

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

February 1996

Issue 293

*The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group  
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss, Harry Harrison & Bob Shaw)*

GROUP CHAIRMAN & NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR, SECRETARY - ANNE WOODFORD,  
TREASURER - SARAH FREAKLEY, PUBLICITY OFFICER - STEVE JONES, ORDINARY MEMBER - ALAN  
WOODFORD, NOVACON 26 CHAIRMAN - CAROL MORTON, NOVACON 27 CHAIRMAN - MARTIN TUDOR.

## Comic Fantasy Writer

# ANDREW HARMAN

author of **THE SORCERER'S APPENDIX**,  
**THE FROGS OF WAR**, **THE TOME TUNNEL**  
and **101 DAMNATIONS** will address the Group  
on Friday 16th February 1996, 7.45pm for 8pm,  
in the upstairs room of the Queen's Head,  
Steelhouse Lane, Birmingham city centre,  
(facing the side of the **EVENING MAIL** building).

What the critics say: "Easily four quids worth of funnies" - Tom Holt;

"Hilarious...first class" - BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY JOURNAL;

"Quite appalling puns, lots of juvenile humour and even a few good jokes" - CRITICAL WAVE;

"Ingenious, energetic and good humoured" - DAILY TELEGRAPH;

"The plot rattles along...the metaphors are quite inspired" - STARBURST;

"An outrageous assortment of puns in a rich brew of Pratchett, Anthony & Adams.

Read at peril to your funny-bone" - ERG QUARTERLY.

**NB: CHANGE OF VENUE, SEE INSIDE FOR MAP**

The BSGF meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs Function Room of the Queen's Head, Steelhouse Lane 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. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to the Treasurer, Sarah Freakley, c/o 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, B66 4SH. Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: **Martin Tudor**, Newsletter Editor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX.

## A FEW WORDS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I received very little notice about the transformation of the function room of the Australian Bar into a restaurant and so I have had very little time to explore possible venues. So, whilst realising that the Queens Head's function room has some failings I would like to ask not only for your forbearance but also for your active support.

In particular it is worth bearing in mind that the Queen's Head is VERY BUSY downstairs on a Friday evening so it will help you (and the Group - if we continue to use the venue) to use the upstairs bar - where the management have supplied bar staff.

I continue to search through various possible venues, and so any information will be - gratefully received.

- Martin Tudor.



## COLOPHON

The contents of this issue are copyright 1996 the BSGF, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication.

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 issue was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. For details of WAVE's competitive prices contact Martin Tudor at the editorial address on the cover.

Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for producing the address labels and transferring files; STEVE GREEN and CRITICAL WAVE for the news.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**UNTIL 17 FEBRUARY 1996: Bram Stoker's DRACULA** adapted by Jane Thornton and John Godber, presented by Hull Truck. At the Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry. Call 01203-524524 for further details.

**14 FEBRUARY 1996: L'ATALANTE**, directed by Jean Vigo, in French with subtitles. Special screening for Valentine's Day "this poetic, perceptive study of the trials and tribulations faced by a couple of newly weds living on a Seine barge merges realism, surrealism, comedy and romance to unforgettably, moving effect. Director Jean Vigo died at the tragically early age of 29, nevertheless, his influence has been enormous. A genuine masterpiece." (TIME OUT) Showing at the Warwick Arts Centre Cinema, Coventry. Call 01203-524524 for further details.

**15 FEBRUARY 1996: GHOST IN THE SHELL**, a big budget, state of the art, animation feature based on the best-selling manga comic strip by Masamune Shirow - directed by Mamoru Oshii, Japanese, subtitled. "Japan, 2029: society is dominated by the Net and crimes have become more sophisticated and more brutal. Kusanagi is an agent in Shell Squad, a team of agents dedicated to policing the information super-highway, who discovers that

a notorious super-hacker, suspected of manipulation of the stock market, illegal data gathering and terrorist acts, has surfaced in Japan. Code-named Puppet Master, this super-agent takes over human beings in order to manipulate information from them." (WARWICK ARTS CENTRE PROGRAMME) Showing at the Warwick Arts Centre Cinema, Coventry. Call 01203-524524 for further details.

**16 FEBRUARY 1996: ANDREW HARMAN, author of THE SORCERER'S APPENDIX, THE FROGS OF WAR, THE TOME TUNNEL and 101 DAMNATIONS, will be speaking to the BSGF, 7.45 for 8pm in the upstairs room of the Queens Head, Steelhouse Lane, Birmingham city centre.**

**17 FEBRUARY 1996: THE TIME WIZARD** "performed" by the All Electric Puppet Theatre Company at Bloxwich Library Theatre, 2pm, tickets £4.00 (£3.00 concessionary). "Imagine a time long ago, a planet far away, a race of peaceable friendly folk harmlessly getting on with their lives all thanks to a beautiful crystal that provides energy and harmony and equilibrium. Suddenly - invaders, evil and bent on destruction arrive and seize control, forever trying to find the crystal. A visual feast of puppets, machines, lights, effects and sheer unadulterated magic with recorded narration by Jon Pertwee." Call 01922-653183 for details.

**17 FEBRUARY 1996: MANGA** Chris Malden explores the phenomena of Japanese sf animation known as Manga. She will illustrate her talk with clips from films and serials which will also include a full screening of the new feature **GHOST IN THE SHELL** (see above). The Warwick Arts Centre Cinema, Coventry from 11am to 4.30pm. Call 01203-524524 for further details, tickets £4.95 (£3.95 concessions).

**20-21 FEBRUARY 1996: THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHERETTES** adapted by Forkbeard Fantasy from Poe's gothic horror of a not unsimilar title. "Deep in the subterranean studios of a crusty old picture palace called the Empire, ghosts of bygone celluloid starlets still lurk. They have been guarded for generations against tomb robbers from the National Film Archive by the House of Usherettes. Enter Forkbeard's bizarre world of wild, mechanical sets, cobwebbed Würlitzers, shark-invested developing tanks and film spliced into live action to discover the truth behind the FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHERETTES. A hilarious celebration of 21 years of Forkbeard Fantasy and 100 years of cinema." (WARWICK ARTS CENTRE PROGRAMME.) At the Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry. Call 01203-524524 for further details.

23-25 FEBRUARY 1996: **DISECTION** the Intersection post-mortem con, Rutland Hotel, Sheffield. Attending £24.00 (£25.00 by credit card). Contact: Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

28-29 FEBRUARY 1996: **LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE**, directed by Jean Cocteau and Rene Clement, in French with subtitles. Re-released in a brand new and restored print, poet, painter and novelist Cocteau's 1946 masterpiece has been proclaimed one of the greatest fantasy films of all time, "adding farce, tragedy and trickery to the original ingredients of bestiality and love. Determined to destroy once and for all the idea that 'fuzziness is poetic', LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE boasts clear precise visual images, breathtaking special effects and overcoming restrictions of budget and post-war conditions, Cocteau's positively hallucinatory imagination, plus a few disembodied arms sticking up through pieces of furniture. Jean Marais suffered hours of make-up before each of his 'Beast' scenes: no wonder Beauty [Josette Day] seems a little disappointed when he turns into a romantic Prince Charming." (ELECTRIC CINEMA PROGRAMME). "To be one with his version of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST required faith, said Cocteau, 'the faith of childhood... one must believe implicitly from the beginning.' Possibly he under-rated the magic spell of his enchanting film, which works for all ages. Its success stems from the affecting simplicity of Cocteau's vision. Perhaps the most elegant of all filmed fairy tales." (NEW YORKER.) Showing at the Warwick Arts Centre Cinema, Coventry. Call 01203-524524 for further details.

1 MARCH 1996: **VSC - VIDEO**. Interested in watching new and old sci-fi cult tv telefantasy programmes? VSC is a local group, based in Brownhills, who have two private tv screening rooms and regularly show classics such as STAR TREK, BABYLON 5, DR WHO, THE X FILES, THE PRISONER, KOLCHAK, EARTH 2 etc. Meetings, 7pm-11pm, at the Sportsman, Lichfield Road, Brownhills, Walsall, admission £1.00, alcohol available upstairs. Call 01543-372142 for details.

5 MARCH 1996: **THE BLACK LODGE**, Birmingham's informal gathering of horror and dark fantasy fans, meet in the lounge of the Australian Bar, Hurst Street, Birmingham city centre, from 8.30pm. Copies of their newsletter, THE REGISTER, are available from 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 7LQ, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

5-6 MARCH 1996: **IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD**, world premiere of this new show by Michelle Dalley, performed by Stratford-upon-Avon High School. Set 100 years in the future with women now

firmly in the dominant role. Men have become househusbands, staying at home, doing the housework, bringing up the children and catering to the breadwinners every need. Everything is going along smoothly, or is it? Suddenly, more men are being seen in the workplace, they don't just want menial jobs, some want careers! But they can only get as far as their female bosses will let them! Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Theatre, tickets £4-£9, call 01789-295623.

5-9 MARCH 1996: **RICHARD O'BRIEN'S ROCKY HORROR SHOW**, Birmingham Hippodrome. Call 0121-622-7486 for further details.

5-9 MARCH 1996: **THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO** "this new version of the daring and very funny story of the naughty boy whose nose grows and grows is presented by Nottingham Playhouse and Italy's brilliantly inventive children's theatre company, Teatro Kismet." (WARWICK ARTS CENTRE PROGRAMME.) A family show, performed in English, with live music, suitable for seven year olds and upwards. Each performance will include an opportunity for audiences to talk to the company members after the show. At the Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry. Call 01203-524524 for details.

8-30 March 1996: **DIVINE RIGHT** in the corridors of political power left and right are combining to form an influential republican movement. Meanwhile, the heir to the throne takes a radical decision, throwing the spotlight onto his son. It is the beginning of a new millennium and the young prince finds an unknown world as he goes to discover his country. Peter Whelan's play asks the question for how much longer will Britain remain a monarchy? Tickets £6.50-£15.50 (concessions available). The Mainhouse Birmingham Rep, Centenary Square, Birmingham. Box Office 0121 236 4455.

12-14 MARCH 1996: **THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE** by Robert Louis Stevenson, adapted by Robin Brooks, performed by the Empty Space Theatre Company. "Do you know the real story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde? How one man's experiments led him to a terrifying end? Now the original and disturbing story with all its horror and excitement is brought to life, twisting a course of tantalising suspense in this famous psychological thriller. The dark side of human nature, lurking just below the surface is laid bare amid the fog and looming shadows of Victorian Edinburgh." Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Theatre, tickets £4-£10, call 01789-295623.

15 MARCH 1996: **BSFG EGM, 7.30pm PROMPT**, the 1995/6 Treasurer's Report will be presented. Followed by regular BSFG meeting at 8.15pm.

Probably the upstairs room at the Queen's Head, Steelhouse Lane, Birmingham city centre. (Venue to be confirmed.)

21-24 MARCH 1996: **YARNSPINNERS**, performed by Kaleidoscope Theatre, "encounters the world of faerie. as amidst wonder, richness, strangeness and an ever-present peril, the story of a quest for an everlasting thread unravels. It is a tale of times and tides long gone and for today. A tale of universal significance. Faeriefolk gather to tease and stir and to create a tapestry richly interwoven with drama, dance, music, mime, verse and imagery". Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, £4-£9, call 01789-295623.

23 MARCH 1996: **COMIC, CARD & SCI-FI MART** at Carrs Lane Church Centre, beside Marks & Spencers in Birmingham city centre. Opens midday. For further information contact: Golden Orbit, 18 Oak Tree Way, Strensall, York, YO3 5TF.

26-30 MARCH 1996: **DR FAUSTUS**. Compass Theatre Company present Christopher Marlowe's epic tale. In return for 24 years of knowledge, power and pleasure, Faustus sells his soul to the devil, now the price must be paid. As the clock ticks toward midnight Faustus waits.... Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, £4-f9, call 01789-295623.

2 APRIL 1996: **THE BLACK LODGE**, Birmingham's informal gathering of horror and dark fantasy fans, meet in the lounge of the Australian Bar, Hurst Street, Birmingham city centre, from 8.30pm. Copies of their newsletter, **THE REGISTER**, are available from 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 7LQ, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

5 APRIL 1996: **VSC - VIDEO**. Interested in watching new and old sci-fi cult tv telefantasy programmes? VSC is a local group, based in Brownhills, who have two private tv screening rooms and regularly show classics such as STAR TREK, BABYLON 5, DR WHO, THE X FILES, THE PRISONER, KOLCHAK, EARTH 2 etc. Meetings, 7pm-11pm, at the Sportsman, Lichfield Road, Brownhills, Walsall, admission £1.00, alcohol available upstairs. Call 01543-372142 for details.

5-8 APRIL 1996: **EVOLUTION** 47th UK National Convention, the Radisson Edwardian Hotel at Heathrow. Guests of honour: Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Jack Cohen. Attending £28.00, supporting £16.00. Contact: 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

6-8 APRIL 1996: **GENERATIONS II** the 30th birthday celebration of STAR TREK presented by Stargazer Productions International Ltd at the Royal Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, London. Guests: Leonard Nimoy (Spock), Roxanne Biggs-

Dawson (Selanna Torres), Robert Picardo (Dr Zimmerman), Walter Koenig (Chekov), George Takei (Sulu), James Doohan (Scotty) - all subject to work commitments. (NB: Some guests may be appearing only once over the show days. Some guests have only agreed to a maximum one hour autograph session. Stargazer cannot guarantee that every attendee will obtain an autograph.) Some of the features of the day will include: "First class audio and visual display; specially designed laser display; galaxy class dealers room (with dealers from both sides of the Atlantic); behind the scenes slide and video presentations; charity auction with excellent collectables from the sci-fi genre; fancy dress competitions; and for the first time in the UK - the Museum of Science Fiction, with original props, costumes and curiosities from your favourite sci-fi shows." Privileged seating £45.00 per day, Premiere £35.00, Premium £30.00, Standard £20.00 and Economy £10.00. A 10% discount scheme is available for attendees booking for all three days - this applies only to tickets purchased that are of the same type. All tickets are sold as non-refundable except in the case of cancellation of the event. Contact: Stargazer Productions International Ltd, 4 Aspenwood House, Ipsley Street, Redditch, B98 7AR.

6 APRIL 1996: **GENERATIONS II THE PARTY** at Le Palais, Hammersmith London, from 8.30pm "till very, very late". Stargazer Productions International Ltd are hosting a "stupendous party ... in attendance will be guests from the hit show STAR TREK along with other celebrities ... the theme of the evening will of course be STAR TREK in all its forms and fancy dress code will be observed ... the evening will entail a first class presentation of music hosted by Le Palais best Disc Jockeys, fancy dress competitions, promotional give aways, and lots, lots more ... the event will be covered by media from around the world". Tickets £12.50, which includes a "special gift pack only available at the party". "Several bars will be open along with food outlets". Contact: Stargazer Productions International Ltd, 4 Aspenwood House, Ipsley Street, Redditch, B98 7AR.

6 APRIL 1996: **THE TIME WIZARD**, presented by the All Electric Puppet Theatre, featuring the recorded voice of Jon Pertwee. Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, £3-£7, call 01789-295623.

27 APRIL 1996: **COMIC, CARD & SCI-FI MART** at Carrs Lane Church Centre, beside Marks & Spencers in Birmingham city centre. Opens midday. For further information contact: Golden Orbit, 18 Oak Tree Way, Strensall, York, YO3 5TF.

3 MAY 1996: VSC - VIDEO. Interested in watching new and old sci-fi cult tv tele-fantasy programmes? VSC is a local group, based in Brownhills, who have two private tv screening rooms and regularly show classics such as STAR TREK, BABYLON 5, DR WHO, THE X FILES, THE PRISONER, KOLCHAK, EARTH 2 etc. Meetings, 7pm-11pm, at the Sportsman, Lichfield Road, Brownhills, Walsall, admission £1.00, alcohol available upstairs. Call 01543-372142 for details.

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28 MAY - 1 JUNE 1996: THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA ON ICE at the Birmingham Hippodrome. Call 0121-622-7486 for further details.

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22-23 JUNE 1996: BABCOM '96 BABYLON 5 "event" presented by Stargazer Productions International Ltd at Le Palis, Hammersmith, London. Guests: Claudia Christian (Cmdr Ivanova), Jerry Doyle (Garibaldi), Andrea Thompson (Talia Winters), Richard Biggs (Dr Franklin), Mira Furlan (Ambassador Delenn), Peter Jurasik (Ambassador Londo) - all subject to work commitments. (NB: Some guests may be appearing only once over the show days. Some guests have only agreed to a maximum one hour autograph session. Stargazer cannot guarantee that every attendee will obtain an

autograph.) "Babcom '96 will have lots of extra attractions such as charity auction, lasers, video wall, behind the scenes specials, specialist merchandise and much more". There will be two price bands, with a 10% discount scheme for those attending both days in the same price band. For further information contact: Stargazer Productions International Ltd, 4 Aspenwood House, Ipsley Street, Redditch, B98 7AR.

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10-11 AUGUST 1996: DELTA QUADRANT STAR TREK convention at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Confirmed guests are Tim Gaskill of the Official STAR TREK Fan Club of the UK and Robert Hollocks of CIC Video, further

guests to be announced. Attending membership £35.00 (6-14 year olds £25.00). Contact: Infinite Frontiers Conventions, PO Box 8966, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 5ST.

29 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 1996: LACON III 54th World SF Convention, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim Hilton and Towers and Anaheim Marriott, California, USA. Guests: James White, Roger Cormen, Elsie Wollheim, Connie Willis (Toastmaster), Takumi and Sachiko Shibano (Fan Guests of Honour). Attending \$110.00, Supporting \$35.00. Contact: c/o SCIFI, PO Box 8442, Van Nuys, CA 91409, USA.

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18-20 OCTOBER 1996: MASQUE 4 "the fourth British Costume Convention for all creative people, fantasy, sf, historical... but above all lots of FUN. Talks, Shows, Competitions." The Moat House, West Bromwich, Junction 1 M5. Attending £25.00, Supporting £5.00, Day attendance £10.00, until 9 April then £30.00,

£10.00 and £15.00 respectively. Contact: Alan Cash, 130 Hamstead Hall Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, B20 1 JB.

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8-10 NOVEMBER 1996: NOVACON 26 the Brum Group's own convention, Hotel Ibis, Ladywell Walk (off Hurst Street), Birmingham. Guest of Honour David Gemmell. Attending membership £25.00 until Easter 1996, supporting £10.50. Progress Report #1 and hotel booking forms now available. Contact: Tony Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stouffbridge, West Mids., DY9 8SS.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

FILES, THE PRISONER, KOLCHAK, EARTH 2 etc. Meetings, 7pm-11pm, at the Sportsman, Lichfield Road, Brownhills, Walsall, admission £1.00, alcohol available upstairs. Call 01543-372142 for details.

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14-17 FEBRUARY 1997: ATTITUDE: THE CONVENTION at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Attending £23.00. Contact: First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1DW.

28-31 MARCH 1997: INTERVENTION the 48th UK National SF Convention, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Theme "communication". Guests Brian W Aldiss, David Langford, Jon Berg and Octavia Butler (NOT Robert Silverberg as previously announced). Attending £25.00, supporting £15.00, cheques (payable to "Intervention") should be sent to: 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants., PO10 7TS.

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1997: LONESTARCON 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas, USA. Attending was \$65.00. Contact: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA.

27 DECEMBER 1999 - 2 JANUARY 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (f10.00) 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.

*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 about) please feel free to write a report or review and send it to the editorial address.*

RHINEGOLD by Stephan Grundy  
Penguin, £6.99, 870pp, p/b,  
Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

As Stephan Grundy explains in his concluding notes, RHINEGOLD is based upon one of the most popular story cycles of Dark Age Europe. Possibly inspired by Attila the Hun's destruction of the ancient Burgundian Royal Family, the tale of Siegfried the dragon-slayer and the extinction of the Walsungs (or Volsungs) is retold in the Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf, the Middle High German NIBELUNGENLIED, and the Old Norse VOLSUNGSAGA, all of which are available in good modern translations and far more rewarding than this well-meant but very tedious novel.

To the above list of treatments one might also add Fritz Lang's imposing silent film epic and Richard Wagner's mighty RING CYCLE of legendary operas, which offer perhaps the most instructive comparison with what Grundy has done here. Whether you like Wagner's music or not, there can be no doubt but that he shaped the material to his own ends, merging characters, pointing up moral dilemmas, and modernising psychological motivation. Although one may recoil from some of the racist philosophy enshrined in his work, there is little denying its power, artistry, and (above all) personality.

Grundy, on the other hand, has attempted to meld disparate literary models with a heightened Wagnerian atmosphere, whilst trying to locate the action in a clearly defined historical period. The result is decent but uninspired and, at this length, quite unforgivably boring and repetitive.

Which is a pity, because the author has clearly researched his subject thoroughly and the book is carefully planned. The generation-spanning action, like that of many Arthurian re-tellings, coincides with the decline of paganism, the waning of the Roman Empire, and the early triumph of Christianity. The supernatural intrudes upon the narrative only slightly, and is clearly a fading and little understood influence upon the characters' lives. There is a strong sense of the ruggedness of daily domestic existence, and real complexity in the tight pattern of envy-driven relationships portrayed.

Yet a book may have many admirable qualities and still refuse to come to life, as is sadly the case here. Grundy's language,



either in description or (especially) in dialogue, is disappointingly stilted and uninvective. Although he keeps the immense family saga moving well enough, he does not really make one care much about its outcome. By the time we have reached the final bloody slaughter it is hard to feel anything other than relief that things are at last sliding towards an exhausted close.

I did not despise RHINEGOLD - for a first novel it shows extraordinary stamina - but, in a world full of good books I haven't read, life is simply too short for it.

**THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION** by Peter F Hamilton  
Macmillan, £16.99, 950+ pp, h/b,  
Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Those of you who attended the BSFG meeting in March last year when I interviewed Hamilton (or read the interview in CRITICAL WAVE #42), will remember his attack on Simon Green's "Deathstalker" series; his accusation that Green had failed to consider and develop the background of the "universe" in which his series was set. Brave words, perhaps a little foolhardy, as Hamilton's own series of space opera had yet to be published...

Well here it is, the first volume of "The Night's Dawn Trilogy". So, does Hamilton have to eat his brave words? By the time I'd ploughed through the first 12 pages I didn't think I'd ever find out. No, this book did *not* grab my attention from the start. If you are a hard-tech freak and into grand space battles I suppose it might - but I'm not. However, I'd devoured Hamilton's first three novels and enjoyed them immensely so I persevered. It was worth it.

This is Space Opera like it should be, but so rarely is - vividly painted, of enormous scope and grandeur of vision, peopled by colourful, exciting, *believable*, characters and a real page-turner (after those first 12!).

I am sure you will love Hamilton's bitek starships, both the voidhawks and the blackhawks, as much as I do; will be as impressed as I was by Tranquillity "a polyp cylinder with hemispherical endcaps, its shell the colour of fired unglazed clay, sixty-five kilometres in diameter, the largest of all bitek habitats ever to be germinated within the Confederation"; on the edge of your seat as Joshua Calvert fights for his life in the Ruin Ring; fascinated by the concept of the Edenist and Adamist cultures; chilled by the events in Aberdale and horrified as they spread across Lalonde; I could go on, and on....

But I won't, believe me this is the most enjoyable and exciting story I have read in several years. The worst I can say about it is that Hamilton leaves you, at the end of the 950+ pages, hanging - with innumerable plot threads to be tied up in later volumes and I am not a patient man!

The universe of Hamilton's "Night's Dawn" is every bit as grand, wonderful and fascinating as that of Banks' "Culture" but it is even more readable. Though I doubt that Hamilton could ever aspire to be the writer/stylist that Banks is, he does have a raw energy, verve, approachability and accessibility that Banks seems to have lost. With Hamilton you rarely get that feeling, as you do with Banks of late, that there is an immensely clever writer at play - instead you find yourself engrossed in the plot and involved in the lives of the characters. If any book deserved a recommendation of "do not miss" it is this! (Do look out for a brief appearance by a certain Mr Peyton!)

*[Copies of CRITICAL WAVE #42 are still available from Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX. Just £1.95 inclusive of p&p, cheques payable to "CRITICAL WAVE PUBLICATIONS".]*

**THE BIRDS OF THE MOON: A TRAVELLER'S TALE**  
by Michael Moorcock  
Jayde Design, £2.50, 24pp, p/b  
Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

Taking all of five minutes to read, this story was commissioned by the NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY for a special issue in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Glastonbury music festival. The issue failed to materialize, and the piece has been incorporated into Moorcock's new story collection FABULOUS HARBOURS. It's a pleasant enough sentimental tale, with rather naff illustrations, about an ageing hippy's search for his wife and children - mysteriously disappeared at a 70s Glastonbury - and his encounters with various mythic figures from the Moorcockian multiverse. I'm afraid I'm not enough of an old hippy myself to see that it really warrants this separate publication.

*[Contact: Jayde Design, 45 St Mary's Mansions, St Mary's Terrace, London, W2 1SH.]*

**DOCTOR WHO POSTER BOOK**  
Bxtree, £9.99, 30 posters  
**DOCTOR WHO POSTCARD COLLECTION**  
Bxtree, £5.99,  
Reviewed by Adrian Middleton.

If a picture paints a thousand words, why can't fifty-one of them inspire me to write five hundred?

Jokes aside, Boxtree's DOCTOR WHO POSTER BOOK and DOCTOR WHO POSTCARD COLLECTION are the first in a line of official DOCTOR WHO products produced for Boxtree by Adrian Rigelsford, who has provided an introduction to both books. Known in DOCTOR WHO circles for possessing the largest collection of photographs from the series outside of the BBC archives, Rigelsford obviously selected the photographs used in these books to pamper to the fans rather than for the general audience, as many of the photographs are previously unpublished.

THE POSTER BOOK is a large, glossy paperback containing some 30 photographs, of which I (and some might call me an authority on DOCTOR WHO) had previously seen only six! All are full colour, and each comes with a descriptive paragraph on the rear of the poster. Each picture is drawn from a different story, but to keep them colour there are sadly no pictures prior to the Jon Pertwee era of the show, although his predecessor, Patrick Troughton, appears in three pictures (one from each of the anniversary stories in which he reprised his role as the second Doctor). While the first Doctor (as portrayed by stand-in Richard Hurndall in a story called "The Five Doctors") appears, the actor who created the role - William Hartnell, is sadly omitted.

Following the lead taken by THE POSTER BOOK, THE POSTCARD COLLECTION offers 20 more colour pictures - this time in the traditional landscape format. Again the first Doctor is omitted, although I was only familiar with two photographs this time around. In both products the photographic quality is excellent, and the pictures are an essential part of any serious DOCTOR WHO fan's collection, while at £5.99 (30p each) the cost for individual postcards isn't too bad - if you can detach them properly.

All in all, a good sample of "stop-gap" releases to keep the fan's happy while they wait for new and more deeply informative books from Boxtree's slightly less official "Classic Who" range.

THE HISTORY MAKER by Alasdair Gray  
Penguin, £5.99, 224pp, p/b,  
Reviewed by William McCabe.

If you read this as science fiction - considering who this review is written for, I assume that - ignore the back cover.

References to ROLLERBALL, Walter Scott, Swift, and Kenny Everett seem totally out of place.

This is another future society novel written in the style of something from a couple of centuries ago. War has replaced football as a major tv sport but this kind of war seems slightly less violent than some football matches. People are still killed as a matter of course but it seems more polite than a Millwall home match (not that I've ever been to either) and there seem to be a lot more rules. Chapter One is a description of a battle in the Scottish border country (although it has something of the feel of the FA Cup Final on tv) and Chapter Three concerns itself with the activity behind the scenes afterwards - the army lost almost all of its soldiers and where are they going to get recruits for next season?

Chapter Two is a description of home life in a small commune/cottage about the size of a tower block. Chapter Four is a spy story like something out of the 60s - a secret group trying to re-invent the world with a new virus. It's easy to break this down into chapters because there are only five of them and they are almost independent of each other. The real difficulty is that they are followed by 60+ pages of notes (you have to read the notes - otherwise you don't get the end of the story). You could read the notes last, but half of the notes relate to things that are going on in the chapters and by the time you get to them you have forgotten that you didn't understand the word it explains. You could read the notes before the start of each chapter but that would give away the plot much too soon in more than one case.

All in all this is a fun book, rather than funny, there are a lot of ideas (not all of them original) and it would be a whole lot better if only they could do something about the notes.

POLLEN by Jeff Noon  
Ringpull, £6.99, 327pp, p/b  
Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

Jeff Noon's second novel is not strictly a sequel to the award-winning VURT, but is set in the same near future Manchester; a weirdly mutated place where the release of powerful new feather-encoded drugs has opened up a doorway into a parallel psychic "vurtworld" that appears to be governed by an eclectic and implacable gallery of mythological archetypes, as well as bringing about a grotesque range of human/non-human interbreedings.

I may not be making too much sense here, but then I'm not sure anyone familiar with Noon's fiction will appreciate my difficulty. If there is some sort of scientific rationale underlying his bizarre scenarios, it does not bear very close scrutiny. The logic of his books is that of a vivid dream, their aesthetic that of symbolic fantasy. At their worst they can seem silly and embarrassing; at their best they have a quality akin to that of an Ernst or Dali painting, as though the familiar world were being mysteriously remade before your eyes.

And there is no shortage of action. POLLEN starts out with a breathlessly atmospheric sequence in which a semi-canine cab-driver fights off flesh-eating "zombies" as he struggles home with an illicit fare picked up on the abandoned early morning moors. There is scarcely time to catch breath before we realize we are in the thick of an extravagant chase plot involving the driver's apparent murder, the abduction of a young boy, a sympathetic dog-cop, his corrupt boss, a rogue black D.J., a street-wise female cab-driver named Boadicea (who owns a vehicle with knives attached to its wheels), her psychically gifted mother Sybil (who contributes bits of narrative in the first person), and a killer epidemic of hay fever.

Although perfect lucidity is not one of Noon's strong points, the book is somewhat easier to follow than was VURT. Perhaps too easy, since so much of the previous novel's fascination derived from the author's suspenseful withholding of key information, his shrewd refusal to explain. By contrast POLLEN, for all its imaginative energy, feels just a little tame. Beneath its manic complications, the plot is actually pretty obvious and the characters pretty thin. What most constantly compels attention is the dazzling succession of surreal images, from the canine driver lying dead with a flower growing out of his mouth to a "vurtball" match with a mixed man/dog attendance.

It would be easy to dismiss Noon as little more than an overgrown adolescent. Certainly, his work is over-sexed and over-violent, his anarchic social vision limited and childish, his use of mythology crude and under-researched. Yet still I think his talent is a large one. His writing may be uneven and gimmicky, but it often attains a wild poetic lyricism. The inner workings of his fictional world may be sketchy, but its surfaces are startling, and it is his own. It remains to be seen if he is able to "mature" as a writer, without losing those very qualities that make him so exciting.

THE ULTIMATE AVENGERS by Dave Rogers  
Boxtree, £16.99, 350pp, p/b  
Reviewed by Chris Murphy.

THE AVENGERS is usually classified as spy fiction rather than science fiction, but many of the scripts showed the influence of QUATERMASS as well as James Bond. The most popular villains were robots, the memorably vicious Cybernauts. Other sf elements included an alien planet, a fake invasion from Venus, instant plastic surgery and giant rats. Little of this was original, but it was certainly entertaining. (Not everyone was appreciative. A programme controller asked the producers to "firmly eschew science fiction from these stories.")

Dave Rogers has written a very thorough history of the series, covering everything from the first season with Ian Hendry to THE NEW AVENGERS in the seventies. He provides a compulsive episode guide, numerous photographs, production details and a huge amount of background information and trivia. The stage version and a variety of toys, records and publications are also described. For AVENGERS enthusiasts this is quite possibly the "ultimate" book on the subject. However it lacks an index, and the price seems rather high for the format.

HEAVY WEATHER by Bruce Sterling  
Phoenix, £5.99, 280pp, p/b  
Reviewed by Robert P Jones.

I have in the past been irritated by Bruce Sterling. Without doubt one of the most talented sf writers of his generation, his fiction can often seem showy, hollow, and self-indulgent.

Not so this pungent, energetic novel, however, which finds him at his intelligent and provocative best.

Set some 35 years into the future, when environmental factors have rendered the world's weather system violently unstable, it follows the fortunes of Alex Unger, a slightly spoiled young man with a rare debilitating lung disease, sprung from a dodgy Mexican clinic by his wild sister, Jane, to fall in with a strange, semi-outlaw band of nomadic scientists and technophiles, known as the Storm Troopers. Literally "Riders on the Storm", these people chase hurricanes and tornados across the vast dust bowls of Texas and Oklahoma, using an interesting range of simulation devices to analyse the data they collect. Led by Jane's lover, the mysterious and charismatic Jerry, their ultimate aim is

to ride out an F6 - a predicted storm that promises to be the most destructive in Earth's recorded history.

Fairly plotless, but never dull, the book bristles with character and ideas, and has a bracing outdoor atmosphere. As the sickly Alex comes to be accepted by the Troupers, he gains a new dignity and sense of self-worth, just as these characteristics appear to be vanishing from society at large. Sterling penetratingly, and sometimes wittily, explores the precarious relationship of human culture with its physical environment, and the evident futility of individual action in a post-modern world. One particularly telling scene has the Troupers failing to agree on the moment when humanity lost control of its destiny - the implication being that it never had control.

Yet, despite its anarchic vision, the novel is not ultimately bleak. On the contrary, some reviewers (including, as I remember, our own Tony Morton) have found the more or less happy ending something of a cop-out.

Me, I'm not so sure it is. As the climatic storm destroys Oaklahoma City, Alex finds himself trapped in an underground bunker with members of an evil necrophiliac, secret society, led by Jerry's cynical brother, Leo. In contrast to their despairing sickness, the final pages of the book radiate a sane hope and optimism in the possibilities of a realistically re-structured society and the resilience of human community. A hope that helps to make **HEAVY WEATHER** a mature and compassionate work, as well as a vivid and exciting one.

□□□□□

Please remember that reviews of books should reach: **MARTIN TUDOR** at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, West Midlands, Willenhall, WV13 1HX, within ONE month of your taking the book.

A number of people **STILL** owe reviews, some from as far back as January 1995 (eh Bernie?) and there are even those who owe as many as **EIGHT** books (eh Carol?). All Guilty Parties can consider this lack of space a brief amnesty - the List of Shame returns next month!

To ensure **YOUR** name doesn't appear there please pass your review(s) to **MARTIN TUDOR** at this month's meeting on Friday (or failing that post them to him at the above address).

## JOPHAN REPORT #92

Bad news to open with I am afraid, Bob Shaw, one of the group's honorary presidents, was hospitalised on 31 January after "cardiac arrest complicated by pneumonia and complete liver 'shutdown'".

Get-well-soon messages can be sent care of Bob's recently wed wife Nancy, 695 Judd Road, Saline, MI 48176, USA.

**VISIONARY TONGUE:** Gothic Fantasy for the Millennium is a new concept in fanzines (it sez here), conceived by Storm Constantine and Eloise Cocuio, showcasing fiction of the dark and sensual that has been produced by writers drawn to the dark fantasy genre. It is supported by a number of established fantasy and horror writers, who will contribute to the zine by providing editing services and articles on the genre and their profession.

Issue #1 is currently available price £1.80 (incl. p&p), cheques to P Kesterton, **VISIONARY TONGUE**, 6 St Leonards Avenue, Stafford, ST17 4LT.

The editors are looking for good quality submissions of poetry, fiction, book reviews, related articles and artwork. All accepted, written fiction contributions will be given professional level editing and criticism, by published writers such as Christopher Fowler, Graham Joyce, Kim Newman, Brian Stableford, Freda Warrington and (of course) Storm Constantine.

Maximum length of contributions 3,000 words, although pieces of 2,000 words or under stand more chance of publication. Please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope of appropriate size for reply, and mark clearly whether your manuscript is disposable or not. Stories over 2,000 words would be preferred on 3½" disk in any Microsoft Word or WordPerfect format.

Do-do-do-do-da... time to cue the **TWILIGHT ZONE** music again as both BBC 1 and SKY 1 broadcast the same episode of **THE X-FILES** on the same day, Tuesday 27 February. Is it a conspiracy? I think we should be told.

The episode in question is the last episode in the second series and the first in a three-part story which will continue with the first two episodes of series three. SKY 1, of course, will be screening the third series the following week.