

January 1997

Issue 304

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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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, Novacon 26 Chairman - Carol Morton, Novacon 27 Chairman - Martin Tudor.

**The Annual General Meeting:
7.45pm for 8pm on
Friday 17th January 1997
in the upstairs room
of the Queen's Tavern,
(ask at the bar for access)
on the corner of Essex Street
and Inge Street (off Hurst
Street), in Birmingham's
"China Town" area.**

The BSGF meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 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. (E-mail should go via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk) 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, West Midlands, WV13 1HX.

	Membership	Non members	Total
January AGM	22	-	22
February Andrew Harmon	21	2	23
March Andy Salmon	18	-	18
April Simon Green	16	1	17
May Tom Holt	17	4	21
May special Prof Krauss	19	16	35
June Ian Watson	19	1	20
July Ian Stuart	23	3	26
August MJ Simpson	19	3	22
September Chris Priest	19	3	22
September Special	7	5	12
October Ken Macleod	16	-	16
November Harry Harrison	25	3	28
13 Meetings	241	41	282

Average attendance 96	Members	Non members	All
	18	3	21

Colophon

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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, supplying news from the Net, transferring files and her article; TONY MORTON for his piece; STEVE GREEN for his magazine reviews and for general news in the Jophan Report and the Events listing.

Will "P. Phillips", who joined the Group in May, please send his address to: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

Chairman's Bit

by Martin Tudor

1996 has been an interesting and varied year, with guest spears such as an

astronomer, an award-winning American physicist, a sf magazine editor and nine authors. A total of 14 meetings (including the AGM and Christmas Special) - not bad eh?

Well, apparently so.

As you can see from the figures on page two (compiled by treasurer Sarah Freakley) we have hit a new low for attendance both average (21) and in particular (just 12 for Robert Jordan in September).

Unfortunately this poor attendance means that we cannot afford the large, pleasant function room at the Prince Hotel.

You may remember at the EGM we decided that we would try to increase membership numbers this year - by paying out the extra for the Prince, increasing publicity, chasing up non-attending members and freezing the membership rate. We have done all this and it hasn't worked.

The response to the letters to non-attending members earlier in the year was informative but of little use. Essentially members had failed to attend for widely varied personal reasons - due to changing circumstances at work, family illness and other family responsibilities. (The only reason we had any control over was the complain about the chairs at the Prince Hotel - problem solved. we're no longer there!)

As for publicity: having investigated the cost of advertising with WHAT'S ON and discovered it was prohibitively expensive, we looked for other alternatives. Steve Jones spread his net wider with leafleting and we targeted the Library network in the Midlands. On three separate occasions during the year we sent specific and general flyers, posters and newsletters to every library in the Midlands. The response has been disappointing so far - but the ground has been seeded.

As far as we can judge the most effective publicity is still word of mouth and flyers in Andromeda - nothing else produces a better response.

It is the recommendation, therefore, of the out-going committee that the Group moves to a smaller cheaper venue; increases the membership subscription to £15.00 (£18.00 for two people at the same address) to cover the production costs of the newsletter more comfortably; and continues to keep the cost of speakers to a minimum.

Hopefully, as members circumstances change once more attendance will again increase. After all, we are rarely seeing more than one third of the membership turning up at any given meeting!

Forthcoming Events

17 JANUARY 1997: BSG AGM & AUCTION, 7.45 for 8pm in the upstairs function room at the

QUEENS TAVERN, 23 Essex Street, Birmingham.

14-17 FEBRUARY 1997: ATTITUDE: THE CONVENTION at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Attending £27.00 (until 31 January 1997).

Contact: First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SSI 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. Attending £40.00, supporting £30.00. Cheques (payable to "Intervention") should be sent to: 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants., PO10 7TS, (e-mail intervention@pompey.demon.co.uk).

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1997:

LONESTARCON 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas, USA. Contact: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA.

14-16 NOVEMBER 1997:

NOVACON 27, the annual sf convention of the Brum Group, will be held at the De Vere Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Guest of Honour Peter F Hamilton. Attending membership £25.00 until 1 April 1997. Supporting £10.50. Progress Report #1 and hotel booking forms now available. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

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.

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise readers to contact organisers 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.

Letters Column

**Tony Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye,
Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.
6th January 1997.**

During recent years meetings of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group have not been sufficiently attended to enable the Group to retain a working capital. This has meant that furthering

the Group's aims has proved difficult. It has also resulted in the Group moving to smaller and what I feel are "unsuitable" venues. If the Group is to continue and further its aims a serious look needs to be taken of the Group, its current working and if it has a future.

I therefore put forward three suggestions for discussion at the AGM:

1. The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meet less regularly to enable members to attend.
2. The Birmingham Science Fiction Group only meet when a Guest of sufficient calibre is booked to talk. (Guest chosen by Committee or referendum of members).
3. The Birmingham Science Fiction Group ceases to exist.

I hope to have the opportunity to present my reasoning for the above at the AGM, where members will I am sure express their own views.

**Bernie Evans, 11 Reddings Lane,
Tyseley, Birmingham, B11 3EX,
(NB: temporary COA).
11th January 1997.**

Let me say from the outset that, as a previous Chairman and a member of some 16 years' standing, I have not in the last 18 months supported the Group in what I feel to be a proper manner. This has been due to family problems.

and doesn't prevent me having an opinion on the low level of support generally accorded the group.

It seems to me that most members don't actually want an SF Group as originally envisaged by its founders, but instead want a "meeting at which we can rubberneck with someone famous or laugh at somebody we consider daft" The EGM is a case in point. There were in effect TWO meetings that night, an EGM at which a fundamental alteration to the Group's Constitution would be discussed, and a talk by a local astronomer. Both these items, a mere 5 or 10 years ago, would have had the room packed to the rafters. Instead, eighteen people showed up, eighteen people!, out of a membership of 60+.

During my three years of chairing the Group the best attended item was a talk by a Ufologist. The best attendance I have seen during all my years with the group was a talk by Frank Herbert, a Very Famous Person.

Contrast this with the monthly London Meetings at the Wellington. These are informal meetings, no fees to pay, no newsletter (unless you count Ansible which is handed out there), no guest speakers (unless you count the chance of meeting a visiting fan, yes I said FAN, who may drop in unannounced, uninvited and unexpected, and be made welcome). The only reason people have for attending these meetings is to meet like-minded people, to gossip, to smof, and even talk about sf. No-one plans

these meetings, no-one organises them, no-one knows what or who to expect, and yet discussions are afoot to move to a new pub, because with attendances at well over 100 people, the venue is too small.

So, what do they provide that our meetings don't? No, I don't know the answer, that's why I'm asking YOU. I'm sure the Committee would like to know what it is they aren't giving you. I'm sure Martin is wondering why he should spend his time trying to persuade people who could charge several hundred, nay - several thousand, pounds a talk to do it for nothing. Why he should spend his time trying to convince publishers that they should pick up travel costs for a speaker whom we find so fascinating that only 20 people will turn up for the event. I'm sure some of our speakers would like to know why they should travel all the way to Birmingham and sleep in a strange bed for the dubious return of speaking to 20-odd people, of whom half display obvious boredom and half of whom will be audibly insulting if he/she doesn't fit the very narrow view of what is EXPECTED.

What happened to open minds, new ideas, the idea of welcoming people into our little community. In short, what the HELL has happened to the Brum Group?

The Jophan Report #100

A correction to a news item last issue: Caroline Nevile's children's book **THE MARVELLOUS MENAGERIE** won't appear from Minerva Press until Easter this year - so plenty of time to get your order in!

Book Reviews

CREATING BABYLON 5 by David Bassom * * *

THE A TO Z OF BABYLON 5 by

David Bassom * * *

Boxtree; £13.99, £8.99

DR WHO: COMPANIONS by

David J Howe, Mark Stammers * * *

ACE! by Sophie Aldred, Mike

Tucker * * *

Virgin; £12.99, £17.99

BEYOND UHURU by Nichelle

Nichols * * * *

Boxtree; £6.99

Reviewed by Steve Green.

Considering its growing popularity, publishers have been a mite slow off the mark with merchandise for BABYLON 5 fans (if only the same were true of the X-FILES production line), but David Bassom shows every intention of staking the spin-off territory out for himself. Packed with stills and interviews, **CREATING BABYLON 5** is a solid overview of the series, covering developments as far as season two's closing episode "The Fall of Night", whilst **THE A TO Z OF**

BABYLON 5 takes a more encyclopaedic approach, annotating characters and locations into the launch of season three (making this the more immediately outdated). Of the two, **CREATING** is the more interesting, with plenty of behind-the-scenes revelation to entertain B5 fans, though the series' labyrinthine plotline is certain to boost the latter book's sales, as minor plot points and players are exposed as being crucial to the narrative.

Meanwhile, Virgin's **DR WHO** treadmill nears its end with the paperback release of David Howe and Mark Stammers' **COMPANIONS**, originally released in hardback last year but here sporting a jazzier cover design and a substitute glamour pose in the Katy Manning profile (for those anoraks who care, this one features a nipple). What I find really puzzling is that neither author thought it worth making mention of the recent tv movie and the Doc's latest companion; a pity to fall at the final hurdle.

Their account of his tv sidekicks instead ends with Sophie Aldred, one of the most popular **TARDIS** co-habitees and author, together with sfx specialist Mike Tucker, of **ACE!**, subtitled "The Inside Story of the End of an Era". That the final two years marked a noticeable upturn in both quality and entertainment value only made the BBC's decision to kill it in 1989 all the more mystifying, a feeling of bewilderment echoed by Aldred and Tucker. It's this sense of personal

involvement which pervades the book and will no doubt slide it into the ardent fan's bookcase; much of the general information is available elsewhere, but there's no substitute for actually being on the set, day in, day out.

BEYOND UHURA proves equally intriguing, though surprisingly it's Nichelle Nichols' life outside the STAR TREK set which wins the attention: narrow scrapes with mobsters during the launch of her singer career, an attempted rape which saw Nichols pitted against an entire town establishment at a time when crosses still burned on Alabama lawns, her post-TREK vocation as NASA's roving ambassador. Plus, of course, her relationships with former friend Bill Shatner and former lover Gene Roddenberry, long the subject of Trekker speculation and here explored with commendable delicacy.

BRIGHTNESS REEF by David Brin
Orbit, pb, 705pp. £6.99.
Reviewed by Chris Ridd.

Also known as "Book One of a new Uplift Trilogy", BRIGHTNESS REEF is located on the planet Jijo, where six different races have been exiled from the Five Galaxies.

The story begins in a swamp several thousand years after the last visit by the Galactics, with a mute human male being rescued by the exiled "natives". One plot throughout the book concerns his identity and where he came from,

although he is in many ways merely a conduit through which many of the other characters in the book interact.

The majority of the book is written from the first person perspective of several of the aliens (or should that be first *alien* perspective? Answers on a postcard.) This all seems quite convincing, although getting your head around the strange and rather different processes got somewhat wearing after a while.

In general however, the book is much too long. Many of the plots seem quite irrelevant (you keep wishing Brin would "get to the point") for too long for the reader to sustain any interest in them. It could have done with a lot of editing. Hopefully, the rest of this new trilogy will be a lot punchier than BRIGHTNESS REEF.

PAWN'S DREAM by Eric S Nylund
New English Library, 345pp, £5.99,
p/b. Star Rating: ***
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This is a first novel by Eric S Nylund, who works as a scientist at the University of California. One might expect it to be hard sf, therefore, but it isn't - it's fantasy. However, the author seems to like his magic to have some sort of scientific rationale. True, I don't read much fantasy, but I haven't previously come across the idea that magic needs "dualities" in order to work: fire and water, life and death, and so forth. Perhaps someone can

correct me if I'm wrong? (Now we'll see who reads this!)

Roland Pritchard lives a mundane existence in our world, but dreams that he is a postulant in an isolated monastery on Meredin, a world of which he thinks he only dreams as an escape from his boring existence. However, he soon finds that both worlds are equally real, that he is in fact the last member of a royal family on Meredin (which is rapidly becoming barren, drained by the magical feuds of the few last remaining Families), and that he has the power to become a powerful sorcerer. He escapes from the monastery and embarks on a series of increasingly exhausting adventures in both worlds, involving wizards, demons and talismans (men?).

I found it quite an impressive debut, well-written and well-plotted, with interesting characters, a suitably climatic finale and a happy ending. I doubt if it's likely to make a great impact in the world of sf literature or sweep up any awards, but I enjoyed it and wish this author well with his future efforts.

* * * *

The "Star 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

A number of people still owe reviews, please ensure that these, along with reviews of books picked up at the last meeting are passed/mailed to Martin Tudor at/by this month's meeting.

Small Press Reviews

Compiled by Steve Green

The following list comprises telefantasy, horror and fiction titles received during the past couple of months; thanks to DARK SIDE's monthly "Fanzine Focus" column for its assistance.

FLESH & BLOOD #7, £3.95 from Harvey Fenton, Post Office Box 178, Guildford, Surrey, GU3 2YU.

DANCING FOR THE WORLD'S DEATH by Storm Constantine £3.50 from Inception, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA.

RARE ZOMBIE COMIX #1, £5.00 cash from Bjorn Schagerstrom, V. Vintergatan 208, 3tr, 703 44 Orebro, Sweden.

THE CLAUDIA CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE Vol.2, #1, distributed bimonthly by the Claudia Christian

Appreciation Society, £10.00/year from Sean Harry, 148A Queensway, Bayswater, London, W2 6LY.

GHOSTS & SCHOLARS #22, £4.00 from Rosemary Pardoe, Flat One, 36 Hamilton Street, Hoole, Chester, CH2 3JQ.

SUSPIRIA #5, US\$2.00 - or a fanzine in trade - from Cesar Souza, Rua Riachuelo, 1334 sl.108, Porto Alegre RS, CEP 90.010-273, Brazil.

NIGHT DREAMS #5, £2.80 from Kirk S King and Anthony Barker, 47 Walmley, Sutton Coldfield, B76 2TS.

OMSK #4, £1.00 from Paul Elliott and Richard Lee, Post Office Box 145, Ilford, Essex, IG3 8XZ.

HEADPRESS #12, £3.50 from David Kerekes and David Slater, Post Office Box 160, Stockport, Cheshire, SK1 4ET.

THE WIZARD'S KNOB #6, £2.00 from Steven Dean, 23 Woodland Vale Road, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex, TN37 6JJ.

SCARY DREAMS #4, £2.00 from the Society of Fantastic Films, 5 South Mesnesfield Road, Salford, Manchester, M7 3QP.

A BAG OF SAND #5, £2.00 from Steve Lawson, 24 Ryegate Crescent, Birstall, Leicester, LE4 3HL.

THE LINA ROMAY FILE, £5.95 from Tim Greaves, 118 High Street, Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO50 5LR.

BRIGITTE LAHAIE, £6.45 from Media Publications, Freepost LON6370, London, N16 7BR.

THIRD EYE #2, £2.25 from Mark Coulson, 68B Leicester Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 2AG.

DATA DUMP #15/16, £3.00, #17, £0.50 from Steve Sneyd, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD5 8PB.

MEDIA SCENE #3, £1.50 from Media Publications, Freepost LON6370, London, N16 7BR.

MONSTERS FROM HELL #4, £3.00 from Stephen Jones, 9 Park View, Langley Moor, County Durham, DH7 8JU.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CINEMATIC TRASH #1, £2.00 from Mason Storm, Post Office Box 3137, Cumbernauld, Glasgow, G67 2AT.

PEEPING TOM #24, £2.00 from David Bell, Yew Tree House, 15 Nottingham Road, Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire, LE65 1DJ.

THE NORA K KOMPENDIUM, £8.65 from Media Publications, Freepost LON6370, London, N16 7BR.

GOREHOUND #22, £3.50 (or
US\$3.00), cash only, from Mikko
Aromaa, Post Office Box 178, 00521
Helsinki, Finland.

DARK STAR #13, £2.50 from Rob
Dyer, 64 Arthur Street, Gravesend,
Kent, DA11 0PR.

ESPYLACOPA #2, £1.00 from Wes
White, Splott's Moore Farm, Wick,
Glastonbury, Somerset, BA6 8JS.

DRONE #26, distributed bimonthly by
Andrew Hall for the Film & TV Model
Club, £10.00pa from 172 High Hope
Street, Crook, County Durham, DL15
9JA.

SHOCK CINEMA #9, US\$8.00 from
Steve Puchalski, Post Office Box 518,
Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York,
NY 10009, USA.

ATTACK OF THE SCISSOR PEOPLE
#1, £1.80 from Daniel Stillings, 12
Bannerfield Road, Sheffield, S7 2DL.

SQUANE'S JOURNAL #3, £2.50 from
Simon Wady, 209 Beacon Road,
Chatham, Kent, ME5 7BU.

VINTAGE HORROR #2, £3.00 from
Ian Cowley, 116 Lowedges Crescent,
Sheffield, S8 7LQ.

TOMB #2, £2.50 from Morien W
Jones, Maveriks, 40 Hawk Close,
Abbeyle, Gloucester, GL4 8NE

THE UNIVERSAL MIND #1, £2.50
from Carl Thomas, 4 Baptist Street,
Rhos, Wrexham, LL14 1RH.

SAMHAIN #59, £2.00 from John
Gullidge, 77 Exeter Road, Topsham,
Exeter, Devon, EX3 0LX.

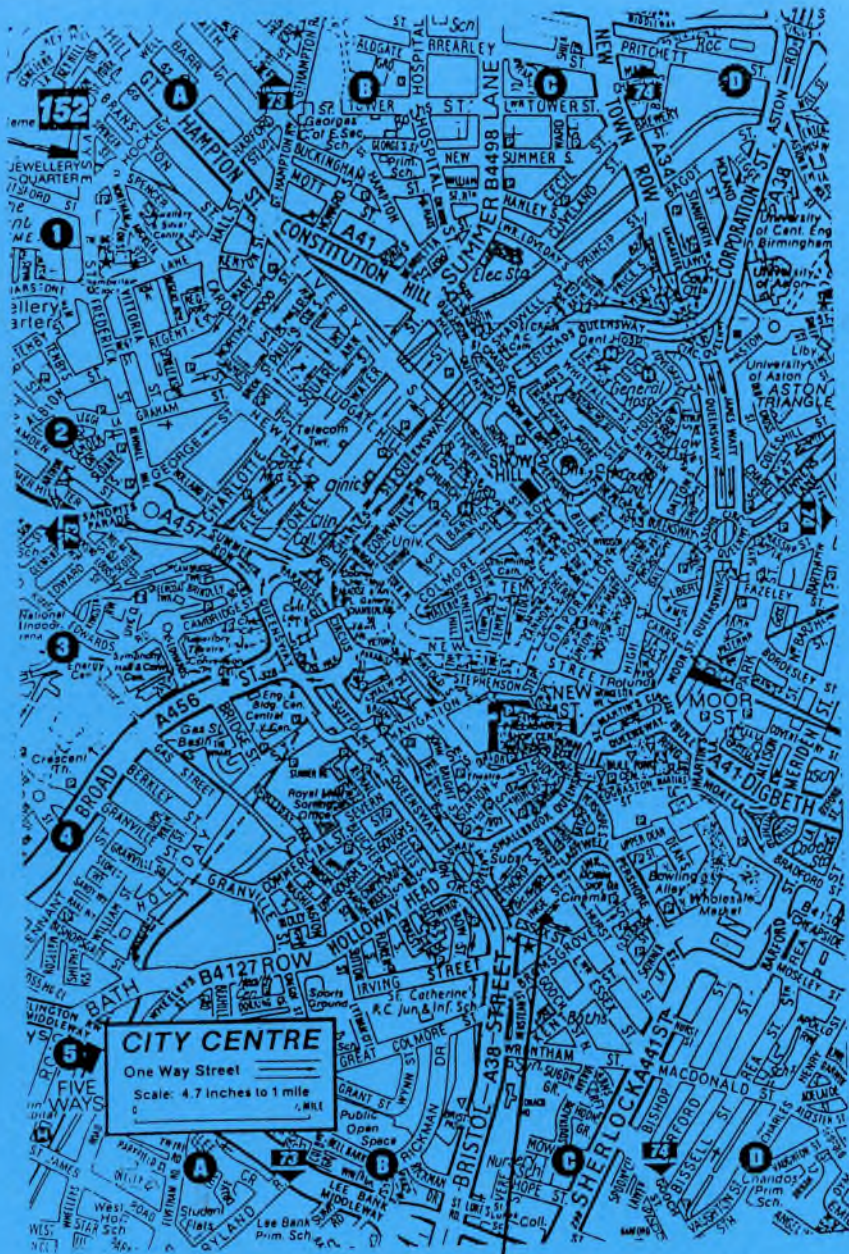
MANSPLAT #6, US\$2.00 from Jeff
Gilbert, Hairball Press, 2318 Second
Avenue, Suite 591, Seattle, WA 98121,
USA.

TAHTIVAELTAJA #47 (3/96), £5.00
cash from Toni Jerrman, Junailijankuja
1 b 29, 00520 Helsinki, Finland.

FEBRUARY 24 #16, £1.20 from
Douglas Baptie, Top Flat, 1 Ancrum
Court, Hawick, TD9 7DB.

THE VINCENT PRICE FILE, £2.75
from Simon Flynn, 41 Hartley Road,
West Croydon, Surrey, CR0 2PJ.

DARK TERRORS #13 (published June
1996), £3.50 from Mike Murphy,
Avalon, Ventnor Terrace, St Ives,
Cornwall, TR26 1DY.



the Queen's Tavern,