

May 1997

Issue 308

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: FREE

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chairman - Tony Morton, Secretary - Anne Woodford, Treasurer - Alan Woodford,

Publicity Officer - Steve Jones, Newsletter Editor and Novacon 27 & 28 Chairman - Martin Tudor.

The May Meeting will be an
informal meeting on
Friday 9th May 1997
from 7.45 in the
TOP FLOOR bar of
the Tap & Spile, Gas Street,
(off Broad Street) Birmingham
Admittance: FREE

There will be a raffle and review copies are available as usual. (Please do not smoke until 9pm when the bar is opened to the general public.)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE - Iain M Banks: The State of the Artist
an overview by Steve Green and STAR TREK:
THE EXHIBITION a report by Steve Jones

The BSGF meets on the 2nd 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 £15.00 per person, or £18.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, the Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Midlands, B65 0RL, (e-mail enquiries 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 Clarks Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (or e-mail to martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

Colophon

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Many thanks to HELENA TUDOR for help collating and mailing last issue; ALAN & ANNE WOODFORD for producing the address labels; STEVE GREEN for his article on Banks.

**Iain M Banks:
The State of the Artist
by Steve Green**

Some writers slide into the public consciousness like a hot knife through butter; others chisel themselves a reputation with successive novels. Iain Banks' debut, on the other hand, ripped into many critical sensibilities like a chainsaw.

Arguably the best realized study of teenage dysfunction since J D Salinger's THE CATCHER IN THE RYE, Banks' THE WASP FACTORY was variously described as "A work of unparalleled depravity" (IRISH TIMES), "Silly, gloatingly sadistic and grisly.. the literary equivalent of a video nasty" (SUNDAY

EXPRESS) and "Astonishing, unsettling and brilliantly written" (COSMOPOLITAN).

The story of Frank, a solitary sixteen year-old whose ritualistic obsessions echo William Golding's THE LORD OF THE FLIES and who recalls with disquieting indifference a series of casual murders during childhood ("It was just a stage I was going through"), THE WASP FACTORY struck an instant chord with a generation which had seen Punk's honesty replaced by New Romanticism's facade (recall the loathing of Salinger's Holden Caulfield for anything he considered "phoney"), and which felt detached, even disenfranchised by the cash-centric narcissism of mid-1980s Britain. Although the narrative is overshadowed by the imminent return of Frank's psychotic brother, Eric, the book is imbued with such raw humour and twisted detail (particularly in the eponymous device by which Frank runs his life, a "beautiful and deadly and perfect" construction part mechanical, part living matter) that the younger sibling remains its focus and even the slightly left field denouement can be forgiven.

Intriguingly, whilst THE WASP FACTORY was not in itself a science fiction novel (there are passing references to STAR TREK and Space Invaders, and Frank's catapult is dubbed "The Black Destroyer", the title of the classic sf work by A E Van Vogt which in part inspired the movie Alien), it was swiftly taken to the hearts of British science fiction fans, who invited Banks to Birmingham in 1986 for Mexican II.

It was then the secretive Scot revealed his hitherto only suspected alter-ego: Iain M(enzius) Banks, science fiction author. THE WASP FACTORY was in fact his fifth book, a switch to the "mainstream" reluctantly taken when the previous three - eventually worked into the "Culture" novels USE OF WEAPONS (drafted 1974), AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND (drafted 1975) and THE PLAYER OF GAMES (drafted 1979) - failed to find a market (the remaining attempt, a sprawling political thriller, eventually appeared in a much-metamorphosed form as CANAL DREAMS).

The hints were also evident in Banks' second published novel, WALKING ON GLASS, which utilises a narrative triptych in the tradition of Brian Aldiss to bring together three separate - but interactive - universes, only two of which are recognisable as our own reality. Ingenious but not entirely engaging, the shifting viewpoint occasionally proving distracting, Banks modified the technique for its follow-up, THE BRIDGE, a stunning voyage through inner space in which a comatose motorist conjures up both the bizarre architectural community of the title and a straight fantasy landscape populated by a Glaswegian swordsman whose quest parallels his creator's search for consciousness. A remarkable achievement in the tradition of Christopher Priest's THE AFFIRMATION and Philip K Dick's TIME OUT OF JOINT, it confirmed Banks as one of the most consistently challenging writers of his generation.

That reputation secured, Banks was now able to unveil his science ambitions to the wider public, CONSIDER PHLEBUS marked the debut both of his middle initial and, more importantly, that of the Culture, a galaxy-spanning network of alien species which operates on such a disorientatingly massive scale that human needs are given as much consideration as we would treat those of microbes. "A broth of a book", in Banks' own words, "not particularly bright, but great fun to be with", its use of an antagonistic central character allowed him to heighten the tension whilst exploring the background concept of a "group civilisation" established for approximately nine millennia.

During its "vast and complicated history", the Culture has observed a galaxy in constant turmoil - "waves of empires, federations, colonisations, die-backs, wars, species-specific dark ages, renaissance's, periods of mega-structure building and destruction, and whole ages of benign indifference and malign neglect" - and so evolved itself into an economic and bureaucratic machine in which an individual planet's destruction by supernova would barely register.

The Culture's semi-detachment from social and emotional issues is further reinforced by the extensive use of sentient starships; in Excession, his most recently-published addition to the Culture canon, the artificial intelligences running the Ships - "Minds" - actually take centre-stage, relegating humanity to the sidelines. Fitted with that favourite nonsense of space opera, the faster-than-light warp drive, Banks' mighty craft cruise the cosmos, the largest of them - the size of major cities - dedicated to

cataloguing and contacting new civilisations. The chances of their crossing our world's path are virtually nil, although his 1989 novella "The State of the Art" does feature a lengthy anthropological encounter between the Culture and 1977 Earth, allowing Banks free rein for a little sociological satire.

The 1970s also features heavily in his fourth non-sf work, *ESPEDAIR STREET*, the autobiography of rock star Danny Weir, which opens - with typical Banksian literary shock tactics - on the lines "Two days ago I decided to kill myself" before timeslipping back to Weir's fledgling musical career as a student in 1973.

This gear-change in genre sets the tone for Banks' career from this point onwards, shifting effortlessly from science fiction (and more specifically, space opera, a style rarely attempted - and even more rarely mastered - by non-American writers) to suspense thriller and dark comedy. Only the variant by-line acted as a vague guide, although it still managed to wrong-foot the editors of the recent reference book *Who Else Writes Like?*, which recommended legendary fantasist Ray Bradbury to fans of "Iain M" and Martin Amis to those who enjoyed his namesake "Iain".

A staunch socialist - once describing Margaret Thatcher to me as the person he most despised and a Tory party conference as his idea of Hell - and aggressive advocate of free speech, Banks' political views came to the fore in his 1989 short story "Piece". A rare excursion into fiction for *THE OBSERVER*, this passionate venting of fury at the

continuing fatwah against Salman Rushdie takes the form of a letter recovered from the Pan-Am wreckage at Lockerbie. Banks' deep contempt for religious intolerance - voiced here through his narrator and frequently in person - is perhaps matched only by his contempt for those politicians and newspaper pundits who keep silent.

Similarly, later non-sf works such as *COMPLICITY* - summed up by its author with tongue deeply in cheek as "a bit like *THE WASP FACTORY*, except without the happy ending and redeeming air of cheerfulness" - accentuate the social realism. This is the true scope of Banks' talent, one moment unfolding concepts on a scale so cosmic as to make many of his contemporaries flinch, the next refocussing "down to Earth" and exploring the microcosm within his protagonists' psyches.

Of the "mainstream" novels - although Banks himself approves of Bruce Sterling's term "slipstream", for ostensibly non-sf fiction which particularly appeals to sf fans - the most famous at present is undoubtedly *THE CROW ROAD*. From its familiar opening tease ("It was the day my grandmother exploded") to the shattering solution of a decade-old family mystery, it's proof positive of Banks' growth both in technique and confidence.

It also translated with immense success to television, winning Union Pictures and director Gavin Millar the "best drama" and "best programme" categories at March's Indie Awards ceremony for independent television producers. One rumour about the serial Banks is happy to dispel is that he

appeared, Hitchcock-like, in a cameo role; after a visit to an Edinburgh Fringe production ended with an anxious cast member interrogating him about a book written four years before and which he no longer recalled in quite sufficient detail, he wisely decided to beat a swift retreat and leave them to it.

Ironically, it's his debut novel which may reach the screen last. Optioned four years after its publication by Strongbow, the Irish team responsible for *EAT THE PEACH*, *THE WASP FACTORY* has proven as difficult to transfer to celluloid as once did William Burroughs' *THE NAKED LUNCH* and Joseph Conrad's *HEART OF DARKNESS*.

Reports that the project finally moved into pre-production in December 1995 - two days before the latest option expired - infuriated Banks when he learned that *Banshee*, the US film which swallowed Strongbow a year earlier, now planned to Americanise the setting and characters. Banks considers the idea "ludicrous": "The one thing I always wanted to avoid was *The Wasp Factory* going to an American company in Hollywood, and being made into an American film - and that is exactly what it appears has happened." Only an increasing suspicion that *Banshee* has failed to secure the necessary financing to get their project off the ground offers some consolation.

For now, Banks has a new science fiction novel due out in hardback on 7 August, *A SONG OF STONE*, another non-sf novel to follow and a forthcoming profile on the prestigious arts magazine *THE SOUTH BANK SHOW*. With his

literary star increasingly in the ascendant, visitors to this year's Birmingham Readers and Writers Festival have a rare opportunity to meet one of Scotland's most exciting authors. Better yet, one with an on-stage personality at least as interesting as his books.

Bibliography

The Wasp Factory (UK, 1984); *Walking on Glass* (UK, 1985); *The Bridge* (UK, 1986); *Consider Phlebas** (UK, 1987); *Espedair Street* (UK, 1987); *Cleaning Up* (limited edition BSFG chapbook, 1987)*; *Player of Games** (UK, 1988); *Canal Dreams* (UK, 1989); *The State of the Art** (US novella, 1989); *Use of Weapons** (UK, 1990); *The State of the Art** (UK collection, 1991); *Complicity* (UK, 1993); *Against a Dark Background** (UK, 1993); *Feersum Endjinn** (UK, 1994); *Whit* (UK, 1995); *Excession** (UK, 1996); *A Song of Stone** (UK, August 1997).

*As Iain M Banks. Others as Iain Banks.

[A version of the above originally appeared in The Word, published by The Birmingham Post to co-incide with the 1997 Birmingham Readers' & Writers' Festival. Special acknowledgements to Mike Simpson and Mary Branscombe at SFX, and thanks to Michelle Hodgson at Little, Brown.]

[IAIN BANKS will talk about EXCESSION, his latest novel, in the Library Theatre, Birmingham Central Library, 7.30-9.30pm on 14 May. Tickets £3.00 (£2.00). For further details call 0121-236-5622. [NB: Rog Peyton of Andromeda Book Shop has a few complimentary tickets available - call him on 0121-643-1999.]

Jophan Report #103
by Martin Tudor

The big news this month, for me at least, was the birth of my daughter Heloise at 3am on 25 April weighing 5lb 9oz.

My wife, Helena, and Heloise, returned home on the 26 April and for a week or so both were doing well. But then Heloise was taken ill and on Tuesday 6th May (when she was just 11 days old) she was admitted to York Ward on the East Wing of Manor Hospital suffering from dehydration and hypothermia. When weighed it was discovered that she had lost 30% of her birth weight through loss of fluid. She was put into an incubator and onto a drip and given a course of antibiotics, while they started force-feeding her through a tube. Within about 18 hours the drip had succeeded in re-hydrating Heloise (getting her back up to her three day old weight of 5lb 2oz) but she was still weak and traumatised, so Heloise, Helena and I stayed in hospital for the rest of the week. (The Registrar who admitted her informed us that if re-hydration had been delayed a few more hours she would have died.)

Although the urine tests were inconclusive (as they had been affected by the antibiotics) most of the staff felt that Heloise had suffered some kind of urine infection - it being one of the few things that can cause such swift and massive dehydration.

On Saturday 10 May Heloise was released home - only to be re-admitted to hospital after her check-up on Monday 12 May. Despite a week of being force fed almost twice as much formula milk as she should have needed for her weight and a weekend of breast feeding supplemented by as much formula as she would take, Heloise had started losing weight again - and was dehydrating without additional water.

And that's why the newsletter failed to appear on time.

Currently (Tuesday 13th May) Heloise is still in hospital and will be there for the rest of this week. Helena and I are still keeping her company there. Given that the infection has

cleared up, all of her blood tests have proven normal, and there doesn't appear to be a problem with digestion, or respiration, the consultant now seems to feel that the problem with her weight loss and lack of colour could be renal related. We await the results of yet more tests. Despite the fact that her little hands and feet look like badly bruised pin cushions, Heloise is still sweet-tempered and beautiful and is as comfortable as we can make her.

Forthcoming Events

UNTIL 2 JUNE 1997: STAR TREK EXHIBITION at the Gas Hall, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham. Open 10am-5pm daily. Admission £3.95 adults, £3.00 children and concessions. Call: 0121-235-1966 or 0121-236-5622 for information and bookings.

9 MAY 1997: INFORMAL MEETING OF THE BRUM GROUP, from 7.45pm at the Tap & Spile, Gas Street, Birmingham.

10 MAY 1997: READERS & WRITERS FESTIVAL BOOKFAIR, 10am-4pm at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston Road, Birmingham admittance free. For further details call 0121-235-4244.

10 MAY 1997: TERENCE BLACKER will talk about his fantasy novel, *REVENANCE*, at Dillons bookstore, New Street, Birmingham. For further details call 0121-631-4333.

13 MAY 1997: NOW WHAT? Jim Crace offers advice on getting published. 5.30pm-6.30pm at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston Road. Tickets £2.00 (£1.00). For further details call 0121-235-4244.

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13 MAY 1997: USING THE NEW TECHNOLOGY - a hands-on guide to how the internet is being used by writers and publishers. 7pm-9pm at the Angle Gallery, James Street, Birmingham. Tickets £7.50 (£4.00). For further details call 0121-233-9260.

14 MAY 1997: IAIN BANKS will talk about **EXCESSION**, his latest novel in the **Library Theatre, Birmingham Central Library, 7.30-9.30pm**. Tickets **£3.00 (£2.00)**. For further details call 0121-236-5622. *[NB: Rog Peyton of Andromeda Book Shop has a few complimentary tickets available - call him on 0121-643-1999.]*

15 MAY 1997: ON-LINE WRITING: NEW APPROACHES TO PUBLISHING - a hands-on workshop examining the opportunities presented by the internet for writers. 7pm-9pm at the Angle Gallery, James Street, Birmingham. Tickets £7.50 (£4.00). For further details call 0121-233-9260.

15 MAY 1997: GREAT APES: WILL SELF & MATTHEW DE ABAITUA "Forget cockroaches, what happens when you wake up one day and you're a chump? Or everyone else is a chimp and you're not? Will Self has put his newest hero Simon Dykes into just such a nightmarish predicament of lost identity. The horror of seeing his loved ones turned into gibbons is too much for Simon. Will Self explains all this monkey business to THE GUARDIAN's Matthew de Abaitua and asks how hairy are your palms?" Tickets £5.50 (£4.00). For further details call 0121-233-9260.

16 MAY 1997: SHAUN HUTSON horror writing's hitman, the author of over 15 bestselling novels, talks about his latest work **KNIFE EDGE** at South Yardley Library, 2.30pm-4.30pm, free. For further details call 0121-706-1944.

16 MAY 1997: ALAN GARNER & THE COMPANY OF STORYTELLERS. "The Voice in the Shadow: the Necessity of Myth" is Garner's introduction to an evening of storytelling. The Company of Storytellers are Ben Haggarty, Hugh Lupton and Pomme Clayton. From 7pm-10.30pm (includes two intervals) at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston Road, Birmingham. Tickets £7.00 (£5.00). For further details call 0121-235-4244.

16 MAY 1997: SHAUN HUTSON horror writing's hitman, the author of over 15 bestselling novels, talks about his latest work **KNIFE EDGE** from 9pm-10.30pm at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston Road, Birmingham. Tickets £3.00 (£2.00). For further details call 0121-235-4244.

27 MAY 1997: VERY ELEMENTARY PARTICLES a lecture by Dr Goronwy Tudor Jones, Reader in High Energy Physics, University of Birmingham. Tuesday at 1pm at the Birmingham & Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham. Open to the public, £1 admission. Call 0121-236-3591 for further details.

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1997:
LONESTARCON 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas, USA.

Contact: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX
78755-2277, USA.

*a report or review and send it to the
editorial address.*

14-16 NOVEMBER 1997: NOVACON 27, the annual sf convention of the Brum Group, will be held at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Guest of Honour Peter F Hamilton. Attending membership £30.00 until 30 September when the price will rise. Supporting £10.50. Progress Report #2 and hotel booking forms now available. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, W. 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 (e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

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

STAR TREK EXHIBITION a Report by Steve Jones

I went to the STAR TREK Exhibition shortly after it opened with the Official Birmingham University Science Fiction Society Outing. In fact, there were three of us (the BSFG is not the only group suffering from near-terminal apathy). First surprise was that the "concessions" rate does not apply to students - a clue that this event is purely commercial rather than fan-run.

Once inside William Shatner himself directed us to the exhibition. (Francis and Helen insisted that he was just a life-size cardboard cut-out of Captain Kirk, but how could anyone be sure?) There were lots of spaceship models, props and uniforms, all secured firmly in glass cabinets. All the films and tv series were covered, except most of the "Original Series" stuff were replicas (no one thought to keep it back then!) and VOYAGER was little represented (they are still using all the gear).

There are sets of the Enterprise Bridge and Transporter Room, but visitors are only allowed on them for photographs, so be sure to take a camera. Right at the end is a shop with the most incredible STAR TREK tat, including playing cards with the four suits of Federation, Klingon, Romulan and Cardassian. This paled beside the Borg dolls which say "Resistance is futile" and "You will be assimilated".

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Outside again I noticed some flyers for Trek cons and societies, so I left some BSFG flyers to keep them company. There was nothing about fandom in the event itself. Overall the exhibition was interesting but not wildly exciting. I would have liked to see more walk-through sets and interactive displays. Recommended only for already certified STAR TREK addicts.

[The STAR TREK EXHIBITION is at the Gas Hall, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham until 2 June 1997. Open 10am-5pm daily. Admission £3.95 adults, £3.00 children and concessions. Call: 0121-235-1966 or 0121-236-5622 for information and bookings.]

Book Reviews

THE FIELD GUIDE TO EXTRATERRESTRIALS

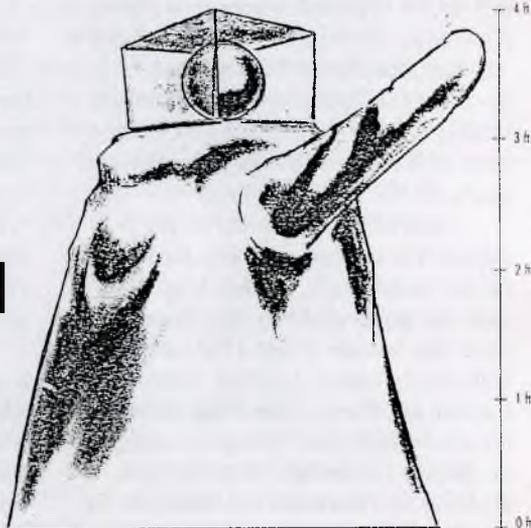
by Patrick Huyghe,
New English Library, 136pp, pb, £5.99.
Star Rating: *.
Reviewed by Chris Murphy.

It may claim to be non-fiction, but the contents of this "guide" are all too clearly products of the human imagination. Sadly, the owners of the imaginations concerned would seem to be LOST IN SPACE fans.

It describes and illustrates about 50 types of supposed alien, derived from reports of UFO landings. All the witnesses' accounts are accepted at face value, even those which come from young children. The ETs themselves are a fairly mixed bunch, ranging from the familiar Greys to robots and "exotics." Some closely resemble the elves and fairies of

folklore. Others, though weirder, are just as ridiculous. You don't have to be Jack Cohen to see that none of them look at all plausible.

This book can be recommended only because it is very amusing, and presumably even that is unintentional. The truth may be out there, but it is certainly not in here.



CLASS: Robotic
TYPE: Fleishy
VARIANT: 2
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC:
square head

DESCRIPTIVE INCIDENT
DATE: December 16, 1957
LOCATION: Old Saybrook, Connecticut
WITNESS: Mary Starr

THE FEY: SACRIFICE

by Kristine Kathryn Rusch,
Orion, £6.99, 550pp, p/b.
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the first volume in an "epic fantasy sequence". Rusch is an award winning author and her writing is accomplished.

The Fey of the title are a race of magical people. All Fey, except for a few very unfortunate creatures, have some kind of magical ability. There are shape-shifters, manipulators of organic materials, visionaries who see the future, spell makers and many others. They are also very bloodthirsty and have a desire to conquer the world. The next step is Blue Isle. Rugar leads his forces to the island, and for the first time in his career, things go wrong. The holy water prepared by the Rocaans, the island's religious sect, dissolves the flesh of any Fey it touches. Unable to leave the island and with no hope of reinforcements Rugar's army is gradually being whittled away.

It is not clear who the reader is expected to sympathise with - the Fey are far too bloodthirsty, yet they have the more intriguing problems to solve and once they become trapped they are the underdogs. Rugar's daughter Jewel is put forward as heroine. The islanders are on the whole ineffectual. Their advantages are largely accidental. The king's son, Nicholas, is a romantic and candidate for hero but the cast of this novel is huge so none of the characters is developed to their full potential. The book tries to encompass too much. It explores in detail, using different characters, the different abilities of the Fey. It sets up a lot of plot threads which are not resolved because they are obviously going to be used in later volumes and some of these ploys are transparent to the regular fantasy reader. This book could have done with some drastic cutting, reserving much of the material for later volumes. Unfortunately, it is becoming a trend for fantasy writers to throw everything at the reader resulting

in thick, unwieldy books driven by convoluted plots with no space for developing character. In the real world, no-one can know really well more than a handful of people. Books are the same.

MID-FLINX by Alan Dean Foster
Orbit, 346pp, p/b, £5.99

Star Rating: ***

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This is part of an ongoing series involving Philip Lynx, known as "Flinx". Unlike Mike Jones, who reviewed the hardcover recently, I don't think I've read any of the others, although the human/thranx or "humanx" alliance does seem familiar to me, so perhaps I have.... Whatever, it doesn't make any real difference if you are a newcomer to the Flinx universe, as this novel stands up quite well on its own.

Visiting the planet Samstead, Flinx is approached by a wealthy industrialist who refuses to take "no" for an answer when he insists on buying - at gunpoint if necessary - Flinx's minidrags to add to his collection of exotic pets. To the extent that even when Flinx flees the planet to a world found at random by his computer, he is followed there. The main part of the book takes place on this world of fantastic, gigantic, semi-sentient jungles, which appears to have been the subject of a failed human expedition centuries ago. There's nothing really original here - we've all met man-eating plants before, but some of these are quite fun. Two other, different types of alien also encroach on this dangerous paradise, each time extricating Flinx and his local companions from a sticky situation, but bringing other problems.

I found it quite a good adventure, with some interesting human and alien characters. I'd never really noticed this author's predilection for flowery prose though (no pun intended?): for instance, what about: "*Flink marvelled through the port at the virescent surface. Colossal emergents with overarching crowns a hundred meters across dominated the chlorotic topography...*" He doesn't believe in using words of one syllable, when he can find words with four, does he?

There are hints, and then more-than-hints, of some evil, dark entity far across the universe which Flink (alone) can detect and will be called upon to defeat at some future time. I may just be hooked enough to read future episodes and find out what transpires.

DIE, BUG, DIE! by Les Martin,
Voyager, 102pp, pb, £3.99.
Star Rating *.

Reviewed by Chris Murphy.

This novel is based on THE X FILES episode "War of the Coprophages." At its best, the series can be chilling, funny or just plain watchable. Judging by DIE, BUG, DIE! the episode in question is not one of the best.

It doesn't help that the storyline uses X FILES standard plot number 1. Something strange happens, Mulder thinks it's the work of aliens, Scully doesn't believe him, more strange things happen, they probably are the work of aliens but Mulder can't prove it and Scully still doesn't believe him. The strange events here are caused by a plague of cockroaches, which is described so

blandly that it seems irritating rather than disgusting or scary.

The narrative is a straightforward adaptation of a script, the worst kind of "novelisation." Nothing is explained in any depth or detail. The author tells us what the characters do, but scarcely explores their thoughts and feelings. There's no real suspense, humour falls flat and the clichéd and unconvincing aspects of the story are painfully obvious.

None of these defects are likely to affect the book's sales. It's a product, a piece of merchandising aimed at immature or obsessive fans. They will buy it because of the large embossed X on the cover, although they've already seen the episode. Everyone else should avoid it.

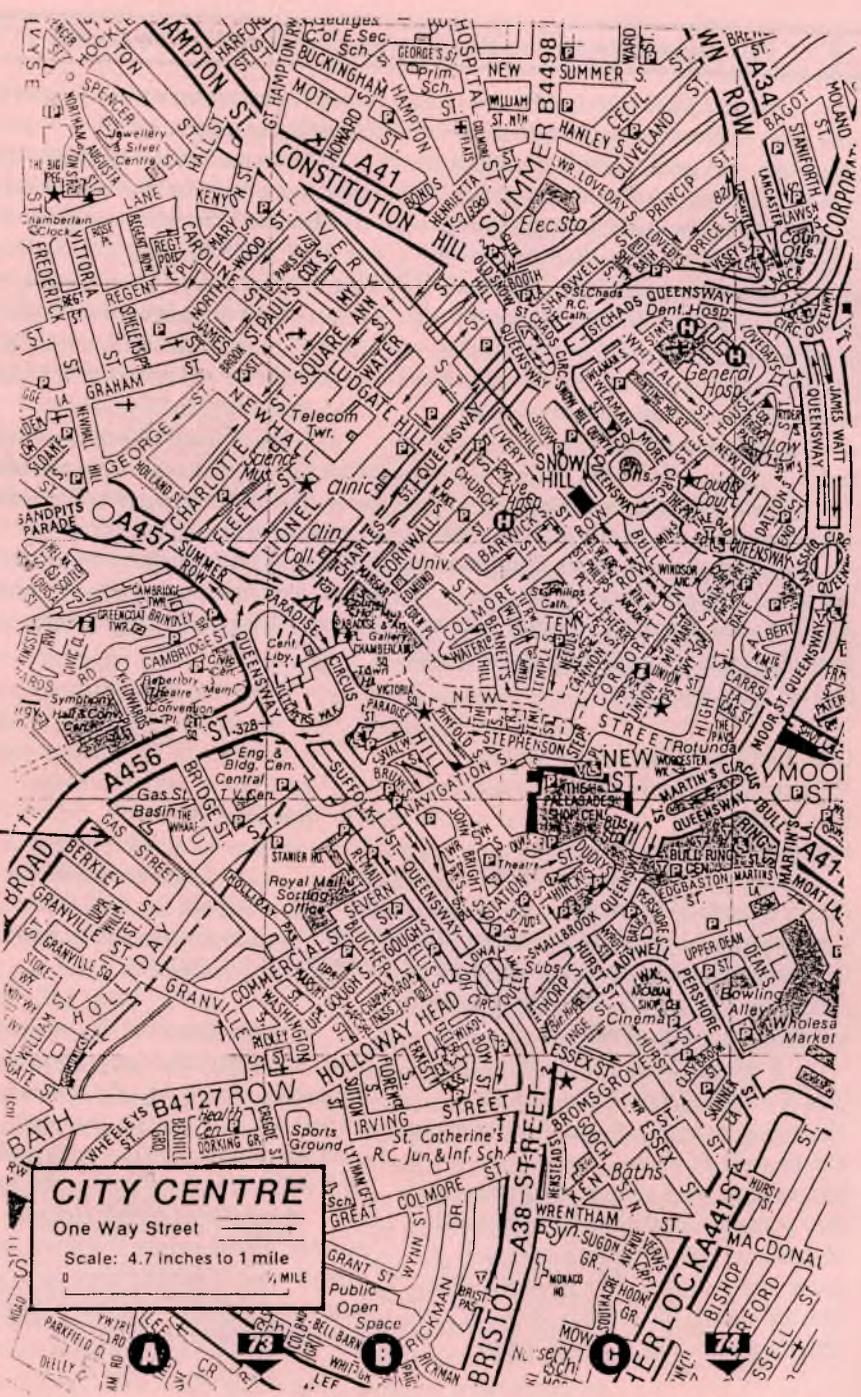
* * * * *

The "Star Ratings" are:

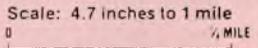
- * = *Crap, beyond belief.*
- ** = *Crap, but readable.*
- *** = *Not too bad, really.*
- **** = *Pretty good actually.*
- ***** = *BUY IT!*

Please remember that reviews of books should reach Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (or e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk), 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 mailed to Martin Tudor by this month's meeting.



TAP
+
SPILE

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


A

73

B

C

74