

BRUM GROUP NEWS

November 1994

Issue 278

*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, NOVAACON 24 CHAIRMAN - RICHARD STANDAGE, NOVAACON 25 CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON.

This month's meeting features the Annual Debate between the Birmingham Science Fiction Group and the Birmingham University Science Fiction & Fantasy Society

on Friday 18th November 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).

"Recent research indicates
that although women's brains
are smaller than mens young
girls are more intelligent
than boys and that the boys
don't catch up. This house
believes that size does count
- smaller is better."

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs Function Room of the Australian Bar, corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are £10.00 per person, or £13.50 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the treasurer Helena Bowles at meetings or by post c/o Bernie Evans (address below). Book reviews and review copies should be sent to the reviews editor Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).

COLOPHON

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Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group.

All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise. This publication was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. For details of WAVE's competitive prices contact:
Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road,
Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG,
(tel: 021 327 3023.)

Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for typing the book reviews, STEVE GREEN, CRITICAL WAVE 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

18 NOVEMBER 1994: THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP versus THE BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY SOCIETY in the annual debate: "Recent research indicates that although women's brains are smaller than mens young girls are more intelligent than boys and that the boys don't catch up. This house believes that size does count - smaller is better."

26 NOVEMBER 1994: NIK POWELL, co-founder of Palace Pictures and now Scala Productions, talks about film production in Britain. His productions include MONA LISA, ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS, COMPANY OF WOLVES, THE CRYING GAME and the soon to be released NEON BIBLE. His talk will be illustrated with clips from his films and there will be complete screening of Scala's first production, BACKBEAT. Tickets £4.95 (£3.50 concessionary), call the Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry on 01203 524524.

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

a few places are still available for 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;

a basket meal of chicken,

scampi or vegetarian

option and chips; prizes;

hire of skittle alley.

Cash/cheques to Helena Bowles,

116 Shireland Road, Smethwick,

Warley, West Mids., B66 4QJ,

before the 18th November or

pay at this month's meeting.

2 DECEMBER 1994: CANDYMAN adapted from Clive Barker's story "The Forbidden", this is a frightening, intelligent riff on urban myths which set the standard for horror movies of the 90s. Showing at the Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry from 11pm, call 01203 524524 for further details.

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, Vine Clarke. Attending £80.00. 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. Attending membership is £23.00 until 30th November 1994, after which it rises to £25.00 until Easter 1995. Supporting membership costs £8.50. Progress Report #1 and hotel booking forms are available, deadline for hotel bookings is 20th July 1995. Contact CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 25". 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, 186 Casewick Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

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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.

**BIRMINGHAM
SCIENCE FICTION
GROUP:
COMMITTEE POSTS
1995**

by Bernie Evans

With the A.G.M. looming on the 20th of January 1995 it's time for all you enthusiastic members to send in your nominations for committee posts. You can, of course, nominate from the floor at the meeting if you wish; but if you KNOW you will be standing, send in your written nomination (and platform of no more than 250 words) so it can be printed in the January edition of *BRUM GROUP NEWS* for everyone to see.

Written nominations must reach Martin Tudor by the 20th of December 1994. He can be contacted either at the Beer and Skittles Evening or by post to 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

So, what positions are there ?

CHAIRMAN

Will chair and keep order at all meetings, and will also hold regular committee meetings (currently on the Wednesday following the Brum Group meeting). Will contact speakers, arrange accommodation where necessary and ensure they get to the meeting on time.

SECRETARY

Should be able to type, attend all committee meetings and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee Members. Likewise the A.G.M. or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

TREASURER

If you don't know what a treasurer does, don't bother to apply !

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Has to produce the newsletter every month. Access to a computer and desktop publishing software and/or a word processor is an advantage, but not a necessity, a

typewriter and a pair of scissors will suffice. The ability to type AND meet a monthly deadline ARE a necessity, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

PUBLICITY OFFICER

Will produce A4 posters, A5 flyers, and so on for meetings, and arrange for them to be displayed in local shops, libraries, and as many other outlets as possible. Will also produce general publicity for the Group, and contact radio and tv if necessary. Enthusiasm and the ability to produce new IDEAS are an important factor.

In addition two other ORDINARY MEMBERS may be appointed by the Committee any time during the year at the discretion of the Committee.

So, that's who we need. Which do YOU want to do ?

JOPHAN REPORT #80

Novacon 24 was one of the smallest Novacons of recent years with just 244 attendees, which made it an even smaller, friendlier and intimate event than last year.

There were two surprises in the Nova Awards this year with Greg Pickersgill picking up the awards for both fan writer and fanzine, though no surprise in the fan artist category which was won by D West. The full breakdown will be in the next issue of BRUM GROUP NEWS.

PAniC, the Peterborough Anima Club, has been founded to present a forum for discussions and viewing for fans of Animanga. The club will meet on the first Monday of each month at the Fountain pub, Burghly Road, Peterborough. For further information write to PAniC, 103 Alexandra Road, Peterborough.

The third TREK DWARF convention is planned for the weekend 17-19 March 1995 at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. Confirmed guests include (subject to the usual work commitments) Max Grodëchik (ROM, DEEP SPACE 9), Colin Howard (artist) and Jane Killick (journalist).

Attending membership costs £30.00, rising to £35.00 from 30 November 1994, write

to TREK DWARF, 47 Marsham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough.

The Black Lodge, Birmingham's horror hang-out, is locked onto the first Tuesday of each month at the city's Old Fox public house in Hurst Street (opposite the Birmingham Hippodrome). Regulars include both CRITICAL WAVE editors, Martin Tudor and Steve Green, FICTION FURNACE's John K Williams and many of the region's fanzine staffers.

Fantasy Fair 5 will be held on Sunday 14 May 1995, featuring "the usual mix of guests, dealers and gaming demos".

Enquiries regarding the Peterborough SF Club or Fantasy Fair 5 should be addressed to 58 Pennington, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 ORB.

The line up of guests for CULT TV, the tv appreciation weekend to be held at Pontin's Seacroft Holiday Village near Great Yarmouth this month, now includes Jon Pertwee (DR WHO), Barry Morse (THE FUGITIVE, SPACE 1999), Kevin Davies (director) and Richard Arnold (STAR TREK consultant) - all subject to work commitments. For further information send an ssa to PO Box 1701, Peterborough, PE1 1EX.

This year's Harrogate International Festival included a performance of Martin Butler's space-operatic "Craig's Progress" on 10 August, staged by Mecklenburgh Opera. Set in New York's Rockerfeller Centre, the production focussed upon one man's efforts to thwart an alien invasion.

Peterborough based band "Sonic Energy Authority" have had two new tracks included on the compilation cassette, THE LAST EVER MELODIC SCRIBBLE/SUPER TROUPER 14".

This, the tenth anniversary issue of the audio poetry collection, is available for £1.00 from Andy Savage, 81 Castlerigg Drive, Burnley, Lancashire, BB12 8AT.

Shock recastings at BATMAN RETURNS: Michael Keaton's cowl has been picked up by Val Kilmer, whilst Jim Carrey has used his ACE VENTURA success to oust Robin Williams from the role of the Riddler. Appropriately, this third batflick (with LOST BOYS director Joel Schumacher succeeding Tim Burton) is being lensed in Transylvania.

The winner of the 1994 James Tiptree Jr Award for best "gender-bending sf and fantasy" has gone to Nicola Griffith for her novel AMMONITE. Griffith beat stiff

opposition from the following short-listed works: RING OF SWORDS by Eleanor Arnason; THE ROBBER BRIDE by Margaret Atwood; IN THE GARDEN OF DEAD CARS by Sybil Claiborne; "Motherhood" by L Timmel Duchamp (FULL SPECTRUM 4); "The Other Magpie" by R Garcia y Robertson (ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, April 1993); "Chemistry" by James Patrick Kelly (IASFM, June 1993); DANCING JACK by Laurie J Marks; "Some Strange Desire" by Ian McDonald (THE BEST OF OMNI III); ILLICIT PASSAGE by Alice Nunn.

The award was established in 1990 at WisCon 15 by Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler to "help preserve and praise gender-bending sf and fantasy". In 1992 the Award went to Gwyneth Jones for WHITE QUEEN and Eleanor Arnason for A WOMAN OF THE IRON PEOPLE and in 1993 to Maureen F McHugh for CHINA MOUNTAIN ZHANG. This year the award moved to Readercon.

Recommendations for 1994 fiction should be sent to Karen Joy Fowler, 3404 Monte Vista, Davis, CA 95616, USA. For information regarding the Tiptree quilt or cookbooks should be addressed to Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704, USA.

Jeff VanderMeer's "Flight For Those Who Have Not Yet Crossed Over" and Bruce Boston's "Spacer's Compass" shared the 1994 Rhysling Award for best short poem, whilst "Basement Flats" by W Gregory Stewart and Robert Frazier was named best long poem. J C Hendee, award chair, is currently negotiating the inclusion of all three works in the next Nebula anthology.

A total of 60 ballot papers were received by the Science Fiction Poetry Association, which has confirmed Boston as the chair for the 1995 award. Further details of the nomination procedure can be obtained from Hendee at Post Office Box 3128, Moscow, ID 83843-1906, United States of America.

CONVENTION REPORTS

Bacon, July 1994

A report by Robert Sneddon

A Unicorn in New Hall Cambridge again, but construction work had closed the old entrance and I couldn't find my way in at first. However I soon blazed a trail through

the building site into the familiar concourse overlooking the fountain in the quad. There were the same old faces; Gerbish dishing out pints of Bateman's fine brews in the real ale bar, Cardinal Cox, the man who dresses from a Mothercare catalogue, Geoff Ryman, the tall Canadian GOH with his perpetually bewildered expression, all the regular gang had come to Cambridge.

And then there were the American high-school students staying at New Hall. They appeared and disappeared like flocks of starlings, shepherded by eagle-eyed supervisors, smoking like it was going out of fashion (and perhaps when they got back home to their homes (and parents) it would), distracted by day trips to Shakespeare's Birthplace and London theatre visits. The students and the con attendees danced around each other in the public spaces of New Hall, each unsure of the other. Dedicated fanfannish missionaries tried to explain to the sons and (especially) the daughters of well-off Numuricans exactly what science fiction was all about, without, I observed, much success.

There was a barbeque on the Saturday evening. It seemed like a good idea, and despite Murphy's Law, the weather held off. It was well-attended, as is almost any fanfannish event with "free" food, "free" drinks, "free" anything really (did you pick up copies of those dreadful fantasy books they were giving away at an Eastercon a few years back? Did you read them? Have you still got them? Why did you take them then?) The veggie option sausages mostly ended up being covertly fed to the koi in the curious Martian-style canal system radiating out from the courtyard's fountain. Emergency supplies of buns and burgers arrived just as the feeding frenzy ended. Only one question remained unanswered - why was there no bacon at Bacon?

The highlight of the main program for me was the Dramatic Presentation (not starring Geoff Ryman this time), consisting of one of the Lost Episodes of Blake's Seven. The plot was inane, the dialogue terrible, the acting truly dreadful, the props more shoddy than words can describe - just like the original TV show, in fact. I was completely taken in until I was told authoritatively that yes, it WAS a spoof.

A group of us went punting early Sunday morning - well, late Saturday night to be more precise. We resisted Marcus Street's impertunings ("Honest, I punt better when I'm drunk") and stayed dry(ish) and upright whilst observing meteors and the occasional passing satellite. Very relaxing after a hard con.

Pardon the familiar litany, but, like

most other cons I've attended in the recent past, attendance was down from the glory years in the mid 80's. What's happening? Poverty, gaffiation, marriage, babies, what? I'm beginning to feel a bit like Peter Pan, the eternal fan, watching all my friends in fandom growing up. Are you lot really happier living in the real world?

Bacon drew to a close, dying slowly as cons do - denizens of distant domiciles with Monday morning jobs (and Monday morning bosses) vanishing in the direction of the train station before the closing ceremony, then the others who live closer getting away on the last bus or lift, until finally its only the committee and the Camafia and the limpets left for a Dead Dog session of clearing up and trying to finish the last of the real ale. A small medical emergency early Monday morning caused some drama, and then it was over. And next year? Alas, no bidders were fighting for the privilege of running a unicon in '95. Perhaps the Sword of Intersection hangs alarmingly over conrunners, till Birnham Wood (great author, I read his fantasy trilogy yesterday) comes to the SECC and the Con that was not born of Glasgow fandom makes its final exit (stage left, pursued by creditors) - then, perhaps we shall see committees spring up again and once more contend for the Unicons ... but I won't hold my breath. There were heard faint mutterings in the conhalls of power of a "rescue" bid - I await developments.

Wincon 3, 29-31 July 1994

A report by Robert Sneddon

Ah, Winchester, city of hills, and ... more hills, and even steeper hills, come to think of it. Truly it is said of Winchester it has more up than down. Wincon 3 was held on the same site as the previous two, on the side of a cliff in the King Alfred College, right next to a rather pleasant cemetery.

As is traditional, one of Wincon's guests did a disappearing act, although before the con started this time. Algis Budrys failed to get a re-entry visa from the US State Department in time to make the trip - he's a foreign resident, not a US citizen, I understand, and has to be careful in these matters.

Like most recent cons, this one was severely underpopulated, with maybe only 120 or so attendees. Other VIP types who turned up included Jack Cohen, Colin Greenland (again). Is there a factory somewhere in Taiwan that is churning out hundreds of these diminutive

bespectacled characters? Every time I turn around I seem to trip over another one), Simon Ings, James P. Hogan and Norman Spinrad.

Things started off well enough with Martin Hoare's Boston in '98 (boo!) bid party in one of the incredibly tiny residence rooms on the Friday night. I spent more time in the equally tiny next-door Baltimore in '98 (yeahhh!) Worldcon bid party. Remember folks, vote early, vote often, vote Baltimore at Intersection! (This has been a paid political announcement by a Baltimore pre-supporter who wants to go to a MCFI NESFA-run Boston Worldcon in 2001.)

Wincons always try to put on good programming, but lack of ideas is a hard obstacle to overcome. Topicality was to the fore in a talk on the Shoemaker / Levy comet collision with Jupiter, including a video showing some of the aftermath shot by an amateur astronomy group in the South of England. Mostly (as usual) I skipped the program and spent time sitting in the bar talking with people. The dealers room was cavernous and mostly deserted - I don't buy as many books now that I've read most of the SF backlist I'd find interesting, and fantasy is not really my cup of tea. It used to be that my only real access to SF books was via con dealer rooms, but now there's two speciality SF bookstores in Glasgow alone, and I can feed my habit more regularly now. I felt a little bit sorry for the dealers, stuck in an empty hall away from the rest of the con, but they seemed contented, inspecting each other's stock in a faintly incestuous manner.

A group of local film-makers brought along some of their work to show - I didn't see it myself, unfortunately, but one of the audience didn't like what he was seeing and threatened to call in the police over this "snuff" movie. This caused a minor panic among the committee, as you might imagine, but nothing came of it.

Andy Robertson and sprogs turned up on the Sunday, surprising and delighting their friends. He's looking in fine shape. SMS also made an appearance (minus the delicious Eira, sadly) and said hello as well. During the Dead Dog I infuriated a bunch of people with the 50p piece puzzle and left them drawing force vector diagrams and arguing vehemently about momentum and frictional effects. Ho ho.

Monday morning came again - I took some final pictures and said my goodbyes. Filthy rumour has it the Wincon crew will bid for an Eastercon next. I'll look forward to it, although not at King Alfreds, unless they install some escalators.

56 hours of continuous 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...

Enjoy the fun in Holland.

Join **Hillcon V:**



Hillcon V: ConSeal
25-27 november 1994

an international SF-convention
Dorint Hotel, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

Dutch Guest of Honour:

Tais Teng

Professional author of SF 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:

To be announced at a later time.

Main Events as known so far:

- **Special Film Night: Life beyond the Bomb.**

At least eight hours of horror & excitement...

We hope you're not afraid of things that go Kra-kra-BOOM in the night.

- **About three days of continuous gaming.**

Role Playing Games, board games, and whatever else we might come up with.

- **Speeches by our Guests of Honour.**

(programme may change without notice)

Membership price: f 50,- p.p. *, after July 1st f 55,-* and after October 1st f 60,-*

Children aged 4-12: f 25,- p.p. +

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

* Membership 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.

How to become a member?

1. Fill out one form per person. Make photocopies if you come with a group.
2. Send it to *ConSeal*, c/o Richard Vermaas, James Wattstraat 13, 1097 DJ Amsterdam.
3. You can pay your membership fee by sending a EuroCheque written out for the proper amount - don't forget to fill in your bank card number. Send the EuroCheque to the above address. Please contact Richard Vermaas before trying other manners of payment.

The Last Major Dutch Convention for at least two years... Don't miss it!

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- Yes, I wish to become a member of *ConSeal*
 I enclose a EuroCheque for f . . . ,--
 I want to receive more information about the convention before I join.

Name : Initials: Birth Date:

Address :

Place and Postal Code :

Country :

I agree that my name and details may be held in a computer database.

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BOOK REVIEWS

NOSFERATU by Carl Sargent and Marc Gascoigne
RoC, 287 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

NOSFERATU is number thirteen in the long-running "Shadowrun" series, even though it does not say so on the cover. Maybe the publishers are superstitious... It is also the second title from Carl Sargent and Marc Gascoigne about the elven mage Serrin Shamander. As before the action is fast and furious, with an odd mix of sleazy hi-tech and low-life magic.

Serrin tries to lie low after a reporter does a media sleaze job on him, as publicity can be deadly to a Shadowrunner. He finds himself the target of a strange group of kidnappers, and without having done anything to annoy them first. Gathering a few friends: Tom the troll shaman, Michael the English hacker and Kristen the Capetown street kid, Sherrin fights to uncover a 300-year-old plot to destroy humanity.

Astute readers will have gathered from the title that vampires just might be involved. This novel appears on the surface to be a standard "good vs evil" plot, but of course in cyberpunk such distinctions are always blurred. This book actually works well, and I will be reading the next one to find out if the "heroes" finally gain control of their own destinies.

ENGINEMAN by Eric Brown
Pan, 373 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is only Eric Brown's second novel but he is emerging as an important British sf writer. He takes as his background the future he visited in a number of his brilliant short stories and in some respects this can be regarded as a resolution to the enigma described in THE TIME-ELAPSED MAN. No longer are ships crossing space through the *nada*-continuum. The Enginemen and women that pushed them (mentally) have been made redundant by the development of Interfaces which bridge the distance between planets in the time it takes to drive from one end of the space field to the other.

Like all of the best stories, this is set

at a turning point: events could go one way or the other. Although the future-science scenario is excellently conveyed, the story is really about people. There is Ella Fernandez, a convert to the Disciples, the religious cult that most Enginemen belong to. They believe that the *nada*-continuum is the afterlife. Ella decides to go and seek her father on one of the Rim worlds after the death of her Engineman lover. Hirst Hunter has arrived on Earth seeking a team of Enginemen to push a smallship to Hennessey's Reach. He picks Ralph Mirren's team. Ralph's brother, Bobby, is the Time-elapsed man, his mind only processing what his senses have perceived twenty-four hours after reception of the stimulus. Ralph begins to have flashbacks of his last flight, in which his ship crashed but of which he has no recall. On Hennessey's Reach the Disciples are about to begin their insurrection against the interfaces and the Danzig Organisation is intent on wiping out the last few indigenous aliens. This one planet becomes the focal point of humanity's future.

Brown brings all the strands together well, developing character and providing explanations with skill. If anything, the ending is a little too brief but otherwise this must be one of the best novels of the year.

REMEMBRANCE DAY by Brian Aldiss
Flamingo (HarperCollins) 268pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

There was a TV drama series some years ago called ACCIDENT, which charted the lives of a diverse bunch of characters who had no connection with each other except for being caught up in the same multi-vehicle road crash. Aldiss has taken the same idea as one strand of this book, writing about four groups of people, some of whom are involved in an IRA bombing at a Great Yarmouth hotel. It is also an investigation into the connections between class, wealth and power, which comes to no very definite conclusions.

The more perceptive readers of this review will by now have inferred, correctly, that what we have here is not an sf novel but general fiction. Set in the 1980s, mostly in Britain. It comes across as a collection of scarcely linked stories which deal with a wonderful assortment of bizarre characters.

Ray Tebbutt and his wife Ruby are economic refugees in late middle age, unemployment having forced them to move from Birmingham to East Anglia. A printer and

former owner of his own business, he now labours at a garden centre while his wife serves in a baker's shop. They are poor but relatively happy in their rural setting. In another story, set in Prague, we see another poor and powerless man, Petr Petrik, being pushed around by his younger, more powerful cousin, a Party member who misuses his power. A third story centres on Dominic Mayor, a young man who has overcome a terrible East German childhood, has made his first million through Stock Exchange dealing, owns a manor house in Buckinghamshire, and is extremely unhappy. It is not only Russian-German ancestry and his displaced person feelings that worry him, but his inability to cope with the people around him - particularly with his wife, Fenella, who seems in dire need of psychiatric help. As a framing device, Aldiss introduces yet more characters: an American academic who is trying to make theories out of what brought some of these people together to die at a hotel in Great Yarmouth, and some of his colleagues at a British university.

The small successes and failures affecting these characters are well observed and make fascinating reading. The few set-piece scenes in which Aldiss has groups of them air the arguments about class, wealth and power (not to mention fate and god) seem artificial. All in all, the book (to call it a novel would be inaccurate) is often entertaining but is somewhat less than the sum of its parts.

SOFTWARE by Rudy Rucker
RoC, 174 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by William McCabe.

This is not a new book (first published in 1982 in the USA and in 1985 here) and many of the ideas aren't quite so new any more, but this was part of the beginnings of what they now call Cyberpunk, and probably deserves credit as a historical document. There are also similarities to *TRON*, a film of the same year, and other pieces of sf both before and since.

The story is dead-straight hard sf. Big computers (they run hotels, museums, space stations) are trying to take over everything. At the beginning of the novel they have control over the moon, which is populated entirely by robots (but most of them have free will) and they are branching out into humans. They have some urge to take over the functions of smaller robots by moving the software into their own system and using the hardware as a non-intelligent remote. The

extension into the human field involves mapping all of the brain's functions and then analysing the chemical composition of the brain itself. Of course the people get killed during this process, but some of them do wind up with a robot body.

This is a simple tale of: two people who get taken off to the moon to have their bodies replaced by robotic ones, a couple of fake religious cults (one of which involves eating people's brains), and a supercomputer in an ice-cream truck. The thing that dates this so terribly is the need for all computers to have a constant temperature of several hundred degrees below freezing. I seem to remember someone having the idea of running machines at that kind of temperature to make them work faster, but I don't think it lasted that long.

Still, like most hard sf, it's a good adventure well-told, and who cares if the science is duff.

POPE AND PHANTOMS by John Whitbourn
Gollancz, 287 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

John Whitbourn won the Gollancz/Radio 4 competition for an unpublished fantasy novel with his first book, *A DANGEROUS ENERGY*. This book has elements in common with it, though the background is slightly different. Both have unsympathetic main characters, and each charts their lives from early childhood to death but, while *A DANGEROUS ENERGY* was set in an alternate England, this story takes place in a Renaissance Europe more familiar to us from history books.

It doesn't seem much like fantasy until elves are mentioned a quarter of the way in. These are the nasty calculating elves familiar from the earlier book but have a very minor role here. From there onwards there are touches of fantasy which become longer and more detailed as the story progresses. The reader is treated throughout to episodes in Admiral Slovo's life (with one in the future for good measure) and as a result the good fantasy ideas are treated far too briefly. Admiral Slovo, as he is called throughout even when he was a pirate captain, is a Papal troubleshooter for most of his life. He is also an initiate into the Vehme. This was a real secret society of which little is known but here they are represented as an organisation which is directing the course of history in accordance with their understanding of the prophecies in *THE BOOK*. Slovo is essentially an assassin.

In all, it is an irritating book. At times the writing is sloppy and anachronistic phrases like "We'll never hack it," creep in. Details of the future lives of some of the characters are inserted (as well as a series of historical footnotes collected at the back of the book) as if to prove how well the author has done his research. It is a nice idea to have one man influencing so many of the turning points of history but one volume is too short to do justice to it and the result has virtually no character development, even of Admiral Slovo.

THE OPPONAX INVASION by John Brosnan
Gollancz, 409 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Phil Noyes.

The novel begins enterprisingly enough with the thief/computer expert Joster Rack being pursued by corporation police, whilst elsewhere the Tanaka Corporation investigate the contents of a metallic ball found in deep space, obviously the artifact of an alien civilisation. The backdrop for the chase is a collection of habitats set aside as historical exhibits (intrigingly 1950s Melbourne and Nazi Paris - not my first choices on a visit through time) and populated with memory-suppressed minor offenders, an idea which may be the answer to Euro-Disney's woes. Joster Rack assumes a female identity following a body chop, and stays one step ahead by use of his nano-technology software and amending others' memories. He reveals some of his past to a companion picked up in Melbourne.

The two story-lines converge as, in a scene reminiscent of *ALIENS*, the artifact breaches the security barriers surrounding it, subsequently releasing a nanotech which converts most of the population of the Tanaka habitat to an alien religion and impregnates all fertile females with alien foetuses. Suddenly Rack is crucial to the efforts to control the threat, and his/her growing conscience about previous sins makes for an easier transition to working with former opponents.

I was immediately struck by the similarity of some of Brosnan's world features to those in, for example, John Varley's *EIGHT WORLDS* - easy body surgery, and Disney - historical/geographical re-creations, to name but two. Sadly they are not treated with any kind of descriptive depth, serving only as props and scenery rather than as parts of a believable world. This fault extends to the uses of nano-technology, tending to the extreme of nano-magic, as the author uses it

without serious attention to how it might actually work in practice.

Overall I found this story disappointing, with a couple of things for which I was totally unable to suspend disbelief, and others which would have benefitted from more careful writing. Brosnan may improve with further novels, but on this evidence I won't be chancing my cash on it.

THE CURSE OF THE MISTWRAITH by Janny Wurtz
HarperCollins, 830 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Janny Wurtz's most recent fantasy series (which is expected to run to five volumes), "The Wars of Light and Shadows", is a disappointment. The first book, *THE CURSE OF THE MISTWRAITH*, is overlong and full of the faults extant in her first novel, *SORCERER'S LEGACY*, but magnified.

It concerns two half-brothers, one of whom controls the power of light, the other of shadow. They begin as mortal enemies but after they have been exiled through a one-way gate into another world they work together to rid their new world of the mistwraith that has blanketed the skies for centuries. But in the final conquest of the wraith, Lysaer is tainted and they revert to their bitter and destructive enmity. There are a number of standard elements such as a conclave of wizards, prophecies, lost princes returning from exile and a lot of travelling from one place to another.

Apart from the unnecessary length, due largely to introspection by the characters - leaving little for the reader to observe for themselves (a fault in common with *DAUGHTER OF THE EMPIRE* written in collaboration with Raymond E. Feist) what should be fast moving action is slowed down almost to the point of tedium. This is exaggerated by the problem that occurs in all of her books to a greater or lesser extent - that of constantly switching point of view. In this book it is so marked that it detracts further from the story. The overall impression is that although her characters develop as human beings Janny Wurtz has written better novels.

□□□□

Reviewers are reminded that reviews should be 300-500 words long and must be received by Bernie Evans within one month of accepting the book or handed to her at the following month's meeting. As Bernie does not intend to stand as Reviews Editor next year she would like to receive ALL overdue reviews by the Beer & Skittles Evening at the latest.

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