superficially a tale of Good versus Evil, but which is which? Can Good do more damage than Evil, as far as the inhabitants of Earth are concerned? Can either be controlled before it's too late?

To match these disturbing questions Garry Kilworth has created some superb and quite disturbing characters; Vanessa Vangellen, the arsonist who becomes Dave's girlfriend; Stan Manovitch, the probation officer who has a mind far sicker than any of his charges; and Dave's partner Danny Spitz, who is torturing himself mentally with what he considers to be his own sins.

I resented putting this book down each time I had to, and couldn't wait to get back to it, which says it all, really. Garry D Kilworth is up there with the best. Read this.

**ANTI-ICE** by Stephen Baxter  
HarperCollins, 280 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

Given Stephen Baxter's growing reputation as one of the three new *hard sf* writers, this book was a much easier read than I expected (preferring my science a little on the softer side), and proves that he can also spin a good yarn. The science in this book is fairly

simple (I understood it!) and it's more of a look-back to Verne and Wells than to his other work. Set in the 1870s, Britain reigns supreme in Europe, it's capital city being Manchester, as a result of the discovery of Anti-Ice.

Anti-Ice is developed by the famous engineer Sir Josiah Traveller, to feed the railway system and any number of novel inventions, even a rocket to the moon. It can also be abused, much like atomic power in the real world. Meanwhile the Prussians and the French have to take a back seat and squabble with each other. Sir Josiah's rocket, the Phaeton, is hi-jacked by a French rebel, with Sir Josiah and Ned Vicars, a young attaché to the French Foreign Office, still on board. Hence begins the adventure which culminates in the very first Moon landing! To add a romantic touch, Ned also falls in love with a beautiful French girl, Françoise.

This book is lightweight, good fun, has plenty of charm, and is definitely one to read.

## GOOD FOOD GUIDE

MARTIN TUDOR is compiling 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 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 of the establishment (and telephone number if possible), details of location, price range, acceptable methods of payment (whether cheques and/or credit cards are acceptable) and comments on quality of the food, standard of service, etc. Please send your reviews to Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.



# NOVACON

*Why not join TWO Conventions for less  
than the price of ONE Worldcon?*

If you send your money before the 1st October 1994 you can join both Novacon 24 and Novacon 25 for just £45.00!

Novacon, as you may know, is a long running Science Fiction convention organised by the Birmingham SF Group. Both Novacons 24 and 25 will have the usual mixture of talks from guest speakers (including publishers, editors, authors and scientists), panel discussions, quizzes, silly games, films, late bar and lots of fun.

NOVACON 24 will be held at the Royal Angus Hotel in Birmingham from 4-6th November 1994, and with a Guest of Honour as entertaining as GRAHAM JOYCE, along with Joyce and Bradbury's Emporium of Dreams and Illusions on the Friday night, a proposed Balti Banquet on the Saturday night and a Beer and Sausage Tasting on the Sunday night, it looks like this will be a Novacon to remember.

NOVACON 25 is going to be something special, it will be held from the 3-5th November 1995 and features FOUR guests - BRIAN W ALDISS, HARRY HARRISON, BOB SHAW and IAIN BANKS, a new location - the Chamberlain Hotel in Birmingham, with room rates from £20.00 per person per night (sharing a double/twin, £40.00 pppn in a single) which includes full English breakfast.

So how do you join? Simply complete the coupon enclosed with this issue of *the BRUM GROUP NEWS* and send it (along with your cheque) to: CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. If you have any queries call Tony or Carol Morton on 0384-825386 (before 9pm).