

**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 - Rog Peyton,  
Newsletter Editor and Novacon 28 Chairman - Martin Tudor, Novacon 29 Chairman - Carol Morton.

**EGM**

**Friday 3rd April 1998,\***  
**7.30pm for 7.45pm, in**  
**the Board Room of**  
**Bennetts, Bennetts**  
**Hill, Birmingham.**

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

Food will be served until 7.30pm.

**Admittance: FREE**

**The EGM will be followed by an informal meeting where members will have the opportunity to meet the current North American TransAtlantic Fan Fund winner - Ulrika O'Brien.**

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

**TOM HOLT**  
**interviewed**

**Friday 17th April**  
**1998,\* 7.30pm for**  
**7.45pm, in the Board**  
**Room of Bennetts,**  
**Bennetts Hill,**  
**Birmingham.**

**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 third Friday of the month.)*

**COMING SOON: Robert Holdstock, 8th May, Britannia Hotel.**

The BSGF 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@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, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail to martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

**This Month's Guest:  
Tom Holt**

Thomas Charles Louis Holt was born in 1961 and his first book, POEMS BY TOM HOLT, was published when he was just thirteen and followed several years later by two novels (LUCIA IN WARTIME, 1985, and LUCIA TRIUMPHANT, 1986) continuing the stories told in the E F Benson "Lucia" novels. He then produced two historical novels set in Ancient Greece (GOATSONG, 1989, and THE WALLED ORCHARD, 1990), now available in one edition from Warner called THE WALLED ORCHARD before writing his first comic fantasy novel, EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER (1987).

This was followed by: WHO'S AFRAID OF BEOWULF (1988), FLYING DUTCH (1991), YE GODS! (1992), OVERTIME (1993), HERE COMES THE SUN (1993), GRAILBLAZERS (1994), FAUST AMONG EQUALS (1994), ODDS AND GODS (1995), DJINN RUMMY (1995), PAINT YOUR DRAGON and OPEN SESAME. He has also collaborated with Steve Nallon on I, MARGARET the (unauthorised) autobiography of Margaret Thatcher (whoever she was).

WISH YOU WERE HERE, his thirteenth comic fantasy novel, has just been published by Orbit in hardback priced £15.99. His twelfth, OPEN SESAME, is now available from Orbit

in paperback for £5.99.

*(Thanks to Clute and Grant's THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FANTASY and Orbit's Press release for the above.)*

**Colophon**

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*Many thanks to: ALAN & ANNE WOODFORD for producing the address labels; the reviewers for their book reviews; thanks also to WHAT'S ON, the Andromeda catalogue, the BBC and the EXPRESS & STAR for the news in the Jophan Report and Events Listing.*

**Forthcoming Events**

**Until 18 April 1998: THE NEW ROCKY HORROR SHOW**, the 25th anniversary production, at the Birmingham Rep. Tickets £12.00 and £17.00 call 0121 236 4455.

**2 April 1998:** URI GELLER will be reading from his new novel, ELLA, from 7pm at Waterstones, 24-26 High Street, Birmingham. Tickets are free call 0121 633 4353 for further details.

**3 April 1998:** An Extraordinary General Meeting of the BSGF to formally accept last year's accounts, at 7.45pm. Followed by an informal meeting where you will have an opportunity of meeting this year's North American TAFF winner Ulrika O'Brien. From 7.30pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street). Please note that TOM HOLT will be addressing the Group on the 17th April instead.

**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.

**17 April 1998:** TOM HOLT will be interviewed from 7.45pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

**MAY 1998:** IAIN BANKS and TERRY PRATCHETT will be doing signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation

and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

**8 May 1998:** ROBERT HOLDSTOCK will speak to the Group on the publication of GATE OF IVORY (Voyager, £16.99), from 7.45pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

**9 May 1998:** IAIN BANKS & KEN MACLEOD will be talking at the Library Theatre, Central Library, Birmingham. Tickets available from 1 May. Call Roger Peyton on 0121 643 1999 for further details.

**JUNE 1998:** ANNE McCAFFREY and RAYMOND E FEIST will be doing signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

**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:** FANTASYCON 22, the convention of the British Fantasy Society. At the Albany Hotel, Birmingham. Guest of

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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, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Paul J McAuley. Attending membership costs £28.00, rising after Easter 1998. 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.

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

### **The Jophan Report #114 by Martin Tudor**

From the 8th May meetings of the BSFG will be held on the second Friday of each month in a function room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel on New Street - venue for this year's Novacon.

As Easter approaches Cadbury World has opened two new attractions: visitors to the Centre can now see the original Aardman chocolate lookalike sets from the sponsorship credits on CORONATION STREET and, of more interest to the true media sf fan, visit PLANET ASTRO, the little planet of biscuit and chocolate in a crispy shell, inhabited by blue-skinned aliens. Once you've arrived on the planet you can interact with the aliens, distort your voice to communicate with them and log onto the Astro web site -



but don't stay too long as these little planets are "so delicious they're doomed". Call 0121 451 4159 for details.

British experts are producing a Mars ride for a US space museum using real NASA data to recreate the landscape of the planet. Visitors will be able to use a state of the art simulator to "fly" a mission over mountains and through Martian valleys and ravines and encounter a red dust storm.

The computer generated Martian terrain has been created by animation experts from Bournemouth University for the ride's builders Camber Entertainment from Crawley, Surrey. It will be the star attraction at the US Astronaut Hall of Fame near the Kennedy Space Centre.

The EXPRESS & STAR reports that DR WHO fan, Mike Owen, has taken out a £1,800 bank loan to buy his own Dalek. They ask where he borrowed the money from and suggest "Time Lloyds"? Ouch.

### **Book Reviews**

**TRAVELS IN DREAMLAND** by  
**Phil Patton, Orion, 264pp, hb,**  
**£16.99, Star Rating: \*\*\*\***  
**Reviewed by Michael Jones.**

In the Nevada Desert, north-east of the area used for nuclear testing, is

Groom Lake: an airbase so secret that the dry lake for which it is named appears on no maps and even to speak the name is forbidden. Consequently, it has been known through the years by various other designations, including "Area 51", a name enshrined in the lore of UFO mystique. However, despite being subtitled "The Secret History of Area 51", this book is not just about UFOs. Rather, it is about secret projects, the development of advanced aircraft, National Security and, above all, about the people who obsessively devote their lives to penetrating the veil of secrecy to find out and publicise what is really happening.

In reporting their studies and investigations, Patton has a great deal to say about supposed UFO sightings, but he does not come down definitely on one side or the other of the debate. Rather, he mostly lets the facts speak for themselves, allowing the reader to provide his own interpretation. When he himself turns to interpretation I felt him inclined to be somewhat pretentious. Nevertheless, I was impressed by a couple of pages near the middle of the book where he explains the various stages in the development of UFOlogy in terms of the changing obsessions of the American psyche. Referring to the secret bases such as Area 51, he describes how the area kept secret becomes a blank to be filled with anything those on the outside may choose to imagine. Then, when

secrets are finally revealed they can often be seen as misdirection aimed at concealing the true nature of what still lies concealed: eventually, no one can be sure whether they have seen a secret aircraft disguised as a UFO or a UFO disguised as a secret aircraft. A further example: in one of the last chapters, after suggesting that the latest stealth aircraft are only tested at night to hide the fact that they may be invisible in daylight it is pointed out that if nobody can see anything it is not because there is nothing to be seen - there is something there, but it must be invisible.

Leaving aside the question of whether to agree or disagree with any particular interpretation of the UFO question, this is not an easy book to read in that it lacks a coherent narrative thread, jumping about confusingly from place to place, from time to time and from person to person. It would have benefited from some judicious editing to make it more accessible as well as more thorough proof-reading to correct the occasional grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. Nevertheless, there is some fascinating information in these pages and I finished them feeling wiser and more knowledgeable than when I began. What more can one ask?

**ETERNITY ROAD** by Jack  
McDevitt  
Voyager, £5.99, 338pp,  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Have you ever wondered why, when Rome fell and the legions abandoned Britain, we also abandoned the marvels of Roman civilisation, like central heating and hot baths to grub around in mud walled huts? In McDevitt's *future*, the same kind of thing happens but a reason is given. Plague wipes out most of the world's population and centuries later, only traces remain of our civilisation. The greatest clue to the past are the roads. Legends have sprung up from the time of the Roadmakers about the repository of books collected after the plague in a place called Haven. Karik Endine returned alone from an expedition to find Haven. Everyone thought he had failed until his death when Chaka Milana receives a volume of Mark Twain's *A CONNECTICUT YANKEE AT THE COURT OF KING ARTHUR* as a bequest. As her brother died on the Endine's expedition she decides to follow the trail, to find Haven and perhaps, what happened to her brother. She, and an ill-assorted group, travel northwards from the Mississippi valley towards the remains of Chicago and Detroit.

The route is meticulously planned and easy to follow on any reasonable map of the United States. The events and artefacts they find seem very plausible even after the passage of more than 700 years. The pace is good and if it lacks anything it is depth of characterisation. This is a good read.

**GERRY ANDERSON THE  
AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY** by  
**Simon Archer & Stan Nicholls,**  
**Legend, 228pp, £7.99,**  
**Reviewed by Michael Jones.**  
**Star Rating: \*\*\***

In 1957 a little tv production company called Polytechnic Films went into liquidation and two of its ex-employees decided to set up their own company. The first job they got was a children's puppet programme called THE ADVENTURES OF TWIZZLE and it was from that inauspicious beginning that Gerry Anderson - for he was one of the two - launched the career which would eventually bring to the tv screen the series for which he will always be remembered: THUNDERBIRDS.

This book has for the most part been compiled from taped interviews with Anderson, supported here and there by comments from others who have known and worked with him over the years. This makes it readable and informative, without any pretence to being a work of great literature: not that it is any the worse for that. After beginning with some family background and a brief sketch of how Anderson got his start in the film business, it tells the story of how he developed puppetry into something completely new before moving on to the live-action format of UFO and SPACE 1999. Then, disaster: the end of his association with ATV left him broke and out of work and at about the

same time he parted from his wife and co-worker Sylvia. After a bad spell he came back again and the book ends on a hopeful note with him in his late sixties, still working hard and looking forward with a big-budget feature film of THUNDERBIRDS.

The story is all in these pages, but it is the story of the tv programmes rather than the story of their creator. It is indeed a useful book for any fan who might want to know for example why SUPERCAR gave way to STINGRAY or how THUNDERBIRDS came to be the way it was, but little is revealed of the man himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The "Star Ratings" are:*

- \* = Utter dross.
- \*\* = Not totally unbearable.
- \*\*\* = Worth risking it.
- \*\*\*\* = Pretty damn good.
- \*\*\*\*\* = BUY IT!

### **Also Received**

TRACES by Stephen Baxter (Voyager, £16.99, 359pp); WISH YOU WERE HERE by Tom Holt (Orbit, £15.99, 252pp); COSM by Greg Benford (Orbit, £10.00, 372pp); OPEN SESAME by Tom Holt (Orbit, £5.99, 312pp); INDEPENDANCE DAY: SILENT ZONE by Stephen Molstad (Voyager, £5.99, 268pp); SWORD OF BEDWAR by R A Salvatore (Voyager, £5.99, 247pp).



## The Rules

*Please remember that reviews of books should reach Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (or by e-mail at 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, RTF 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 DISCORLD COMPANION by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Briggs (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).

**Yvonne Rowse:** THE STONE CANAL by Ken MacLeod (9/97).

**George Ternent c/o Dave Cox:** MILLENNIUM: THE UNOFFICIAL COMPANION, VOLUME 2 by N E Gense (1/98).