

BRUM GROUP NEWS

March 1996

Issue 294

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

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

Extraordinary General Meeting
on Friday 15th March 1996, 7.30pm **PROMPT**,
in the upstairs room of the Queen's Tavern,
corner of Essex Street and Inge Street,
Birmingham city centre.

This month's speaker,

ANDY SALMON,

will address the Group after the EGM (8.30pm approx).

Admittance: Members: £2.50, Non-Members £3.75.

(Under 18s, Full-time Students and other Unwaged £2.00, at the
discretion of the Treasurer, on production of appropriate proof.)

Andy Salmon is a member of the
Birmingham Astronomical Society and
will present a talk illustrated by slides.

NB: CHANGE OF VENUE (AGAIN!), SEE BACK COVER FOR MAP

The BSGF meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) 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.

COLOPHON

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A FEW WORDS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

by Martin Tudor.

As I mentioned last month I have been searching for a suitable new venue for the Group. But I'm afraid I've met with mixed success. Below you will find a list of the venues I have checked out with appropriate comments; this is followed by the recommendation of the BSFG committee and myself. You will have an opportunity to discuss this at the EGM on Friday. All of the venues are in (or very near) Birmingham city centre:

WHITE LION, Horsefair: The function room we used to use no longer "exists".

FACULTY & FIRKIN, Holt Street (the old Pot of Beer): no function room.

SACK OF POTATOES, Gosta Green: no function room.

WHITE SWAN, Edmund Street: no function room.

THE OLD FOX, Hurst street: no function room.

THE FOX INN, Essex Street: "function room" (a back lounge) only seats 10-15 people.

QUEEN'S TAVERN, Essex Street: although this has the advantages of real ale (Ruddles

County, Directors and Courage Best), being available on Friday evenings, no loud music and costing just £10.00. It has the disadvantages of being very small and is difficult to get into - this is where the AGM will be held, so you'll see what I mean on Friday....

QUEEN'S HEAD, Steelhouse Lane: as those who attended last month know, although it is cheap, (nothing last time, normally £20.00) the music downstairs drowned out the speaker and the room is very small and "L" shaped. (Rog Peyton tells me that the bar closed early as well!)

THE CROWN, Broad Street: minimum £50.00 room hire, so initially I ruled this out. However, given the lack of alternatives it is an (expensive) possibility - although the loud music could again cause problems.

FLAPPER & FIRKIN, Cambrian Wharf, Kingston Row (the old Longboat, behind the ICC): this is by far the best room I've seen. A good size - seating up to 100 comfortably, with a stage and pa available if required. It is downstairs for a change and quite well sound-proofed (I couldn't hear the rather loud jukebox from upstairs once we'd closed the door behind us. It serves real ale (various guests along with the usual Firkin beers such as Dogbolter and its own Flapper ale) and costs about £20.00 including a bar person serving all evening from the downstairs bar. "About" £20.00 is as far as I've got with the negotiations as the manager, who told me that price, is now on holiday until after the EGM. The only real drawback is that the room is only available on a Tuesday night....

THE CROWN HOTEL, Corporation Street (opposite Yates, near Courts): a less than ideal room - it's a "crescent" shape with the bar at one end of the crescent, so the speaker would have to be positioned quite carefully! Advantage of being cheap (£10.00), quite big (seat 40-50), well sound-proofed and on the ground floor. The disadvantages are that the beer isn't too good and that the room is only available on Monday and Wednesday evenings (or on some Tuesdays).

OLD ROYAL, Church Street: the room is almost ideal, but the manager isn't interested - he claims to be able to take £2,000 a night in there by doing buffets/meals. I doubt this, and will keep an eye out for a change of management.

ROCK CAFE, Fletcher's Walk/near Central Library: although sound-proofed, the room is split in half by the bar and is totally unsuitable for a speaker addressing an audience.

BIRMINGHAM & MIDLAND INSTITUTE, Edmund

Street: unfortunately the building closes at 10pm, so the function rooms have to be evacuated by 9.30pm. Equally unfortunately the cost of the available rooms are £70.50 (seats 60); £86.95 (seats 160); £169.20 (seats 180) and the bar is in the basement.

PRINCE HOTEL, Station Street (formerly Stephenson's Hotel, near the Midland Red Bus Station, behind New Street Station): recently refurbished and under new "private" ownership, this one-time Toby Hotel is the only remotely viable venue I've found for a Friday night. Unfortunately despite having only recently re-opened they have already been "ripped-off" by a couple of groups who used their function room. They had originally charged a fairly low hire charge as long as people guaranteed to buy lots of drink from the downstairs bar - the ***s didn't, so the hire charge they're asking for now is £80.00. I managed to convince the Night Manager that we would be better value for money than their previous customers and he is trying to convince the owners to charge us just £50.00. Advantage of being available on Friday evening, being interested in our business, being a quiet room, one real guest beer each week, seats approximately 60-80. Disadvantage of costing at least £50.00 (and possibly as much as £80.00), and the fact that although the downstairs bar has been pleasantly refurbished it is still frequented by a number of quite noisy drunks and is still known as something of a trouble spot.

As you can see out of the very few function rooms available in Birmingham city centre the best is only available on a Tuesday. The Prince Hotel, while a possibility for the occasional "Special", is not affordable based on the average attendance at meetings last year. We would need an average of 40 or so attendees, rather than the 25 or so we averaged last year at regular meetings; if we were to cover a £50 room hire and speaker's expenses. Anything over £50 would mean a correspondingly greater increase in attendance was needed.

Given all this both I and the committee agree that changing the meeting night to the third Tuesday instead of the third Friday is the best alternative for the Group. We therefore propose that the constitution be amended accordingly.

FREE admission to the BSFG meeting of your choice!
Simply introduce someone to the BSFG and when they join you will be issued a ticket for FREE ADMISSION to the meeting of your choice! See the Treasurer for further details.

Those of you who attended the February meeting will already have heard the terrible news of the death of Bob Shaw, those who didn't will doubtless have heard it elsewhere - bad news travels fast.

I had intended writing a short piece about Bob myself but have found it impossible to do so - just producing this page has been difficult enough. Bob was a good friend, a fine fan and will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

David Wake attended the funeral, over to him:

Bob Shaw

by David B. Wake.

I remember the pain: a sharp, specific pain in the side of my face as my jaw tightened. I remember thinking that I'm not going to survive this. I looked at my watch, half an hour to go, and there was another pun coming, telegraphed far too early in that dead pan brogue (but it worked!). It was Bob Shaw's Serious Scientific Talk at Worldcon in 1987. The funniest performance I have ever experienced. He gave another talk at Worldcon in Glasgow, not so funny, full of reminiscences, a cheerio to fandom. I wouldn't have changed the way it turned out, he seemed to be saying.

Bob Shaw married Nancy Tucker eight weeks ago. He had a very pleasant last few months by all accounts, became ill in America, recovered enough to travel home to visit friends and family. On Sunday 11th February, he went down to his local for a few drinks and a natter, came home and went to bed.

His funeral was held on Monday the 19th February 1996. Despite a bitterly cold day with forecasts of blizzards, it was very well attended. Along with his son Ian and daughter Claire, were family from Ireland and young grandchildren; the Brum Group was represented by Rog Peyton, David Hardy, Bernie and Mick Evans and Carol Morton; others from fandom included Chris Priest, Ian Sorensen, Jean Maudsley, Alison Scott, Steven Cain, Norman and Ina Shorrock, Ray and Carol Bradbury, Henry and Cherry Newton, Andy Sawyer, Roger Culpan and Sue Mason.

The service was fairly standard C of E except that the reading was one of Bob's. The heater at the back of the church paused

and we were able to hear his words, read by Anne Skelhorn, clearly. It was about what sf and writing meant to him - a lot.

Ray Bradbury gave a moving eulogy: tales of chatting over a few drinks, of friendship, of taking forever to walk somewhere because everyone stopped to chat to their friend. He spoke for all of us really. All day we just heard anecdotes about Bob and about friendship. When his first wife died, for instance, neighbours would stop him in the street and offer him chicken soup! He affected everyone in that way. He wasn't simply the most approachable author in sf fandom - he approached you. (I'm re-reading his HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION to hear his voice in my head again and came across: "...then you should consciously befriend them and cultivate that person. Show your interest in his speciality, get his name and phone number, add him to your 'collection'. There doesn't have to be any element of insincerity involved - friendships based on a mutual interest tend to last very well." He obviously followed his own advice and there wasn't any element of insincerity - he was very genuine.

After the church service we all went to the crematorium at Walton Lea for the committal and after that to his daughter's house for light refreshments. We were all made very welcome there, swapped stories and so on. The fandom contingent, typically, decided to go on to Bob's local, the Red Lion, afterwards. It was a shame that other commitments meant I couldn't; it seemed an appropriate pilgrimage.

When I was finally dragged out of the house, I noticed three books in the hall: THE ROMAN ARMY, LIFE IN A ROMAN VILLA and ROMAN BRITAIN. (I am obsessed with the period.) His daughter explained that she had to take them back to the library - Bob had had them out since September. I was reminded of something Bob once said: "A time-traveller always returns to the period that the author has been boning up on." I wonder. I would have liked to have read that story. I'm sure everyone else would have wanted to read it too. And for that matter the next, and the one after that and so on.

As the curtain of the crematorium closed, I mouthed two words. A moment later someone standing behind me said exactly the same thing:

"Good-bye Bob."

Bob Shaw:

A Celebration

by Bernie Evans.

Henry Newton has announced that the Warrington SF Group, of which Bob was a member for many years, is holding a celebration of Bob's life on Saturday 23rd March. This event is open to all.

It will take place between noon and 6.00pm in a CAMRA-run real-ale pub which was a favourite watering hole for Bob, and is also where the group meet twice a month. Although known as Appleton Thorn Village Hall, this is *not* to be confused with the village hall of your imagination, as you won't find the local WI selling jam in there!

Appleton Thorn is just outside Warrington on the B5356, and can be reached by taking the M6 to Junction 20, then the M56 to Junction 10, then the A49 towards Warrington. Turn right at the traffic lights (I'm assuming here that Henry means the first lights you come to), and the pub is on the left near an industrial estate. The village of Appleton Thorn is in my A-Z Road map of Great Britain, so it should also be in whatever version you have, and when you are on the A49 it should also be sign-posted.

A small cover charge of £5.00 (payable on the day) will be made to cover hall hire and buffet - any profit will go to charity.

Those wishing to continue celebrating Bob when the pub closes at 6.00 will find excellent local hosteleries not too far away. Further details are available from Henry at 4! The Rock, Helsby, Cheshire, WA6 9AS, (tel: 01928 7245765).

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Bob's family requested that, rather than flowers, people should make donations to the Hope Hospice for Children in Bob's honour. To this end we started a collection at the February meeting of the BSBFG; so far over £30.00 has been raised - the collection will continue at this month's meeting, after which we will forward it to Bob's daughter: Mrs Claire Hutt, 17 Victoria Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, where personal donations in Bob's honour can also be sent.

Bob's widow, Nancy, returned to the USA in February; messages of condolence can be sent to her at 695 Judd Road, Saline, Michigan 48176, USA.

BOOK REVIEWS

JOHNNY MNEMONIC "a novel by Terry Bisson based on the short story and screenplay by William Gibson", HarperCollins £4.99, 246pp, p/b. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

No novel, this. More an augmented script which sacrifices logic, credibility and characterisation for frenetic action.

It's 2021, and Johnny (Keanu Reeves) is a courier, brain stuffed with an overload of vital information which, it seems, everybody is after. He's chased throughout by various Yakuza (Japanese mafia), continually menaced by bizarre people with futuristic weapons. The plot's based on coincidence and contrivance, lurching from one sfx set-piece to another, like a Bond movie. Most entertaining is the sombre, dystopian background, full of great ideas, reminiscent of BLADE RUNNER.

Both Bisson and Gibson are more talented than this escapist fodder suggests.

DJINN RUMMY By Tom Holt, Orbit, 277pp, £15.99, h/b. Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Heroine-to-be Jane decides on suicide in a railway station waiting room by aspirin overdose. However, fate decides otherwise and the aspirin bottle contains a genie. This (unsurprisingly) changes her life, but not necessarily for the better. And once again you're swept away into the comic imagination of Tom Holt.

Introducing a genie that has sponsorship to pay for repairs and insurance plus a shrewd heroine who (after reading the owners manual) realises she can wish for anything within the "Wish by Date", Holt then twists the plot again as Jane wishes for MORE wishes: Not apparently accounted for in the manual, so genie cannot say no. Well, somehow that's what I would EXPECT Tom to come up with, but to make it work and develop the story into an apocalyptic tale delves the depths of even his imagination. Apparently genies split into two type: one that Aids us and ones who prefer not too and spend all their time trying to destroy the world. Not as easy as you would think for an all powerful genie as the 'good' genies recreate all the destruction causes or simply divert

the 'baddie' genies intention. So balance of a sort is maintained. Further, all the genies realise this status quo occurs so conflict is averted - whats the point of conflict if you ALWAYS end up where you started? It circumvents them trying it thus saving time and energy to do other things. BUT (there's always a but) one very nasty genie decides he wants to give it a go anyway and by diverting Kiss (as Jane's genie is named) to other pursuits, he could probably do his worst. It doesn't quite work out that way, despite this evil genie, Philly Nine's, best efforts.

Some good twists and (illegal) use of escapes from impossible odds - but who knows WHAT a genie can do to get out of such scrapes? A sort of happy ever after ending, but not the one anyone expects. Except perhaps, Tom Holt.

THE RUNES OF WAR: Book One of the Runespell Trilogy by Jane Welch, HarperCollins £5.99, 495pp, p/b. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a debut novel from an author who writes with intelligence. Yes, it has many of the trappings associated with fantasy novels, including a map at the front and a quest, but it doesn't rely on these. The northern part of the world is under threat from an encroaching ice field and the nomadic tribes that can normally scratch a living on the steppes are beginning to starve. A charismatic leader, Morbak, has united the tribes and is leading them south with the intention of over-running the fertile plains of Belbidia. In the way stand the mountains of Torra Alta.

Morbak speaks with the voice of Vaal-Peor, the God of Ice whereas the Belbidians worship "the one true God" and using the wealth of the land to build magnificent cathedrals. These missionaries have almost exterminated the worship of the Earth diety, personified as the triad, Crone, Mother and Maiden.

Branwolf, Baron of Torra Alta struggles to prepare his fortress above the main pass through the mountains. Sounds emanating from the well suggest that enemy scouts are trying to find a route in via the caves and tunnels that riddle the hillside. During the investigations his son Caspar and young half-brother, Hal, are cut off by a rock fall. Seeking a way out they stumble upon a dragon's horde, and are captured by the nomads. As they are taken north, Branwolf follows, as does the blind, stunted dragon whose treasure has been

stolen. For the two young men, the journey becomes a rite of passage, for Branwolf it becomes an opening of old wounds. The boys are helped to escape by an old woman and a girl. In return they promise to help them find the missing Mother for without her, there is no chance that Torra Alta can stem the tide of Vaal-Peor.

MAGIC: THE GATHERING - ARENA

by William R Forstchen,
Boxtree, £4.99, 297pp, p/b.

Star Rating: **

MAGIC: THE GATHERING - WHISPERING WOODS

by Clayton Emery,
Boxtree, £4.99, 294pp, p/b.

Star Rating: ***

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Collectable trading cards have been around for many years. "MAGIC: THE GATHERING" is something new: a collectable trading card game. There are hundreds of different cards, which are available in 60 card decks and 15 card booster packs; each containing a random selection of cards. Players trade their duplicate cards until they have a full set. Fortunately players don't need all the cards before they can play - but the more they have the more options they have in the game. Some cards are worth more than others, and rare cards have been known to change hands for over £100!

Nowadays anything successful goes multi-media; so far MAGIC has spun off into calendars, t-shirts, computer games, screen savers and now a series of novels. Each book comes with a limited-edition card offer, which will ensure that all the collectors buy them.

ARENA is about a contest of wizards, where the winner gets to learn the deepest secrets of sorcery. Each duel in the book is similar to a write-up of a game of MAGIC.

WHISPERING WOODS concentrates more on the innocent people and creatures who are magically forced to fight for the wizards. Both books are standard examples of fantasy fiction, and neither has much connection with the card game. The most interesting concept in each novel is that the wizards (or players) are uniformly villains; casually destroying whole civilisations to further their own ends.

BELGARATH THE SORCERER

by David & Leigh Eddings.
HarperCollins, £15.99 h/b, 662pp.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This novel as you must guess tells the story of the life of Belgarath, from his youth before he met Aldur and became a sorcerer up to the point where the Orb of Aldur is stolen and he goes off to Faldur's farm to collect Polgara and Garion. There is nothing in the book that should be new to fans of Eddings' work, it just goes into detail about events and places that are only mentioned in passing in THE BELGARIAD and THE MALLOREAN.

The story starts with Garath being thrown out of his native village for various larcenous acts, how he spent one winter with the aging godless ones who refused to go with the Gorim to live in Ulgo under the protection of Ul. He left them the following spring and met up with an old man with a rickety donkey cart and spent most of the spring and summer with this old man. Garath was on his way back to the godless ones when he was caught in a freak blizzard, was rescued by a man who lived in a tower and that is when he discovered that the old man with the rickety cart was Aldur. Garath stayed for several years just serving Aldur before he performed his first act of the will and the word, it was at this point that Aldur changed his name to Belgarath and took him on as his disciple.

Over the following centuries others joined Aldur and Belgarath in the vale, Zedar, Sambar, Makor, Tira, Kira and finally Din were all accepted by Aldur and became his disciples.

The book goes on to tell about the orb Aldur spent several centuries working on, how Torak stole the orb, how the peoples rose up against Torak and his Angaraks, how Torak raised the orb in threat against Aldur and his other brothers, how the world was split and Torak was maimed. The meeting and marriage of Belgarath and Poledra, the stealing back of the orb by Belgarath, King Cherek Bear Shoulders and the King's sons, the birth of Polgara and Beldaran, the death of Poledra and the founding of the kingdom of Riva all so that Belgariad can stand and fight Torak.

This is a very long and complex book to do justice in any review of it would mean going into far too much detail, but as this book must be read ONLY after you have read both THE BELGARIAD and THE MALLOREAN, you will know what it contains. I have to say whilst it is not a great work of literary genius, it is a very entertaining book. I found it unputdownable and if you are a fan of the Eddings' work you will too.

CHUNG KUO BOOK SIX: WHITE MOON, RED DRAGON
by David Wingrove,
NEL, £5.99, 629pp, p/b.
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The saga continues. The unchanging world of the Middle Kingdom has changed - irrevocably - yet the rulers are still trying to put it back together. Once there had been seven cities each ruled by a T'ang for this future has seen a reemergence of Chinese imperialism and a suppression of the history that told of an era of Western supremacy. Now there are just three, and the White T'ang, Li Min, working his way up from the bottom of the stacks. City America has gone, destroyed by a falling space station, City Africa is divided into factions run by bandits and City Europe is being eaten from the inside. As is inevitable there is a vast cast of characters which has continued to grow throughout the volumes and although many are now listed as dead they still show their influence. There are a number of story lines. There is the inevitable politics with various parties vying for influence. There is the conflict between Jelka Tolonen and her father over her chosen partner, the clayborn genius Kim Ward. Emily Ascher has left her privileged position as Michael Lever's wife to disappear down the levels to where she feels she can do most good. DeVore is planning another attempt to conquer the world, this time by making copies of people and infiltrating them as sleepers.

It is difficult to assess a book such as this which is part of such a large canvas. It is well written, the characters have depth (though there are too many of them to remember) and the plot has internal consistency however, the only real way to appreciate what Wingrove has achieved to date is to put aside a lot of time and start at the beginning.

ODDS AND GODS By Tom Holt,
Orbit, 282pp, £4.99, p/b.
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The Gods, it seems, do not continually dwell on "cloudy heights". They do not live unchanging lives. In fact - according to Tom Holt, they retire to "the Sunnyvoyde Residential Home" where they live out their dotage without ever quite dying (well they wouldn't would they, being immortal gods). The problem with such a life; even after 'retirement' is, as a god, what do you do with yourself? The answers can only be supplied by Tom Holt.

Some nice ideas flitter through the story - the Norse gods traction engine project and its consequences; the interplay between the gods and Mrs Henderson; and the main theme involving Osiris, with his godson's attempts to have the old god committed as senile; plus Kurt Lindquist. All amply mixed into one crazed concoction, liberally coated with chaotic incidents and left to simmer as only Holt can imagine it. The interplay between gods and (mere) mortals and 'others' (no give aways here!) all add spice to the tale. The flights of Thor, Odin and Frey; whose continual mis-direction always aids Osiris in his quest to keep out of the clutches of his godson's attorneys and other evil doers. A slight mishap leads to the aged gods revolting at Sunnyvoyde, another problem for Mrs Henderson and company to sort out - but how? With Mr Osiris giving the old duffers ideas, what can the answer be? Well actually, dentures. But read the book to find out why.

Holt at his irreverent best, this story reads like classic farce and renews hope for his future. Can he ever run out of ideas? Pray not, if this is his standard fare.

ALCHEMIST by Peter James,
Gollancz £15.99, 574pp, h/b.
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Just how unscrupulous can a large pharmaceuticals corporation be? In the case of Bendix Schere, it seems to monitor and partly control the habits and whereabouts of its employees. But does it also murder them for disloyalty? And does it carry out trials of new drugs without informing the human guinea pigs? Montana Bannerman and her father join Bendix Schere when their small pharmaceuticals company is taken over. At the same time, Conor Molloy, an American patents lawyer, also joins. Various odd circumstances alert Monty and Conor to the possibility that Bendix Schere is implicated in worldwide evil-doing, and they begin investigating. They also fall in love. Yes, not only are their names straight out of a romantic novel, but their actions too.

In fact, there are clichés galore here (tall, handsome American falls for eccentric scientist's beautiful daughter; conspiracies abound in high places, so you daren't tell anybody of your suspicions; when the heroine is told to stay put she goes out on her own and gets into trouble). The novel's complex plot operates, all too often, by means of coincidence, and many events are telegraphed.

Just in case you thought it was only a thriller, there's a black magic sub-plot which is gradually integrated with the rest.

This is James's biggest horror novel so far, though not his best. It has a fast pace and is slickly written, as always, yet it is essentially an unconvincing piece of formulaic writing.

WARHOST OF VASTMARK: The Wars of Light and Shadows Volume 3 by Janny Wurts, £5.99, 563pp, p/b.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Janny Wurts is a good storyteller but seems to have lost her way a little with this series. Not that the ideas or writing is at all bad, it is more that the scope of the novels and the number of characters are rather unwieldy. It is rather like trying to relate the whole of the Napoleonic Wars from the point of view of all the principal combatants simultaneously.

Arithon and Lysaer are half-brothers descended from royal stock but returned to this world from exile. In volume one, they vanquished the Mistwaith - almost. This entity has left a curse which causes the two men to attempt to destroy each other, Lysaer from a misplaced sense of justice, Arithon because the curse compels him. In this volume, Lysaer, enraged by Arithon's victories, assembles a vast warhost to hunt Arithon down. Arithon however has the opportunity to choose the killing ground, which he does to the devastation of Lysaer's forces. In the end little has really been accomplished except a lot of people have died and the landscape reshaped. The crucial developments could easily have conveyed in fewer pages.

HAWKMOON By Michael Moorcock, Millennium, 646pp, £5.99, p/b.
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Volume three of Moorcock's 'ETERNAL CHAMPION' sequence presents the reader with the omnibus edition of the HAWKMOON stories - "The Jewel In The Skull", "The Mad God's Amulet", "The Sword Of The Dawn" and "The Runestaff". All the stories originate from the late sixties and are little revised for this single edition.

Set in the future, a post industrial world in which the scientific achievements of today appear as magic, the stories follow the quests of Hawkmoon and of Castle Brass, his adopted home. The Duke is captured in the

initial tale and broken to the will of the Dark Empire, only to be chosen to be their pawn to revenge Baron Meliadus for Castle Brass' non-cooperation. This forms the basic background for the whole series; how the Baron continues in his attempts to subdue Castle Brass and of the Dark Empire's expansionist dream countered with Count Brass' repulsion of their aims and Hawkmoon's single minded search to find a means to destroy the Empire.

Each separate story adds another piece to the jigsaw as Moorcock creates his illusion in this fantastic tale, although each can be read as a stands alone story. How the single force withstands the evil Dark Empire to become the hope of all, Hawkmoon and the others attain hero status as they repeatedly evade their enemies plans and even disrupt them. The Dark Empire, based in Londra, with its immortal King-Emperor who desires to rule the world, can only spawn evil intent, mainly through his based hierarchy who live only for cruelty. Their destruction and murderous ways only heighten the evil they portray, leaving one in no doubt as to the righteousness of the hero.

For its time a bold attempt to counter jingoism; with Hawkmoon of German extract (the Duke of Koln) and the Dark Empire emerging from 'Granbretan'. However, while still an entertaining and plausible story it has somewhat dated. Not outdone by current fantasy, Moorcock's 'ETERNAL CHAMPION' presents an overview of how to write superior stories without resorting to cheap clichés, keeping the reader entertained and absorbed by the events unfolding in the story as you follow the threads of plot to its conclusion. All in all, a nice reminiscence from my earlier reading days and one which I enjoyed thoroughly.

OOOOO

The sharp-eyed amongst you will have noted a new innovation above (in the review of the MAGIC books by Steve Jones) - yes we would like every reviewer to give a "Star Rating" in future, the Ratings are:

- * = Crap, beyond belief.
- ** = Crap, but readable.
- *** = Not too bad, really.
- **** = Pretty good, actually.
- ***** = BUY IT!

Please remember that reviews of books should reach Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne

Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX, within ONE month of your taking the book.

Surprise, surprise, a number of people STILL owe reviews, their names are followed by the books they have yet to review (and the month in which they received them). Please ensure that these, along with reviews of books picked up at last month's meeting, are passed/mailed to Martin Tudor at/by this month's meeting:

Dave Cox: HOT SKY AT MIDNIGHT by Robert Silverberg (5/95).

Bernie Evans: THE DEUS MACHINE by Perre Ouellette (2/95); NIMBUS by Alexander Jablovkov (3/95).

"Squiggle" (formerly known as Sarah Freakley): LIFE FORM by Alan Dean Foster (1/96).

JOHN HOWES: THE WAR OF THE LORD'S VEIL by Adam Nichols (8/95).

Robert Jones: JERUSALEM COMMANDS by Michael Moorcock (1/96).

Steve Jones/B'ham Uni: DRAGONCHARM by Graham Edwards (1/95); TALISMAN by Sam Lewis (1/95); WARHAMMER: WOLF RIDERS ed David Pringle (3/95); BRIGHTNESS REEF by David Brin (1/96).

Carol Morton: WITCHES' BREW by Terry Brooks (5/95); ROMAN THE BARBARIAN by James Bibby (5/95); THE FEY: SACRIFICE by Kristine Katherine Rusch (8/95); SACRED GROUND by Mercedes Lackey (9/95); STORM WARNING by Mercedes Lackey (9/95).

Chris Ridd: SUNDIVER by David Brin (1/96).

James Robertson: BEGGARS IN SPAIN by Nancy Kress (9/95).

PETE WESTON: THE STARS ARE ALSO FIRE by Poul Anderson (1/96).

28th-29th September 1996
at The Little Library Theatre,
Birmingham.

TeleFantastic will present

WRITER'S GATE: THE SPECIAL EDITION

Two previous events have been held in Peterborough, and now we're moving to Birmingham where we will be moving away from just covering DOCTOR WHO fiction to cover all tv-related fiction. The sort of authors we're looking at include: Chris Boucher, Douglas Adams, Christopher Priest, Christopher Bidmead, Terry Pratchett, Stephen Gallagher, Tanith Lee, P J Hammond, Nigel Kneale etc. Watch this space for further details!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

UNTIL -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.

15 MARCH 1996: BSFG EGM, 7.30pm PROMPT, the 1995/6 Treasurer's Report will be presented. Followed by regular BSFG meeting at 8.30pm featuring guest speaker **ANDY SALMON**. The upstairs room at the Queen's Tavern, corner Essex Street/Inge Street (off Hurst Street), Birmingham city centre. (Ask at the bar for access to the function room.)

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-£9, 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 (Belanna 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.

19 APRIL 1996: SIMON R GREEN will address the BSFG in the function room at the Prince Hotel, Station Street, (behind New Street Station, near the Electric Cinema and the Bus Station), in Birmingham city centre. 7.45pm for 8pm.

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.

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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.

15 JUNE 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.

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.

27 JULY 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.

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 Corman, 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.

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.

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, Stourbridge, West Mids., DY9 8SS.

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



CITY CENTRE
One Way Street 
Scale: 4.7 inches to 1 mile


the Queen's Tavern,