

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

September 1994

Issue 276

*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 **ROBERT HOLDSTOCK**

on Friday 16th September 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).

ROBERT PAUL HOLDSTOCK was born in Hythe, Kent on 2 August 1948; educated at University College of North Wales Bangor, 1967-70, BSc (Honours) in applied zoology 1970; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 1970-71, MSc in medical zoology 1971; research student, Medical Research Council, London, 1971-74. His first story, "Pauper's Plot", was published in *NEW WAVE* in 1968, he became a full-time writer in the mid-seventies. Best known for his "Mythago Wood" sequence, *MYTHAGO WOOD* (1985), *LAVONDYSS* (1988), *THE BONE FOREST* (collection 1991) and *THE FETCH* (1991), earlier works included *EYE AMONG THE BLIND* (1976), *EARTHWIND* (1977), *WHERE TIME WINDS BLOW* (1982) and the short story collection *IN THE VALLEY OF THE STATUES* (1982). He received the British Science Fiction Award in 1985 and the World Fantasy Award in 1985. From the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties he wrote around 20 novels; under the house name KEN BLAKE instalments of "the Professionals" series *CRY WOLF* (1981), *THE UNTOUCHABLES* (1982), *OPERATION SUSIE* (1982), *YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT* (1982); as ROBERT BLACK two film novelizations *LEGEND OF THE WEREWOLF* (1976) and *THE SATANISTS* (1977); "the Berserker" series as *CHRIS CARLSEN SHADOW OF THE WOLF* (1977), *THE BULL CHIEF* (1977) and *THE HORNED WARRIOR* (1979); as STEVEN EISLER the linking texts for two volumes of reprinted illustrations *SPACE WARS WORLDS AND WEAPONS* (1979) and *THE ALIEN WORLD* (1980); the "Night Hunter" sequence *THE STALKING* (1983), *THE TALISMAN* (1983), *THE GHOST DANCE* (1984), *THE SHRINE* (1984), *THE HEXING* (1984) and *THE LABYRINTH* (1987); under the house name RICHARD KIRK *SWORDMISTRESS OF CHAOS* (1978) with Angus Wells (writing together as Kirk), *A TIME OF GHOSTS* (1978) and *LORDS OF THE SHADOWS* (1979). His non-fiction includes *STARS OF ALBION* (1979) anthology edited with Christopher Priest, *OTHER EDEMS* (1987), *OTHER EDEMS II* (1988) and *OTHER EDEMS III* (1989) all anthologies edited with Chris Evans. Other works include *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION* (1978), consultant editor *NECROMANCER* (1978) a paranormal horror; *ELITE: THE DARK WHEEL* (1984) novella based on a computer game; *BULMAN* (1984) and *ONE OF OUR PIGEONS IS MISSING* (1984) tv novelizations; *THE EMERALD FOREST* (1985) film novelization.

[Thanks to *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION* by Clute & Nicholls and *20th CENTURY SF WRITERS* for the above.]

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 typing the book reviews, ROBERT SNEDDON for his convention reports, STEVE GREEN, CRITICAL WAVE, MATRIX and WHAT'S ON for the news in the Jophan Report and Events listing and TONY BERRY for the use of his spare room.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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.

23-25 SEPTEMBER 1994: *PANOPTICON DR WHO* convention at the Hotel Leofric, Coventry. Contact: PO Box 357, London, SW19 8BT.

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. Guests of Honour Katherine Kurtz and Brian Lumley, MoC Graham Joyce. Contact: 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0TG.

7 OCTOBER 1994: JACK COHEN and 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.

7-9 OCTOBER 1994: MIDCON STAR TREK convention, Holiday Inn, Leicester. Contact: 9 Ennerdale Close, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 4TH.

15-16 OCTOBER 1994: MEMORABILIA '94 "Europe's largest ever event for collectables relating to comics, films, sf and pop memorabilia". The NEC, Birmingham, 10am to 5pm each day. Adults £2.50, children/OAPs/students £1.50. Call 0462 683965 or 0860 355620 for details.

15-16 OCTOBER 1994: INTERSECTION STAFF WEEK-END, open to "Interested Others", at Victoria Hotel Periquito, Wolverhampton.

21-24 OCTOBER 1994: ALBACON '94. Central Hotel, Glasgow. Attending £30.00 until 15 October then £35.00 on the door. Guests of Honour Robert Asprin, Douglas Hill and Birmingham's own Fangorn. 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 NOVEMBER 1994: TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing at Waterstone's, 24-26 High Street, Birmingham, call 021 633 4353 for details.

11-13 NOVEMBER 1994: UNIFICATION '94 multi-media convention at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. QUANTUM LEAP, STAR TREK, DR WHO, ROBIN OF SHERWOOD, STAR WARS, V, TIME TRAX, DSG and many more, plus guests, quizzes and games. For further information write to: Unification, Clifton House, 27 Clifton Place, Newton Bar, Wakefield, WFI 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 021 558 0997.

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

### The December BSFG Meeting

16 December 1994

will be the long-awaited  
BEER & SKITTLES EVENING at the  
Samson & Lion, Wordsley.  
Price £10.00 per person,  
includes travel from and back  
to Birmingham city centre.  
Cash/cheques to Helena Bowles,  
116 Shireland Road, Smethwick,  
Warley, West Mids., B66 4QJ.

14-17 APRIL 1995: CONFABULATION 46th UK National sf con at the Britannia International Hotel, London. GoHs Lois McMasters Bujoid, 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, Vinc Clarke. Attending £60.00 until 30 September 1994, then rising to £80.00. 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 science fiction 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 BSGF 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.*

## CONVENTION REPORTS

Vibraphone  
4-6 February 1994

Report by Robert Sneddon

Two things came to mind as I drove into Brighton on the Friday before the annual British filk convention - the first was I had only ever visited Brighton when attending a convention, and second, the filkers, a fringe fangroup if ever there was one (excepting of course the Robert Lionel Fanthorpe Literary Study Circle) had run more (and more regular) specialist cons than had the fannish literati with the Mexicons.

For the first point, I assumed there was a lot in Brighton worth seeing outside the convention, but I wasn't here to enjoy myself.

The second point was that filking was in serious danger of becoming respectable fannish activity. The old jokes like "Where's the filking tonight? Anywhere the committee can't find us." don't ring true anymore now that filkers help run mainstream cons and filk concerts are - shudder - ON THE PROGRAMME. The filk cons are where the filkers can come out of the closet (and a good thing too. The acoustics are terrible) but all of a sudden we don't need to anymore. It's starting to get crowded in here, though.

Vibraphone. VI, number six in the series, at the Royal Oak hotel, with an American FoN (Filk of Note, for the uninitiated) Tom Smith, a gentleman of some rotundity (typical of the breed for some reason), and our own home-grown Talis Kimberley as local talent to compare him with. Filking cons are quite difficult to program, it appears. There are workshops on playing instruments, recording, and writing and performing music, as well as the inevitable circles (Bardic, amoeba, PPP) but they form and disperse spontaneously more often than not. All the committee has to provide is some rooms and chairs and ensure anyone who requested a quiet area bedroom is located well away from the function space. Other programme ideas? If you have any, the committee of TranSept, the next filk con, would really like to hear from you Real Soon Now.

The Guest of Honour speech of a regular con is supplanted by the "Sing for your Supper" concert where the FoN is pushed out in front of a good-sized audience and a microphone and told "Entertain us". Tom Smith's set was funny and melancholy by turns and he avoided the trap other American FoNs fall into of singing songs based on a clichish Yankee shared experience. The centrepiece was undoubtedly his tribute to Jim Henson, the Muppet Show creator who died a few years back. Talis did her concert the next day, singing her own stuff, some old and familiar, some new. She was nervous at first, as she usually is, but once she got into her set she started to loosen up and enjoy herself. Zander backed her on keyboards as usual, with Phil Allcock providing occasional support on acoustic guitar when appropriate. Talis' voice and breathing still needs a bit of work IMHO, but her heart is evident in every song, and her creativity still astonishes me. The rest of my con was spent visiting with fans - the British filk cons are started to get noticed on the other side of the Big Pond and we had a few fly-ins from America. Fan feuds being what they are, there were also

one or two noticeable absences from the membership list. Perhaps feuds are a sign of maturity, but it was sad not seeing some old friends.

Sightseeing? Nope. The only trips around historic Brighton I made were part of my endless search for a space to park my car. Maybe I'll do the tourist bit next time I'm in Brighton - Easter '96 at Evolution, probably. Then again, maybe not.

Boskone 31  
18-20 February, 1994

Report by Robert Sneddon

I paused for a second, ratchet spanner in hand, and thought "Hold on, I've done this before!" I looked around, and, sure enough, I was putting a convention art-show together, and Chip Hitchcock was telling everybody what to do, and everything was labelled "NESFA", and ... so what? I was at an American convention. Of course I was putting a NESFA art-show together. It's what I spent 600 bucks getting here for, wasn't it?

For the truly dedicated British convention-goer, Boskones are a legend, spoken of reverently in the room parties when the booze is almost all gone, the Eastern sky is lightening, and Paul Dormer is fast asleep on one of the beds. The home con of the top US fan group, thirty years in unbroken succession, it's got to be great. All the stupid mistakes were fixed years ago, the organisational nightmares were solved for all time by the Ghods of Smof. A fire-and-forget Ops team, hot and cold running gophers, a programming committee West Point would be proud to call their own ... how could it fail to be Perfection? Dreams are made to be broken, perhaps. And yet, knowing this, Boskone 31 still disappointed. I saw little new, a lot old, worn, obsolete even by British standards.

I was told of the Boskones of old, the drunken ratpacks that devastated hotels, thousands of fans (gasp, shock, horror!) ENJOYING themselves (Heaven forbid!). The orgies, the human sacrifices, fans mind-blasted on drugs so evil and pernicious the authorities dared not declare them illegal for fear of allowing their very existence to be known to the unsuspecting public, the unspeakable Gnathic rites in the con suite .... Ah, said the cognoscenti, those were the days. Those were the REAL Boskones, they sagely muttered in the dark corners of the hotel bar. And, as usual, I missed them. Boskone 31 was similar to a dozen or more regional

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British conventions I've attended over the past few years. The art show was better than most British cons can put on, given the quality and availability of work from various pro and semipro artists. The program also had access to many more filthy pros to talk on the panels, and to me from the wrong side of the Pond, the names were fresh and new (whereas I've had it up to HERE with Ian M. Banks, Brian Aldiss, Robert Holdstock, Terry Pratchett etc.) The dealers room was less familiar, with the hucksters selling a completely different selection of overpriced and unaffordable stuff. Boskone 31 possessed no magic that would attract new fans into what should be a congress of wonder, a community of the imagination. I felt it was tired, like an old firehorse that still leapt out of its stall when the mid-February bell rang, only to watch the shiny red fire engines roar off down the tarmac street without him. The spawning of Arisia a few years back might have been a warning to the old Boskonians that something had gone wrong, but if so it was ignored. "We're not here to have FUN!" seemed to be the convention philosophy. The laughs at Boskone were for in-jokes, like the treatment of Ben Yalow at the opening ceremony. A neo would never have understood the references that were creasing the rest of the audience.

This was a get-together of friends, slowly growing older together, like the fanzine fan get-togethers in the UK, when famous names of the past cry in their beer about the awful state of fan publishing and how it isn't their fault for KTF reviewing and insularity and refusal to do anything different for forty years. Beware, Boskone. Some day the movers and shakers will ask "Why bother?". The regular attendees will ask the same, and Boskone will be no more. Cons are organisational vampires. They endlessly rise from their uneasy graves and demand fresh new blood. A dry corpse yields no sustenance to such as they. Boskone, beware, and awake before it is too late.

ConYak

26-28 November 1993,

Overamstel, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Report by Robert Sneddon

Ten years after my last BeneluxCon in Holland, I travelled back to Amsterdam to attend ConYak. The differences were startling - the sercon atmosphere had disappeared, the British Guest of Honour (Robert Holdstock) was accessible to the fans (unlike X-con where

Brian Aldiss had spent the entire convention surrounded by committee members) and the British fan contingent was more obvious, making up over 10% of the membership. I spent a couple of days in Amsterdam before the convention, staying with Eya Kuismanen and seeing the sights, before decamping to the Hotel Mercure in the south of the city.

The last PR's how-to-get-there instructions said "Get out at the Overamstel tram stop, look to your right and the hotel is visible". This forgot to allow for the thick fog that descended on Amsterdam on the Friday.

The Mercure is a modern business-type hotel, and the staff were obviously unused to SF conventions. They did try to make us welcome, thankfully, and the restaurant served good meals at reasonable prices. This was a relief as the eating places in the centre of Amsterdam were a good 20 minutes away by tram.

As usual, I spent most of the con socialising and only attended a few bits of the formal program. The gopher hole was THE place to be, under the thumb of mummy gopher Miranda. Coffee and boiled eggs were on the menu, comfy chairs to sit on, conversation a la carte - who needs a program? The Dutch Guest of Honour was Tonke Dragt, a popular children's fantasy author who has not (yet) been translated for the English-reading market. A masquerade was held, run by the fan Guest of Honour, Annmarie Van Ewijk. This attracted ten entries, and may become a more usual event in Beneluxcons.

The continuous video program included large chunks of Japanime and a Godzilla all-nighter on Saturday/Sunday. About half of the program was in English, to cater for the insular and linguistically challenged Brits. The Russians and Ukrainians turned up as usual, selling KGB membership cards, space memorabilia and Star Trek Russian dolls. European conventions are getting steadily more international since the borders between East and West became soggy. ConYak was less different to British conventions than I had expected. This is perhaps due to the increasing internationalisation of cons and con-running. ConFiction in 1990 had a mainly British ops team; the 1995 WorldCon in Glasgow is being put together by an organisation with representatives from all over the world. This might lead to the real differences between cons disappearing, leaving us with a bland standard Euro-product. I don't think this would be good for fandom in general, and me as a consumer in particular. SF is different, and I believe cons should

reflect this, especially across national boundaries.

Did I enjoy ConYak? Yes, with the above reservations. I made new friends and saw a few new things. The natives were friendly and the atmosphere convivial. Would I go to another Beneluxcon? Yes, but I might hope for a surprise or two at the next one.

## JOPHAN REPORT #78

Jack Womack's ELVISSEY and John M Ford's GROWING UP WEIGHTLESS tied as winners of this year's Philip K Dick Award for best original paperback, presented at the Seattle convention Norwescon 17 in April.

The other nominees were BUNCH! by David R Bunch, CRASH COURSE by Wilhelmina Baird and ICARUS DESCENDING by Elizabeth Hand. Judging the award, which includes a citation and cash grant, were Joan Gordon, Phyllis Gotlieb, Jonathan Lethem, Dave Smith and Sarah Smith; the award administrators are David G Hartwell, Gordon Van Gelder and David A Smith. The award was sponsored by the Philadelphia SF Society, the Northwest Science Fiction Society and Norwescon.

Harbouring a lifelong desire to sit in the command chair of the USS Enterprise? Have a few hundred dollars to spare? Beam Aboard Enterprises has been set up to twist Paramount's arms to create a STAR TREK theme park/hotel, although they've yet to decide whether it's Kirk's or Picard's vessel which deserves the honour (or even Pike's, for those for whom it was love at first sight).

For details, the group can be reached on (California, USA) 1-900-255-1555 (first minute US\$2.95, \$3.75 for the remaining 150 seconds), or at Riverside, California, USA.

Although the BBC has shelved its run of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION until September, fans can reacquaint themselves with both the current series and its 1960s incarnation through THE TREK UNIVERSAL INDEX, Thomas Maxwell's encyclopedic guide to Gene Roddenberry's sf trendsetter.

Published by Boxtree at £9.99 (or £12.99 if you believe the press release), it's "first ever" tag is only slightly dented by the existence of Bjo Trimble's STAR TREK CONCORDANCE (1976) - although, to be fair, that only covered the original television series (albeit in far greater detail). The visual device of placing 24th Century entries

in bold to distinguish them from 23rd Century notes is a neat one, too; a pity that they're the wrong way round, though.

Redemption Video has marked its first birthday with the announcement of a planned sister label, Jezebel. The existing label, which specializes in cult/obscure horror releases, many in versions unavailable since the advent of the Video Recordings Act 1984, has already sold more than 70,000 units.

The widespread "moral panic" over horror comics, "the Nasties of the 1950s", is analyzed in July's HISTORY TODAY by John Springball, reader in history at the University of Ulster at Coleraine.

NUDES, PRUDES AND ATTITUDES, TAFF winner Avedon Carol's latest contribution to the pornography debate, is published by Britain's New Clarion Press in September.

British fans of underground horror movies may find Germany's Essa Distribution of interest - the company promises "no fuss" UK delivery of such material as Jürg Buttgereit's NEKROMANTIK series and Nick Zedd's WAR IS MENSTRUAL ENVY. For full details, contact Essa at PO Box 1621, 25806 Husum, Germany.

Ringpull, the Manchester-based publisher whose first sf release - Jeff Noon's VURT - carried off this year's Arthur C Clarke Award, has linked up with Simon & Schuster for a deal which will promote their authors worldwide. Following an earlier partnership with New York agent Barbara J Zitwer, VURT has been sold on to US publishers Crown "for a six-figure sum", whilst a 40% share transfer to Eddy Shah's Messenger Group has underwritten the company's relocation to new offices at Queensway House, London Road South, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1NJ (tel. 0625-850037; fax 0625-850038).

Autumn should see 17 titles, including Noon's POLLEN, with a further 60 planned for release next year.

Robinson published Dennis Etchison's second "Raven" novel, SHADOWMAN, on 12 September, priced £4.99. It's followed on 10 October by THE DON SEBASTIAN VAMPIRE CHRONICLES, a £5.99 omnibus of Les Daniels' horror trilogy.

Ray Stewart's fifth annual guide to MAGAZINES OF THE MOVIES celebrates with a report on one filmzine most horror fans had

long considered a myth: the second issue of Dez Skinn's MONSTER MAG.

Although it still appears the entire British run was destroyed by UK customs in 1973, Stewart has been allowed to examine an almost-as-rare French copy by HORROR PICTURES COLLECTION editor Gerald Noel; needless to say, Noel's copy is not for sale.

Copies of Stewart's guide are available for £2.95 from 45 Killybawn Road, Saintfield, Ballynahinch, Country Down, Northern Ireland, BT24 7JP, and comes highly recommended.

Sf/fantasy/horror modellers may care to check out Andrew Hall's DRONE, which promises objective reviews of the latest kits and a no-holds-barred approach to the industry which has apparently left certain dealers' noses out of joint ("if a figure is a re-cast or is rubbish, we will tell people").

Sample copies are £2.00 (£8.00 for six) from the Film & TV Model Club at 172 High Hope Street, Crook, County Durham, DL15 9JA.

BLINK, starring Madeleine Stowe as a musician who suffers "retroactive vision" after undergoing a revolutionary cure for blindness, is released on 9 September. Aidan Quinn co-stars as a police detective called in after Stowe witnesses the brutal murder of her neighbour - a full day after the event.

Directed by Michael Apted, BLINK reached #7 in the British box office charts on its theatrical release earlier this year and will be cross-promoted in 54 UK cities via the Laserquest chain.

William Gibson, whose short story "John Mneumonic" is currently being filmed with Keanu Reeves and Ice T in the leads, has reportedly sold his novel IDORA for a US\$850,000 advance.

Tony Jones of Aberdeen's Robert Gordon University is compiling a fanzine directory for distribution to libraries, media centres and other universities. Material for inclusion should be forwarded to him at the RGU's Faculty of Management, Hilton Place, Aberdeen, AB9 1FP.

Robert Hutton, who died on 7 August aged 74, was the star/director of 1963's horror picture THE SLIME PEOPLE, wherein nuclear tests awaken scaly monsters which are eventually destroyed by Hutton's piercing of the city's smog layer.

Hutton made his film debut in the 1943 underwater drama DESTINATION TOKYO and followed through with a series of "heart-

throb" roles throughout that decade. Unfortunately he had less success as he grew older, despite good reviews for his performance in Sam Fuller's 1951 Korean war movie THE STEEL HELMET.

Birmingham based space artist Dave Hardy was featured in a full page spread in the BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL on Friday 12 August. Which followed four of his paintings of the Comet SL-9/Jupiter impact being published in major magazines and newspapers in the UK, USA, France, Germany, Italy, etc. One of them was regularly shown, animated with lightning flashes and a "whoosh", on the NEWS SAT TEN. Dave himself appeared on the NEWS AT TEN on 21 July, the anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing. He earlier appeared on RADIO FOUR's MIDWEEK programme (with Dave tells us "a nun, an American organist and a guy who collects ties...") and with Paul Brighton on RADIO WM.

Dave's painting, "Terraforming Mars" (from his 1982 book ATLAS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM) will be used by Gollancz as the cover of Arthur C Clarke's new book THE SNOWS OF OLYMPUS. Carl Sagan had wanted to use it for the cover of his new book A SMALL BLUE DOT (about man's expansion into the universe) and, although miffed to discover that Clarke had got in first, has decided to use four of Dave's illos inside. Sagan may yet use another of Dave's terraforming Mars paintings, "Terra Nova", as the cover - Dave awaits confirmation of this.

Arthur C Clarke, meanwhile, made a surprise appearance at Archon, the STAR TREK convention held over the August Bank Holiday weekend at Heathrow. In addition to a large number of non-TREK guests the convention organisers were pleasantly surprised when they were contacted two weeks before the con by Patrick Stewart ('Captain Picard') who wanted to know if they would mind him coming along... Stewart is doing the commentary for one of Clarke's underwater films. Clarke and Mat Irvine made the first public announcement of the film version of A FALL OF MOONDUST at the con. Dave Hardy is doing the production art for the movie and has already produced four conceptual paintings.

While filming what he thought was his next MYSTERIOUS WORLD series at the Science Museum Clarke was grabbed by Michael Aspel with a Big Red Book... The THIS IS YOUR LIFE programme should be screened in November.

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



## BOOK REVIEWS

TO RIDE PEGASUS by Anne McCaffrey  
Corgi, 275 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pat Brown.

Somehow I just couldn't get into this book, which surprised me because I have enjoyed other works by Anne McCaffrey. This may be connected to the first publication date; originally written as several shorts over thirty years ago, and first published in its present form in 1974, it is unfortunately showing its age. Although written at the same time as the early Pern stories, *TO RIDE PEGASUS* has not stood the test of time anywhere near as well.

Essentially it's a standard post World War II tale of how individuals with various "powers of the mind", such as clairvoyance and precognition, got together to vindicate themselves and become accepted by society. Even so there are anomalies - the group establish themselves by predicting the death of a benefactor, then go on to prove themselves by predicting, and then *preventing*, various major accidents.

Frankly Anne McCaffrey has written far more enjoyable material - this is perhaps a novel best left to the historians.

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

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

*DIVINE ENDURANCE* was first published in 1984. Now, nine years later, comes *FLOWERDUST*. Divine Endurance and her companion, Chosen Among The Beautiful, are toys. They are also the ultimate in man's striving for perfection. While Divine Endurance is a cat, Cho is an angel doll, made for one person but whom all love. Cho's person is Derveet, a bandit, a failed woman and the last of the Garudas. In the first novel Derveet was a visionary, an idealist who wished to free the people of the Peninsula from their Rulers - a revolutionary who thought she could win without bloodshed.

In *FLOWERDUST* Derveet has virtually retired and lives in the crumbling Garuda palace just outside Ranganar. Flowerdust is a powerful narcotic and it has appeared in the city. Derveet believes she knows where it came from and sets out to retrieve it. Also involved in this venture are Cyler Jhonni and Prince Atoon, who appeared in the earlier

novel. Working against her are the women of the dapur who use Endang as their agent. They also want the flowerdust and persuade Endang to work his way into Jhonni's trust.

This book is not exactly a sequel to *DIVINE ENDURANCE* but an episode that might have happened part way through. In some ways it is less complex as it deals with only one narrative thrust. In other ways it is more so because its more leisurely pace allows the opportunity to explore the culture of the Peninsular in greater depth, and expands the social layering that is extant in the earlier novel. It also introduces new ideas which, although perhaps hinted at before, now have room to blossom, like the extent and nature of dapur magic. There is a much greater suggestion of history. Before, we knew that the world had changed greatly between our present and the society represented here - Cho's existence is in part evidence for this. There were hints that the rest of the world is a desert, literally and figuratively, and only the Peninsular remains lush and fertile. This is why the foreign Rulers have come. Now we get an explanation as to why this situation has arisen.

If you are looking for straightforward adventure, you will find it in this book, but it is well wrapped with thought provoking incident and excellent character development. Worth spending time on.

SHADOW OF A DARK QUEEN by Raymond E Feist  
HarperCollins, 382 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Yet another venture into the world of the Riftwar that began with the wonderful *MAGICIAN*, we now have a new series, this one called "The Serpentwar Saga". The story concerns Erik von Darkmoor, the bastard son of Baron Otto von Darkmoor. Erik's mother continually tries to get the Baron to acknowledge Erik as his son, each time he visits their village. On one such visit the Baron brings with him Stefan and Manfred, his two legitimate sons. Stefan rapes and half kills Roselyn - Erik's childhood companion and potential sweetheart - and Erik kills Stefan in anger and self-defence. The shock of Stefan's death kills the Baron, and Manfred declares Erik a murderer. Eric flees the village with his friend Roo, but they are captured and sentenced to death, along with several prisoners, by James, Duke of Krondor (yes, Jimmy the Hand got his wish).

In the cases of Erik, Roo and four others, the execution is a sham, to hide their being

turned into non-people. Erik finds himself alive but being given very secret military training, with a view to infiltrating Novindus, a country which seems to be dominated by the Pantathian Serpent Priests and a Dark Queen. They intend to invade Midkemia to gain control of the lifestone and bring back the Valheru, the Dragon Lords. When Erik and his fellow prisoners arrive in Novindus they find that the Serpent Priests have transported an army of near invincible warriors from another world. They have to get this information back to Midkemia in time for a defence to be prepared. There is an added urgency in that the Oracle of Al, who guards the lifestone, is about to go into her birthing cycle and will not be able to guard the birthstone for seven years, so Pug and the mysterious Miranda must go in search of Macros the Black, as only he has the knowledge to protect the lifestone.

At more than one point in this extended trilogy I have felt that it has passed its sell by date, notably with *SILVERTHORN* and *PRINCE OF THE BLOOD*, but the books following them have redeemed the series. *SHADOW OF A DARK QUEEN*, whilst not as good as *MAGICIAN*, is non-the-less a very good story, with the deaths of Martin, Arutha and Anita showing that the author is not afraid to expend major characters in order to develop his storylines. I only hope that Feist can keep the quality going this time, with this particular storyline.

**STONE ANGELS** by Mike Jeffries  
HarperCollins, 301pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

Middle Ages Norwich, and an apprentice stonemason working in the cathedral witnesses unspeakable horrors (literally so, as he has his eyes and tongue ripped out as a result), linked with a carved angel recently installed there. Angel it is, but the fallen kind, namely Abbadon, Angel of the Pit (Abbadon hope all ye who enter there), who feeds on the huddled masses about the cathedral close.

Six hundred years later, whilst recovering from panic attacks linked to an experience in an Egyptian tomb, archaeologist Jarvin Mandrake begins to research the cathedral interior. The pattern of disappearances, deaths and inexplicable events begins, and he finds his lot thrown in with Joni, a young homeless woman, and Martyn, a local doctor, as they are pursued by gargoyles and seek to defeat evil incarnate.

Things proceed towards a showdown in and under the cathedral, where it becomes apparent that the mason Geothrick, although

blinded, had been able to leave a legacy which threatened Abbadon's plans, and which was instrumental in restricting it to several feedings over the centuries.

The atmosphere at the start of the book is dark and full of menace, but unfortunately it doesn't travel well to the twentieth century. It might have worked *much* better as a wholly medieval story. Also, although the setting has great presence the characters don't - I was unable to suspend disbelief for the main character's *name*, let alone his experiences. Overall, interesting but not very memorable.

**NECROVILLE** by Ian McDonald  
Gollancz, 317 pp, £15.99, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Ian McDonald is one of those authors the scope of whose imagination takes your breath away. In the future he has created here there is life after death, for everyone. Nanotechnology has reached such a pitch that after you die your body is recreated by nanomachines. After resurrection you can have the body form you desire, you cannot be killed - the body constantly repairs itself - and the sun on your skin is your power source. Of course the dead are a form of cheap labour, how else are they going to be able to pay for resurrection.

This is the background. The story itself takes place over one night, the Night of the Dead, and concerns a group of friends. Normally they all meet at the Terminal Café in Necroville on this night, where one of them has planned an exotic diversion. Santiago Columbar is a designer of mind-warping drugs and has planned for them to take part in the Night Hunt. Unfortunately, only he makes it on time to join in. YoYo Mok, a young lawyer, has just lost the most important case in her life and has to meet a new client before she is free to join her friends. Toussaint is kidnapped on the way by members of the Free Dead, who are attempting to overthrow the empire of Adam Tesler, whose corporation developed the technology that leads to resurrection. Camaguey is dying, his living cells having been infected by rapidly multiplying tectors. Trinidad Malcopuelo arrives but walks out on Santiago on learning that one of his drugs killed her lover.

Each of these characters has a trial involving life or death before the night is over. Each learns something about themselves in the process. This book is a little difficult to broach at the start because McDonald makes no allowances for the readers' lack of

knowledge about the current level of technology - you have to work it out as you go along - but the passage is eased by the concise story telling, the fast pace and the wealth of invention. The reader discovers not only how this future works, but the intimate histories of the main characters, and gets to know their failings and their aspirations. All this is blended with a precise skill lacking in the works of too many published authors these days. *NECROVILLE* should be required reading for anyone to pretend to be a Science Fiction fan.

WARREN PEACE - DIMENSIONS by Bob Shaw  
Gollancz, 217 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This sequel to *WHO GOES HERE?* finds Warren Peace now an Oscar, one of a race of perfect, immortal, indestructible super beings, and he is bored out of his skull. Oscars are vegetarian non-smoking teetotallers and, while Peace can live without meat or smoking, his beer is what he misses most of all. During an attempted escape from the Oscars, Peace encounters an asteroid made from prykinote, the only substance to which Oscars are vulnerable, and it is on a collision course with Mildor IV, the Oscars' planet. Peace changes the asteroid's course, but in doing so is affected by it, and becomes human once more. It turns out that the asteroid was deliberately aimed at Mildor IV by Jeeves, an intergalactic master criminal, who had hoped to wipe out the Oscars because they constitute a type of galactic police force.

To say that Jeeves is not happy with Peace is an understatement. He swears revenge and starts pursuing him around the galaxy. He eventually captures him, and tries to kill him by feeding him to a black hole. It would have worked, except that Jeeves' henchmen couldn't find a black hole, or an aubergine hole, so he had to make do with a puce hole. This hole does not kill Peace, but transports him to an alternate Manchester where it is always raining and where, even though he is bonking his landlady's daughter silly, he finds himself in a dead-end job, on a planet he is convinced is being attacked by Martians, with a body that is slowly going to seed, and with no hope of escape back to his own universe.

I have not (yet) read *WHO GOES HERE?*, but I still enjoyed this yarn. Bob Shaw is a past master at writing this type of story and, whilst his more serious novels are always of a high quality, I would like to see him write more comedy. In this particular tale Peace is

a self-centred anti-hero type who is far more interested in the seedier side of life, and his own skin, than in saving the galaxy and being an all-round good guy. Believe me, it makes entertaining reading. The wit, humour and all-round class in this novel certainly makes it one I wholeheartedly recommend, so do yourself a favour - buy it, read it, you'll have a good laugh and a good time.

MERLIN AND THE LAST TRUMP by Collin Webber  
Gollancz, 304 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

The cover and themes of this humorous novel recall Terry Pratchett (a questionable but probably salesworthy ploy), but on reading the first few pages I was relieved to find the contents go beyond imitation, admittedly sometimes by a narrow margin.

Merlin is trying to avert a threat to the future of mankind, and has to use all his waning powers to seek a champion. Lancelot is dead, having been killed by Sir Griswold for his adulterous affair with Guinevere, and Uther is present as a ghost. So what does this have to do with James Dimmott, unsuccessful suicide (and anything else he tried to be) in the Twentieth century? Dimmott is a wisher, one whose desires have the power to change the future and avert the eventual demoralisation of humanity plotted for by demons. And when Mwerlin's magic misfires (he short-sightedly accepted a blacksmith's pledge that he had never been with a woman as a guarantee of virginity) he collides with Sir Griswold, who has been flung into the future.

Much of the book's humour depends on the conflict between the knight and Dimmott as he attempts to steer him through modern life, and there are some good set pieces - a battle between street fighters and demons comes to mind. As a whole the book is readable, but lacks the pace and comic richness I had hoped for. Webber may well produce much better later.

## 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. 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 BSFG meeting and/or send your reviews to him at 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

# NOVACON

*Why not join TWO Conventions for less  
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If you send your money before the 1st October 1994 you can join  
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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).