

**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 - Tony Morton, Secretary - Anne Woodford, Treasurer - Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer - Rog Peyton,  
Newsletter Editor and Novacon 28 Chairman - Martin Tudor, Novacon 29 Chairman - Carol Morton.

# **Stephen Baxter**

**will address the BSFG on**  
**Friday 13th February 1998, \***  
**7.15pm for 7.30pm, in the**  
**Board Room of Bennetts,**  
**Bennetts Hill, Birmingham.**

**The Board Room is on the ground floor - on your left as you enter the bar from Bennetts Hill, the room past the Library.**

**Food will be served until 7.30pm.**

**Admittance: Members £3.00 (£2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £4.00 (£3.00 Unwaged). (Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.)**

**(\*VB: the second Friday of the month.)**

## **COMING SOON:**

**Tom Holt on 3rd April; Robert Holdstock on 8th May.**

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Board Room of Bennetts on Bennetts Hill (off New Street), Birmingham city centre on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15.00 per person, or £20.00 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@bentonsdemon.co.uk](mailto:bsfg@bentonsdemon.co.uk)). Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, Newsletter Editor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail to [martin@emptiesdemon.co.uk](mailto:martin@emptiesdemon.co.uk)).

**This Month's Guest:  
Stephen Baxter**

Born in 1957 Stephen Baxter was raised in Liverpool, has a degree in mathematics from Cambridge and a Ph.D from Southampton and began publishing sf with "The Xeelee Flower" for Interzone in 1987. This, with most of his other short work, fits into his Xeelee Sequence. Novels included in the sequence are Raft (1991), Timelike Infinity (1992), Flux (1993) and Ring (1994) and the collection of linked stories, Vacuum Diagrams (1996).

Other works include: Anti-Ice (1993), Chiron (1993 chap); The Time Ships (1995); Voyage (1996); Titan (1997) and his forthcoming collection, Traces (1998), of short stories to be published by HarperCollins Voyager imprint on 20th April, priced £16.99 in hardback.



*(Thanks to Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopaedia of SF, based on the Nicholls Clute book, for the above information and the photograph, which is copyright 1995 Sandra Shepherd.)*

**Colophon**

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*Many thanks to: ALAN & ANNE WOODFORD for producing the address labels; STEVE GREEN for his column; PAULINE MORGAN, YVONNE ROWSE and WILLIAM MCCABE for their book reviews; thanks also to WHAT'S ON, the BBC and the EXPRESS & STAR for the news in the Jophan Report and Events Listing.*

**Lost & Found**

Dave Holmes handed in a copy of Gibbon's Decline and Fall by Sherri S Tepper and a bar of chocolate that he found in the Board Room after the last meeting. If the owner of these can give

further details about the bar of chocolate to Martin Tudor they can collect them at the February meeting. Failing this the items will be returned to Dave Holmes.

## **The Roscoe Report #2 by Steve Green**

Typical. Year after year, science fiction fandom - of which the Brum Group remains one of the more hardened arteries - yeams for one of its luminaries to achieve significant press exposure. And then when we do, it's another bloody expose on L Ron Hubbard or a leftfield attempt to embarrass Charlie Windsor\* via the planned investiture of Sri Lankan tourist attraction Arthur C Clarke, who'll probably be dead by the time he's able to bury the various paedophilia allegations (fairly likely, given that (a) his homo-... sexuality was already an open secret in sf circles, (b) no one cares that he's gay in any case, even in a country where such a lifestyle is officially illegal, and (c) the UK Secret Services checked out any potentially unsavoury lifestyle facets at least six months ago) and reschedule the shoulder-patting on home ground. I trust they all feel proud of themselves.

(\*Not an unworthy aim in itself, but let's get some context in here, okay?)

Whilst ACC considers his avenues for legal redress, news arrives that the long-running bankruptcy battle over rights to Terminator 3 has finally been settled - but with daggers still drawn. Producer Gale Anne Hurd (ex-wife of director

James Cameron, who joined Twentieth Century-Fox in walking away from sequel and prequel rights following the collapse of Carolco Pictures) now finds her Pacific Western Productions in bed with former Carolco co-chair Andy Vajna, who scored 50% of any future movie with an \$8million bid. Oh, to be a fly on that bedroom wall.

Thankfully, no such ill feelings surround the crew on *The Hangman's Daughter*, sequel to the highly successful vampire bloodfest *From Dusk Till Dawn*. Co-produced by director Robert Rodriguez and star/screenwriter Quentin Tarantino, this prequel focuses upon the shapeshifting erotic dancer originally portrayed by Salma Hayek, who sadly looks unlikely to complete the reunion. No word, either, on whether George Clooney will return for the proposed sequel, *Texas Blood Money*, though the piss-poor box office receipts on *Batman & Robin* could tempt him back into the surviving Gecko brother's shoes (in which case Tarantino may also reappear, replete with fangs). It certainly wouldn't conflict with *Batman's* cameo in the long-pending *Superman Lives* (aka *The Death of Superman*), since director Tim Burton has made it clear he wants Michael Keaton to slip back into cowl and cape for that outing.

Those with more money than taste might care to check out the new range of *Babylon 5* dolls, now available "under \$20 each" from US branches of Toys 'R' Us (surely long overdue for a change to *Cretins 'R' You*). G'Kar, unsurprisingly, is the least inaccurate, though he seems to have shrunk by a good twelve inches, whilst his curious gait and baggy trousers hint at faulty incontinence underwear. Sheridan, meantime, looks like the

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anorexic, repressed younger brother of Barbie's beau Ken, a condition which is possibly understandable given that Delenn has been transformed into a stunted pixie who is trying to disguise her bad hair day by hiding in a purple duvet. Still, we are promised "lifelike features", "exceptional.. sculpting detail" and "removable clothing", which should be a godsend for any entrepreneurial animator eager to corner the market in B5 porn.

### **Forthcoming Events**

11-15 February 1998: **BBC TOMORROW'S WORLD LIVE**, Halls 6-8, National Exhibition Centre. Call 0181-948-1666.

13 February 1998: **STEPHEN BAXTER** will be addressing the Group, from 7.15pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

13 March 1998: **BSFG** meeting from 7.15pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

13-16 March 1998: **CORFLU UK** US-style, fannish, relaxacon, in the Griffin Hotel, Boar Lane, Leeds. £25.00 attending to Corflu, c/o Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk. Hamilton, ML3 7HY.

21-22 March 1998: **MEMORABILIA** Europe's largest sf. film, cult tv, pop and comic collector's fair at the NEC. Call Made in Heaven on 01899-221622.

24 March - 18 April 1998: **Richard O'Brien's THE NEW ROCKY HORROR SHOW**, the 25th anniversary production, at the Birmingham Rep. Tickets £12.00 and £17.00 call the box office on 0121 236 4455.

27-28 March 1998: **Forkbeard Fantasy/The Barbers of Surreal** "an evening of insanity set in a beauty parlour where the ex-lab rabbit has formed a liaison with the antique mirror and the egg shampoo is behaving strangely, possibly as a direct result." At the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, tickets £7.50 (£5.25), call 0121 440 3838 for further details.

3 April 1998: **TOM HOLT** will be addressing the Group on a date to be confirmed, from 7.15pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

10-13 April 1998: **INTUITION**, the 49th British National Convention, Jarvis Piccadilly and Britannia hotels, Manchester. GoHs: Ian McDonald, Martin Tudor, Connie Willis. Attending £30.00, supporting £15.00, to: Intuition, 1 Waverley Way, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, SM5 3LQ.

8 May: **ROBERT HOLDSTOCK** will be addressing the Group, from 7.15pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

21-24 August 1998: **THE WRAP PARTY** to celebrate the conclusion of **BABYLON 5**, the Radisson Edwardian

Hotel, Heathrow, London. Confirmed guests include: J Michael Straczynski, Harlan Ellison, Dr Jack Cohen, John Ridgeway, Bryan Talbot, Adam "Mojo" Lebowitz, John Matthews. Attending £65.00 (instalment scheme available), to The Wrap Party, PO Box 505, Reading, RG1 7QZ.

**11-13 SEPTEMBER 1998: FANTASY-CON 22**, the convention of the British Fantasy Society. At the Albany Hotel, Birmingham, Guest of Honour Freda Warrington, with more guests to be announced. Contact: c/o BFS, 2 Harwood Street, Stockport, SK4 1JJ. (This is a temporary contact address pending the organiser's house move.)

**13-15 November 1998: Novacon 28**, Guest of Honour Paul J McAuley. Attending membership costs **£28.00**, rising after Easter 1998. Venue to be announced shortly. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

**2-5 April 1999: RECONVENE, 50th National British Convention**, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. GoHs: Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon. Attending £25.00 to Reconvene, 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

**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. Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick

Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

## **The Jophan Report #112 by Martin Tudor**

The HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY may finally reach the big screen. Douglas Adams has made a deal with the Disney subsidiary Hollywood Pictures and the film is due for release in 2000. Ed Victor, Adam's agent reported in a recent RADIO TIMES that it was the end of a long struggle. "For nearly 20 years, I went around saying, 'There's this great science-fiction comedy where earthlings and aliens mingle,' and they'd say yes, maybe, no. But after MEN IN BLACK they were all asking, 'How can I get a sci-fi comedy where earthlings and aliens mingle?' And there it is."

Where were you in June 1973? If you were at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs you need read no further, for you'll already know that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the birth of the legendary ROCKY HORROR SHOW

As part of the "70s Festival" the Birmingham Rep are staging THE NEW ROCKY HORROR SHOW from 24 March to 18 April, along with various tie-in items. Call in on [www.timewarp.org.uk](http://www.timewarp.org.uk) or telephone 0121 236 4455 for further details.

In 1996 Chuch Harris donated the cream of his fanzine collection to US fan Gary Farber (who was returning to New York after attending Novacon 26) to

auction for TAFF. As Farber has failed to do this Vicki Rosenzweig, one of the losing candidates in the recent TAFF race, has volunteered to do auction them instead.

A list of fanzines and bidding instructions follow - descriptions are by Gary Farber and Chuch Harris. (NB: The following contains sections from Vicki's December and January statements.)

"Bids should be sent to me by paper mail or email (or in person if convenient), not as Usenet posts (my newsfeed is spotty). I'll announce current high bids at the end of January and February, then March 15 and 31, and April 15, possibly with additional announcements as the deadline gets close, depending on how much activity there is.

Announcements will be made on rec.arts.sf.fandom, by email to bidders or others who give me an email address and ask to be notified, and via the postal service to people who supply me with self-addressed stamped envelopes. (If you're outside the US, send the self-addressed envelopes and some international reply coupons, or a dollar or two if you have US currency lying around.) The auctioneer may bid; she will *not* declare herself the winner in any bidding without

notifying other people who have bid for that item and giving them the chance to outbid her. (It's possible that they'll then get email saying "OK, you bid 80, I bid 85. what do you say?")

The minimum bids stated below are in US dollars. Bids will also be accepted in pounds: I'll compare the two at current published exchange rates. (Bidders resident in neither the US nor the UK may

bid in either currency, but will need to arrange to send their payments in that currency.)

Nobody will be sending me money; the winning bidders will be notified and asked to send their payments to the appropriate TAFF administrator. When the administrator tells me they got the money, I'll arrange to send the fanzine to the winning bidder (at the bidder's expense, by any reasonable shipping method).

This is the information update for the mail/email auction of Chuch Harris's fanzines, to benefit TAFF. For more information, see <http://www.users.interport.net/~vr/auction-long.html>, or email me for details. (This is long enough already.)

Basics: the auction will last approximately four months; the deadline for bids will be 15 April 1998. Bids should be sent to me by paper mail or email (or in person if convenient), not as Usenet posts (my newsfeed is spotty). The next update will be no later than March 1.

The minimum bids are in US dollars. Bids will also be accepted in pounds; I'll compare the two at current published exchange rates.

Please note that the minimum bids on some items have been lowered since the initial announcement, on the advice of several people whose opinions I trust. Anything that doesn't sell at these values will be auctioned off at a convention (probably either Worldcon or the 1999 Corflu), where you can expect to pay more than the minimums stated here.

A description of the items follows, with minimum bids and current highest bids. Unless otherwise stated, material is mimeographed.

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1. Q #23 November, 1989 By Chuch Harris. Trip report of Chuch's trip to America, including the Minneapolis CORFLU. and Seattle Minimum Bid: \$7

2. Proof copy of BEYOND THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR by Walter A Willis and James White. 1990. Produced by Geri Sullivan. Minimum Bid: \$15.

3. THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR by Walt Willis and Bob Shaw. First Edition February, 1954. Copy #1, of 200 copies; numbered, limited edition. Minimum Bid: \$150. Current high bid: \$250.

4. THIS GOON FOR HIRE by John Berry. Illustrated by Arthur Thomson, duplicated and published by Chuch Harris. Tale of Goon Berry, of the Goon Defective Agency. Minimum Bid \$20. Current high bid: \$50

5. VARGO STATTON SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, Vol. I, No 3. Professional magazine, pulp. 1953-4? Contains Chuch Harris's only professional sf/fantasy story: "Omega." Also contains other sf/fantasy, and material on fanzines. Minimum Bid: \$30.

6. PAMPHREY #7. Walter Willis FAPazine October, 1958. Final issue. Single sheet, two sides. Farewell to FAPA. Minimum Bid: \$10.

7. PAMPHREY #3. Walter Willis FAPazine. October, 1956. 16 pages, single staple. Madeline Willis, Walter Willis, Terry Carr. Minimum Bid: \$15.

8. GOONCONTACT "13" "April 1st", early 196?. Hoax newszine, published "once in a lifetime by the GOONCONTACT group: Vincent Clarke, Joy Clarke, 'Sandy' Sanderson, Chuck Harris." Minimum Bid: \$10.

9. Apazines and little one-shots: "I Wish I Knew What 'Nuces Tibi' Meant." FAPA/OMPA zine on TAFF feuds, arguing with Bob Madle "Off The Cuff for Gertrude." 3 pages, open letter to GM Carr on same TAFF feud. "A True Bill" by Eric Bentcliffe and John Berry, with contributions by Walter Willis, Chuch Harris, Sadie Shaw, Diane Berry, George Charters, Bob Shaw. 4 pages, second sheet torn in half; first page partially torn. Minimum Bid: \$10

10. 3 issues of "Peace on Sol III -- Goodwill To Mellow Fen" 1962, 1964,

1965 Christmas fanzine/cards from Walt Madeleine Willis. Palm-sized 8-pagers with dialogues and ATOM illos. Minimum Bid \$15

11. Complete run of HYPHEN #1-37. Some loose pages, good to fair condition. Rusting staples. These will be sold as single issues. Minimum Bid: \$20 per issue

12. Fen Critturs Comical Books. Summer, 1952. 16 page half-sized mimeod comic book. Written and Drawn by Bob Shaw, assisted by Vincent Clarke. Original Story by Bob Shaw and James White. Faanish parody of Pogo comics, using Pogo characters. Minimum Bid: \$20.

13. The Bob Shaw Appreciation Magazine, "Vol. 1, No 1." July, 1952. 8 pages, magazine done for BoSh when he moved from Ireland to England. Cover by BoSh. Articles by BoSh, Vincent Clarke, James White, Walter Willis. Minimum Bid: \$20

14. THE HARP STATESIDE. 72 pages. Walter Willis's trip report of his 1952 Willis Fund trip to America and the Chicon II. Published in February, 1957. Illustrated by Arthur Thomson. Dense, hilarious, thoughtful, and wonderful. Minimum Bid: \$35.

15. LONCONFIDENTIAL. Chuch Harris's trip report on the 1957 London Worldcon. 15 pages. Illustrated by ATOM (Arthur Thomson). Minimum Bid: \$20

16. WILLIS DISCOVERS AMERICA. 1952. 24 pages. May, 1955. Collected version of fictionalized version of a trip report. Walter Willis originally wrote in summer of 1952 for Lee Hoffman's QUANDRY and Shelby Vick's CONFUSION while fund raising for the 1952 Willis trip was ongoing. Minimum Bid: \$25

17. More apazines: MEANDER, by Chuch Harris, illustrated by ATOM, for OMPA #2. 8 pages, half-sized, 195?. SURD No. 2, by Chuch Harris, for FAPA, 6 pages of mailing comments. Undated: somewhere between 1952-62. CHUX OWN OMPA zine. Last page is loose. Minimum Bid: \$15

18. MOONVENTION Program. 6 pages of alleged program for hoax moon convention ("also known as the Looniecon"). Done for the London Convention, 1953, and FAPA by Chuch Harris and Ken Slater. Minimum Bid: \$10

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19 THE STORY SO FAR A Brief History of British Fandom -- 1931-1987 by Rob Hansen Offset booklet produced for Worldcon 1987. CONSPIRACY. Offset, perfect condition. 50 pages of very small type Minimum Bid \$7

20 BEYOND THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR by Walt Willis and James White, illustrated by Stu Shiffman Copy number 1 of 200 copy limited edition, autographed by Willis and White and Shiffman to Chuch. Mimeoed, offset covers "Collector's First Edition." 1991. Minimum Bid \$15 Current high bid \$15.

21 "Wild Heir" Classic faanish piece by Walter Willis satirizing the style of Charles Burbee. Very bad condition, torn in half, flaking, with photocopy Minimum Bid: \$5

A complete run of SLANT Detailed descriptions follow Minimum bid per issue \$30 All SLANTs, save for #7, which is hybrid, were produced by letterpress with handset type They are NOT mimeographed. These are incredibly rare and valuable. Chuch Harris's personal set is, of course, unique.

22 Slant No 1 Nov 1948. This is a replica copy produced to make up the set. The illos, by James White, are produced from blocks of plywood cut with a razor blade. It featured "Contact with Earth"... fiction by Walter Himself. He wrote the rest of the contents too. It is witty and erudite and one hell of a project when you realise every single letter was hand set and the result printed on a junk store printing press

23 Slant 2 Summer 49. Original edition. Cover and illos are James White linocuts again. It features "The Still Small Voice" by Clive Jackson, "Outcast" by Walt and "All Dogs are Equal" by Cedric Walker and the usual brilliant "departments"

24 Slant 3 Spring 1950. Cover and interior illos by James White, linocuts. Contents all typeset "Strictly Logical" by Cedric Walker. "Atomic Error" Forrest J Ackerman. "The Swordsmen of Varnis" Geoffrey Cobbe "Revenge" by E E Evans (!!!) and "Last Wish" by H K Bulmer and the usual departments (that was always the best thing in every issue)

25 Slant 4 Autumn 1950 Superb multicoloured linocut cover by James White

Fiction Manly Banister, Ted Tubb, Geoffrey Cobbe, Cedric Walker, Ken Bulmer, Clive Jackson and all the usual departments

26. Slant 5 Spring 1951 Another fine linocut colourcover by James White Fiction by Peter Philips DR Smith Peter Ridley HT McAdams Willis/Bulmer, F G Rayer Clive Jackson. Ermengarde Fiske -- who is bloody marvellous in a New Yorkery sort of way contributes a column in this issue.

27. Slant 6 Winter 51/2 Another full colour linocut cover by Jas with interiors by B.Nanister Shaw and White. Fiction by Brunner, Banister, A Bertram Chandler, Evelyn Smythe (that's Ermengarde!) Clive Jackson ER James BoSh and Ken Bulmer and all the usual departments (4E, EFR A fanmanship lecture from Bosh etc.

28 Slant 7. Winter 52/3. The printing press has finally collapsed This issue is mainly duplicated from stencils. Contributors Chandler Bloch Banister Majorie Houston, Wrai Ballard Arthur C Clarke William Temple Bosh CHUCK HARRIS Walt Vincent Clarke Ermengarde Fiske and Bill Venable This was the best issue ever (he said modestly). It was also the last."

Vicki Rosenzweig can be contacted on [vr@interport.net](mailto:vr@interport.net), at <http://www.interport.net/~vr> or at 33 Indian Road, 6-R, New York, NY 10034, USA.

## **Book Reviews**

**GIBBON'S DECLINE AND FALL** by Sheri S Tepper  
HarperCollins, 404pp, hb, £16.99,  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Sheri Tepper has the power to surprise. She has strong female characters but every book is different and has something to say. This one begins in the past, in 1959. A group of six, very different women meet at college.



Individually, they each had problems which could have lead to them being isolated and to failure. Together they were able to support and encourage the strengths in each other. When Sophy could stand the sexual harassment caused by her unwanted, magnetic charm, the others helped her disguise herself. One of the props was a leather-bound volume of Gibbon's *DECLINE AND FALL*. From then on they vowed that they would not, or let others of the group, stray from their chosen goals. None of them would decline, or fall.

Time passed, each women became successful in their chosen path. By 2000, the world has changed. It is a plausible near future with a lot of familiar developments as well as, as yet unrealised, extrapolations - such as the hibernation tanks in which convicted criminals are incarcerated. The six women have met regularly over the intervening 40 years and the plot-strands follow some of the events in their immediate lives. Emerging from the tangle is the growing effect, not just of world wide sterility but of male impotence. In some this generates gentleness, in others violence. All have problems coping with it and it is this factor above all which is likely to shape the next millennium. The group begin to suspect that this is not a natural phenomena and the only way to solve the problem is to reach its cause. To do that they must find Sophy who they have thought to be dead for the past three years but who they begin to suspect, might not be.

Amongst other things, the journey that the remaining five make in space and time leads each towards resolving their individual identities and towards the

decisions that some of them delayed making. This is an excellent novel and should be read by more than just the feminists out there. It has something relevant for all of us.

**TALL, DARK AND GRUESOME - an autobiography by Christopher Lee Gollancz, 314pp, hb, £15.99 (& index), Star Rating: \*\*\*  
Reviewed by William A McCabe.**

I would suppose that enough of you would know Christopher Lee from his many films (including many as Dracula and seemingly a lot of Hammer's other output) to avoid any real need to introduce the man. That said, this is an autobiography rather than "film memoirs" so the first third of the book is taken up with family, school life and military career while the remainder seems evenly split between showbusiness and golf.

Those interested only in the films will probably find enough in the anecdotes to satisfy some of their curiosity but the great flaw here is the lack of depth. So much seems to have been mentioned in passing but with not enough time for greater explanation. It seems like there is an intent to show only part of the picture and imply that it is a very small part. For example a picture caption reads "With three of my best friends: Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and John Carradine" - as I remember it, Carradine is not mentioned anywhere else in the book - he certainly doesn't have an entry in the index. I would have supposed that anyone the writer was close to would have been more prominent in the book but in this case it

seems to work in reverse to some degree - maybe the closer he is to someone the more he feels he should respect their privacy.

I would suppose this is a life story that is a whole lot more interesting than the book and the greatest pity is that more of it couldn't be put in.

(Further to Jo Fletcher's comment in the December ANSIBLE Lee must have been to some cons before (in particular one in London nearly 30 years ago) but, since he refers to such things as "sci-cons", I doubt he's been to that many )

**Bad Chilli by Joe R Lansdale,**  
**Indigo, 292pp, pb, £9.99,**  
**Star rating: \*\*\*\*\***  
**Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse.**

When I saw this was available to review I fell on it with a glad cry, like that of my mother when she finds a particularly unattractive cardigan half price in the January Sales. She will give the ugly cardigan to me next Christmas. I will keep BAD CHILLI and refuse to lend it to all but my most trusted friends.

I like Joe Lansdale books. I like them a lot and that's strange because they're not my usual sort of book. They're not sf, they're full of violence, they're written from a very male point of view and they're very black and white. The good guys are human and likeable, the bad guys are stupid, violent and ugly.

This is the fourth Hap Collins book. Hap, the hero, is white, straight, an ex peace and love sort of guy. His best friend, Leonard Pine is black, gay and

streetwise. They're both good in a fight. Luckily.

At the beginning of the book Leonard has lost his lover, Raul, to a local biker. The biker is found murdered and Leonard is suspected. Hap breaks out of hospital before finishing his rabies shots in order to clear Leonard's name. Leonard's video collection has been stolen. Then Raul is found tortured and murdered. Our guys set out to bring the bad guys to justice. On the way they endure torture, violence and Hap finally gets some sex. The violence is described in far more loving detail than the sex which happens off page. Too bad.

What makes these gory thrillers such compulsive reading? Hap and Leonard are wonderful characters. Their verbal sparring alone would make the book worth reading. Their friendship is so firm that I'm jealous. Brett, the new girlfriend, fits right in. I hope she lasts longer than the others did. Hap's last two lovers lasted about as long as Captain Kirk's but died far more gorily.

Then, Lansdale's style is arresting. His similes are original and graphic "the moon leaking weak light through the trees like spoiled cheese dripping through a grater". His dialogue is spot on. His pace is fast to breakneck.

I think what makes this a horror/thriller that a 'p.c.ish' person like me can read is that the baddies really deserve it. They're set up so they're irredeemable. No need to feel guilt when they're hurt or killed. In fact, I'd like to introduce Hap and Leonard to a few people from my past. A certain chemistry teacher springs to mind. Take that Mr Crossfield!!

So. Go out and buy this and the last three books because I'm not going to lend you my copies.

**MY HERO** by Tom Holt  
Orbit, 314pp, pb, £5.99,  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Imagine what happens to the characters in a book when the author puts the pen down for the evening or turns off the word processor. Actually, they go down the pub and winge about their authors or wait for their agent to ring. To Regalian, the hero of Jane Armitage's fantasy novels, being a character is just a job. Albert Skinner appears to be a character from a western. Unfortunately, he is the author but got stuck in his creation 30 years previously when he erroneously shot his hero. Normally the worlds of fiction and reality don't mix but Skinner manages to get a message to Jane asking to be rescued. The only way she can do it is to write her hero into the western. But the only way a character can get into another book is if he happens to be reading the other. So Skinner and Regalian find themselves in *A MID-SUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* and Titania is not such a coy maiden as Shakespeare made out. Meanwhile, Hamlet has landed the job as animating spirit of a monster created by Norman Frankenbotham who is trying to build a fast bowler for the Yorkshire cricket team from bits. As his body begins to disintegrate, Hamlet decides he doesn't like his new role. And his agent wants to destroy the world.

This book is a romp through genre writing and is best read quickly. It is clever, amusing and witty in parts and it is the juxtaposition of the various characters that provides the fun. Not for those without a weird sense of humour.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The "Star Ratings" are:*

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

### Also Received

*Eternity Road* by Jack McDevitt (Voyager, £5.99); *Douglas Adam's Starship Titanic* by Terry Jones (Pan, £5.99); *E.L.V* by Nick Nielsen (Voyager, £5.99); *Edge of Light* by Robert Silverberg (Voyager, £9.99); *The Alien Years* by Robert Silverberg (Voyager, £16.99); *Where the Children Cry* by Jenny Jones (Gollancz, £16.99); *Gerry Anderson: The Authorised Biography* by Simon Archer & Stan Nicholls (Legend, £7.99); *MIR* by Alexander Beshler (Orbit, £9.99); *The Making of Starship Troopers* by Paul M Sammon (Little, Brown, £9.99).

### The Rules

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

## The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX ( or e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk), within ONE MONTH of your taking the book.

All contributions are preferred on 3.5 inch disks in Works, Word or Text format.

Please note that in future no one who owes THREE or more reviews will be allowed to have further review copies and no more than three review copies may be taken at one time.

### The List of Shame

A number of people still owe reviews, please ensure that these, along with reviews of books picked up at the last two meetings are mailed to Martin Tudor by this month's meeting. The following list includes the name of the person, the title and author of the book and in brackets the month when the book was picked up for review:

**Robert Jones:** TIMESCAPE by Gregory Benford (2/97).

**Steve Jones & Friends:** THE RUINS OF AMBRAI by Melanie Rawn (3/97); MAGNIFICAT by Julian May (3/97); THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION by Peter F Hamilton (3/97); THE SANDMAN BOOK OF DREAMS ed Neil Gaiman & Ed Kramer (4/97); MILLENNIUM ed Douglas E Winter (6/97); THE DISCWORLD COMPANION by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Brigg (6/97); BABYLON 5: TO DREAM IN THE CITY OF THE SORROWS by Kathryn M Drennan (7/97); THE FIFTH SACRED THING by

Starhawk (9/97); THE PAVILLION OF FROZEN WOMEN by S P Somtow (9/97); WALKING TO MERCURY by Starhawk (10/97); JOVAH'S ANGEL by Sharon Shinn (10/97); 3001: THE FINAL ODYSSEY by Arthur C Clarke (11/97).

**Adrian Middleton:** ALIEN: RESURRECTION by A C Crispin (11/97); SERVANT OF THE BONES by Anne Rice (11/97).

**Carol Morton:** SORCERIES ed. Katherine Kerr (2/97); RAGE OF A DEMON KING by Raymond E Feist (3/97); SORCERERS OF MAJIPOOR by Robert Silverberg (3/97); THE SEER KING by Chris Bunch (10/97); JACK FAUST by Michael Swanwick (10/97); MAGISTER by Jonathan Wylie (12/97).

**Tony Morton:** STARBORNE by Robert Silverberg (2/97); TIMELIKE INFINITY by Stephen Baxter (8/97); ORACLE by Ian Watson (10/97).

**Yvonne Rowe:** THE STONE CANAL by Ken MacLeod (9/97); VIVIA by Tanith Lee (12/97).

**Alan Woodford:** THE HOUSE IN THE BORDERLAND by William Hope Hodgson (1/97); THE FIFTH ELEMENT by Terry Bisson (6/97); THE BIG IDEA: CRISCK, WATSON & DNA by Paul Strathern (11/97); THE BIG IDEA: TURING AND THE COMPUTER by Paul Strathern (11/97); THE BIG IDEA: HAWKING AND BLACK HOLES by Paul Strathern (11/97); THE BIG IDEA: NEWTON AND GRAVITY by Paul Strathern (11/97); THE BIG IDEA: PYTHAGORAS AND HIS THEOREM by Paul Strathern (11/97); THE BIG IDEA: EINSTEIN AND RELATIVITY by Paul Strathern (11/97).