

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

January  
1992

Issue  
244

## The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Your Newsletter

Editor...

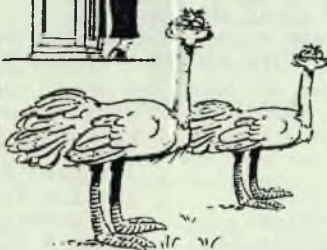


... Treasurer ...

... Chairman ...



... Secretary ...



... and the rest of the Committee ...

... Wish all Brum Group Members

**a Very Happy Christmas!**

**NEXT MEETING:**  
7.45pm on 17th JANUARY  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**NB: CHANGE OF VENUE**  
full details inside

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP 17th January 1992 AGENDA

*Meeting to be chaired by Tim Stannard, Group Legal Officer*

1. Adoption of last year's AGM Minutes (Proposer & Seconder required)
2. Group Chairman's Opening Remarks
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Publicity Officer's Report
5. Novacon 21 Representative's Report
6. Adoption of reports (Items 3-5 above)
7. The 1991 Committee will stand down
8. Election of Group Chairman  
(Chris Chivers stands for re-election Tony Morton standing in opposition, five minute platform each)
9. Election of Committee Members:
  - a) Secretary (No nominations)
  - b) Treasurer (Richard Standage stands for re-election)
  - c) Newsletter Editor (Martin Tudor stands for re-election)
  - d) Publicity Officer (Al Johnston stands for re-election)
  - e) Ordinary Members (2) (Mick & Bernie Evans stand for re-election)
10. Confirmation of Novacon 22 Chairman - Helena Bowles has been appointed to this post by the 1991 Committee.
11. Appointment of Legal Officer
12. Any Other Business
13. Vote of Thanks to our Presidents
14. The 1992 Annual General Meeting will be concluded

STANDING  
ON  
PLATFORM '92

STANDING FOR THE POST OF TREASURER:  
RICHARD STANDAGE

Nominated by Martin Tudor  
Seconded by Bernie Evans

If elected for a second year I will do my best to repeat my successes of 1991. Unfortunately, as I lost the Group around £1,000 last year and we haven't got that much left to lose this year this could be a tall order.

However, I do think I am ideal for this job. I could brag about my BA (HONS) in Accountancy or my four year auditing and accountancy work experience. But I would rather emphasise the fact that I quite simply love money - and have none of my own. Please let me get my hands on yours.

□□□□

STANDING FOR THE POST OF CHAIRMAN:  
TONY MORTON

Nominated by Martin Tudor  
Seconded by Richard Standage

At a discussion sometime last year I was "asked" if I would stand as Chairman in 1992. This came as something of a surprise as I've not been a committee member for about four years! However, the idea 'stuck' and, after careful consideration, I am standing for the post of Chairman.

I make no promise of revolutionary ideas or despotic rule but feel my organisational skills will prove useful, my speeches won't be long (but who wants that ?) and my preference for consensus leadership an added asset. Also after my comments to Bernie ("stand up") Evans, I've GOT to give her a chance to get even!

□□□□

STANDING FOR THE POST OF NEWSLETTER EDITOR:  
MARTIN TUDOR

Nominated by Richard Standage  
Seconded by Tony Berry

Here I am living proof that it's much easier not to learn from your mistakes... yes, I'm standing for re-election as newsletter editor. You've seen what I can do in 1991 I

produced a newsletter every month 144 pages of them which conveniently works out at 12 pages a month. I've tried to ensure that there has been a reasonable mixture of material in each -- sometimes successfully, sometimes less successfully.

If I'm re-elected there will be more of the same in 1992, although I would like to see the regular report on meetings return (volunteers anyone ?). Circumstances permitting, I would like to mail the newsletter on the Wednesday of the week BEFORE the meeting, rather than the Monday of the week of the meeting. But will that give you lot too much time to forget about the meeting ?

A LETTER FROM  
BRIAN ALDISS

From: Brian Aldiss  
To: Bernie Evans

8.xii.91

I see the *BRUM GROUP NEWS* describes you as an 'Ordinary Committee Member'. Shame ! Shame ! We never thought there was anything ordinary about you.

On Saturday, I was up in London, dining with Sam Lundwall, who was over from Stockholm, and Harry Harrison. There, Harry presented me with the beautiful pewter mug, grandly inscribed, which the BSGF so kindly gave me for my 65th birthday. It's been a while getting to me, and I noticed traces of dried Guinness foam round the rim (thanks, Harry !), but I was really delighted with the gift.

Will you please thank everyone for their kindness. It's always been a source of pride and pleasure to be associated with the good old Brum Group, and I shall take this mug with me to the Old Folks' Home when I go after Christmas.

All best wishes for the Future to all concerned - Yours Brian

Apologies to Dave Hardy for the delay in using his cover (the Post Office failed to deliver it, returned it to Dave and Dave sent it again...) despite the slightly unseasonable greeting I felt it was too good not to use immediately -- Martin Tudor.

# STANDING ORDERS FOR GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

1. THE MEETING SHALL BE CHAIRED BY THE LEGAL OFFICER OR HIS APPOINTED DEPUTY.
2. THE WORD 'CHAIRMAN' IN THESE STANDING ORDERS SHALL REFER TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING, NOT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP.
3. ALL MOTIONS SHALL HAVE SPEECHES FOR AND AGAINST UNTIL IT IS DEEMED BY THE CHAIRMAN THAT THERE HAS BEEN PROPER DEBATE, AT WHICH TIME THERE SHALL BE A VOTE OF MEMBERS PRESENT.
4. AN AMENDMENT TO A MOTION SHOULD BE PROPOSED BEFORE THE SPEECHES ON THE MOTION CONCERNED, BUT MAY BE PROPOSED AT ANY TIME BEFORE THE VOTE AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN. THERE WILL BE ONE SPEECH FOR THE AMENDMENT AND ONE SPEECH AGAINST, FOLLOWED BY A VOTE OF MEMBERS PRESENT ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE AMENDMENT INTO THE MOTION.
5. ALL CANDIDATES FOR COMMITTEE POSTS SHALL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY OF ADDRESSING THE MEETING BEFORE A VOTE IS TAKEN, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN.
6. QUESTIONS MAY BE DIRECTED TO THE SPEAKER AT THE END OF HIS SPEECH, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN, THROUGH THE CHAIR.
7. THE CHAIRMAN MAY RULE THE MEETING CLOSED AT ANY TIME, AT HIS DISCRETION. ANY BUSINESS REMAINING WILL BE DEFERRED TO THE NEXT APPROPRIATE MEETING, THE DATE OF WHICH TO BE ARRANGED BY THE COMMITTEE.
8. A CHALLENGE TO A RULING OF THE CHAIRMAN MAY BE MADE BY ANY MEMBER AND WILL TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER ALL OTHER BUSINESS. THERE WILL BE ONE SPEECH FOR THE RULING BY THE CHAIRMAN, AND ONE AGAINST BY THE CHALLENGER, FOLLOWED BY A VOTE OF MEMBERS PRESENT.
9. THE CHAIRMAN MAY PLACE A TIME LIMIT ON ANY SPEECHES, INCLUDING THOSE BY NOMINATED CANDIDATES.
10. THE ORDER OF PRECEDENCE OF MOTIONS IS:
  - 1) A CHALLENGE TO A RULING OF THE CHAIRMAN.
  - 2) AMENDMENT TO A MOTION.
  - 3) THE BUSINESS IN HAND.

Issued 20 January 1989  
Reprinted 8 January 1990  
and 12 January 1992

# CONSTITUTION OF THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(As approved by the Annual General Meeting of 21st January 1983 and amended at the ExtraOrdinary General Meetings of 11th March 1983 and 20th February 1987.)

1. THE NAME of the Society is to be THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP (hereinafter called 'the Group').
2. THE AIMS of the Group will be to further the interests, knowledge and social activities of readers of science fiction, and the promotion, encouragement and participation in writing, publishing and producing books, magazines, films and any other projects connected with science fiction, and in particular the management of a yearly convention known as 'Novacon'.
3. THE GROUP will consist of the elected Committee, The Chairman of Novacon, the Legal Officer and the Ordinary Members. The Committee will consist of the Chairman, the Treasurer, the Secretary, the Publicity/Recruitment Officer, the Newsletter Editor, and not more than two Ordinary Committee Members, who shall be elected at the AGM. The Chairman of Novacon, appointed by the Committee, will automatically be a member of the Committee for the year in which his convention falls. The Legal Officer shall be a supernumerary member of the Committee, who shall appoint him.
4. THE OFFICE of Treasurer and Secretary may be held by one member of the Group, at the Committee's discretion.
5. THE COMMITTEE shall be the governing body of the Group and will have full power:-
  - (a) To manage and control the finances of the Group, except for donations made outside the field of science fiction. Such donations must be agreed by a majority vote of those group members attending any meeting at which such a donation is discussed.
  - (b) To suspend any officer or member of the Group, upon such cause being shown as they may deem sufficient.
  - (c) To fill such vacancies as may occur.
  - (d) To manage the Novacon Convention.
6. THE WHOLE COMMITTEE stands down at the AGM and may stand for re-election.
7. RESIGNATIONS from the Committee must be made in writing to, and submitted for acceptance at the next Committee Meeting by, the Treasurer.
8. A QUORUM of the Committee shall be four (4) members.
9. A FINANCIAL YEAR of the Group will commence on 1st January. Membership will run for 12 months from the date on which payment of subscription is due. The amount of the subscription will be reviewed at each AGM.
10. CHEQUES drawn on the Group account must be signed by the Treasurer and by one of two other appointed officers of the Group.
11. THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Group will be held in January each year.
12. THERE WILL BE at least one Committee Meeting per quarter.
13. THERE WILL BE one ordinary meeting of the Group per month, at the Committee's discretion.
14. THE COMMITTEE may convene an ExtraOrdinary General Meeting at any time with a minimum of 14 days' notice.
15. ANY MEMBER may call an ExtraOrdinary General Meeting at any time when so petitioned by at least one-third of the total paid-up membership of the Group, and at such EGM there must be a quorum of at least 15 members in addition to the Committee.
16. AMENDMENTS to the Constitution shall only be made at the AGM or at an EGM, and a member calling such EGM shall give 21 days' notice in writing to the Committee of the suggested amendment.
17. THE CHAIRMAN of the Group shall have served on the Committee of the Group for at least one full year.
18. Acceptance of these rules is a condition of membership of the Group.

Issued 20 January 1989  
Reprinted 8 January 1990  
and 12 January 1992

## CHANGE OF VENUE

THE NEW VENUE OF  
THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP AS FROM  
17 JANUARY 1992 WILL BE THE  
UPSTAIRS FUNCTION ROOM OF THE  
WHITE LION PUB ON THE CORNER OF  
THORP ST. & HORSEFAIR/BRISTOL ST.  
IN BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE

Due to the imminent refurbishment of the Australian Bar, the departure of the helpful management and the timely offer of a more suitable room the Brum Group is on the move again.

Les Husband, the previous manager of the Australian Bar has been transferred to the White Lion, on the corner of Thorp Street and Horsefair/Bristol Street (almost facing the Dome, around the corner from the Odeon Queensway). Being 'a very, very nice man' he has offered to let us have the slightly larger and far more suitable function room there for the same price as we were paying at the Australian.

The committee decided that this offer was too good to miss, especially as the Australian is scheduled to close for refurbishment in late February/early March.

**ADDITIONAL MEETING  
at the White Lion on  
FRIDAY  
14th FEBRUARY 1992  
featuring  
GREG BEAR**

Yes ! Despite the dubious 'assistance' of Chris Chivers, the BSFG's less than illustrious Chairman (who incorrectly 'corrected' the year of Greg Bear's visit to 1993...). We are delighted to announce that GREG BEAR, author of *HEGIRA*, *PSYCHLONE*, *BEYOND HEAVEN'S RIVER*, *STRENGTH OF STONES*, *CORONA*, *THE INFINITY CONCERTO*, *BLOOD MUSIC*, *EON*, *THE SERPENT MAGE*, *THE FORGE OF GOD*, *ETERNITY*, *SLEEPSTORY*, *EARLY HARVEST*, *HARDFOUGHT*, *TANGENTS*, *QUEEN OF ANGELS* and *HEADS* will be addressing the Group on Friday 14th February THIS year.

AWAY FROM IT ALL

A Logic Problem

by Stan Eling

I recently spent a vacation on the planet Oughtred, on the shores of Lake Lippershey. There I rented a small boat and went fishing most days, but all I caught was a cetacean. In the evenings, most often you would find me in the little Inn, drinking and chatting with the Innkeeper and his four regular customers ; let me tell you something about them.

The guy named Tphph is the owner of a two seater speed ship.

The alien called Ouka is a deep sea diver, she does not come from Othry.

The rich merchant does not own a ship.

The Earthman who is a plumber, is not named Faq nor does he knit for a hobby.

Tphph is not the retired trooper and his hobby is not knitting.

Fred who owns the half-brig, lives next door to the rich merchant.

The one from Othry is the owner of an old cruiser.

A chap named Littledoor comes from the planet Unirra and he does not have a hobby.

The owner of the half-brig is a dart player.

The retired trooper comes from Othry.

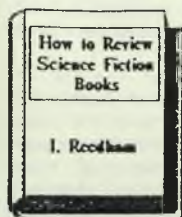
The owner of the space clipper does not come from Boz, nor is he the retired trooper who collects buttons.

One of them does fretwork for a hobby.

If Fred is not the Innkeeper, what is the name of the one who comes from Decar ?

00000

The solution will appear next month.



# Book Reviews

HEADS by Greg Bear

Legend, 117 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a novella but contains all the hallmarks of Bear's full length novels. The only real difference is that the plot is straight-forward without the convolutions that longer works can encompass.

The story is set on the Moon in a future where family groupings are all important in business and politics. Micky Sandoval is in charge of a small outpost where his brother-in-law, William, is attempting to reach absolute zero. When his sister, Rho, purchases four hundred and ten frozen heads and has them transported to the installation on the Moon an ants' nest is stirred up. For no reason that Micky can fathom there is a concerted attempt to destroy, politically, the Sandoval family just because they have the heads. Until they realise who three unnamed heads belonged to.

Within a very short book there is a wealth of background material, much of which is cleverly implied rather than spelt out. There are also amazing leaps of scientific logic, reminiscent of the extrapolations in *BLOOD MUSIC*. There is no extraneous wordage and it is a pity that more authors do not cut the padding and leave the reader with a clean, neat, enjoyable package like this one.

THE RAINBOW ABYSS by Barbara Hambly

Grafton, 256 pp, £14.95, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Rhion is apprentice to Jaldis the Blind, a freelance wizard allied to any one of the myriad of orders that abound. Because of this they scrape a meagre living making love-potions and luck-spells, and doing a little fortune telling. Jaldis' researches have led him to opening up a dark well across the void, and in the well a voice calls for help because in his world magic is dying. Before Jaldis and Rhion can cross the void to that world they sell a love-potion to the wrong woman and have to flee for their lives,

leaving behind most of Jaldis' library and, more importantly, abandoning the dark well.

Eventually they find sanctuary with a more enlightened Duke, are accepted into his house-hold, and once again Jaldis resumes his investigations into the dark well. Rhion complicates things again by falling in love with the Duke's daughter, so once again the politic thing to do is flee, but this time they prepare to cross the void to discover the secret of destroying magic so they can protect the magic in their own world.

An eminently readable and entertaining story by an author who writes excellent fantasy without going OTT with the mumbo-jumbo that seems to surround the portrayal of magic in much of the fantasy written these days. This is the start of a series by Hambly that is going to be worth collecting.

THE FRIGHTENERS by Stephen Laws

NEL, 461 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor

At the cut'n'slash end of the horror market the current obsession seems to be bizarre forms of prison reform. *THE FRIGHTENERS* has much in common with Shaun Hutson's recent gorefest *CAPTIVES*. Here the absurd plot of experiments on the brains of prisoners is taken to even more extreme lengths as these experiments are government sanctioned (as opposed to the mad scientist in Hutson's version).

Laws, unlike Hutson, doesn't restrict himself to a bit of dubious pseudo-science and lots of blood, he decides to add large dollops of mysticism to the distasteful concoction. I won't bore you with the monotonous details of the increasingly absurd plot, suffice it to say that the bodycount is higher by far than *CAPTIVES* but (thankfully) the gore filled descriptions are much shorter.

LENS OF THE WORLD by R A MacAvoy

Headline, 286 pp, £14.95, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a quiet fantasy. It is written as the reminiscences of an old man looking back on his formative years. Nazhuret entered the Royal Sordaling School as a child with no memory of what had occurred before. He guesses that he must have some noble blood as this is a requirement for entry, but knows nothing more of his past. He sees himself as a short, goblin-like figure but he is a survivor, learning all the skills of swordsmanship his masters can teach. When he finally has to leave he falls in with a

strange man who keeps him in an observatory on a hillside, trapped by his curiosity and the compelling personality of his mentor. Powl teaches him that he knows nothing and proceeds to train him in self-defence and lens-grinding. Finally, Powl throws Nazhuret loose on the world with the advice to stay away from the king. Though Nazhuret tries to do this fate conspires against him.

The first half of the book ambles along pleasantly as the education of Nazhuret unfolds, first at Sordaling School, then with Powl. The pace increases after he begins his wandering, and a mystery is introduced. A young warrior, Arlin, keeps crossing his path, declaring that they are old friends. Nazhuret does not remember him at all. Then he stumbles on a troupe of the king's enemies planning an ambush and the whole path of his life changes.

There is a degree of placidness about the style in this book, perhaps due to the fact that it is told by an old man looking back, when the rashness and excitement of youth can be viewed with the wisdom and understanding of age. Although this is soothing to the reader it is in no way boring but, enables the joy of excellent prose to shine through undisguised by the haste that some action-packed narratives have.

HIGH WIZARDRY by Diane Duane

Corgi, 236 pp, £2.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor

This is the third volume in a series, the first two being *SO YOU WANT TO BE A WIZARD* and *DEEP WIZARDRY*. Although obviously aimed at the juvenile market these comic tales of wizardry and space opera are well worth reading.

In *HIGH WIZARDRY* the heroine of the previous two volumes, Nita, discovers that she is not the only wizard in her family as her smarter, younger sister, Dairine, rampages through the universe with the help of a software version of the Wizard Manual.

A well written book, light-hearted stuff but, as they say, great fun for all the family.

THE DAY IT RAINED FOREVER by Ray Bradbury

ROC, 232 pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A re-issue of Bradbury's work containing 23 short stories. Largely a series depicting human behaviour and interaction with events beyond their control. A few SF and fantasy stories intermingled in the collection but

nothing that grabbed this reader. Some potent ideas and well worked storylines were undermined by other less developed and somewhat disappointing ones.

Stories that I liked: "Almost the End of the World", telling of man's almost demise as television goes off the air. "And The Rock Cries Out", turns the tables on the Americans. "The Strawberry Window", an amusing time travel anecdote in someone's attic, provided light relief from some of Bradbury's pessimistic visions and dire interrelations.

Men has a lot to learn both about himself and his environment but this doesn't seem the best way to address the problems. Overall very disappointing, and one for Bradbury connoisseurs only.

WE CAN REMEMBER IT FOR YOU WHOLESALE

by Philip K Dick

Grafton, 495pp, £5.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans

This is the fifth and final volume of the complete collection of Dick's shorter fiction, this time covering 1964 to 1981 (including his classic period). It is probably the most satisfying of the five books. It's been tastefully done by Grafton as they've resisted the temptation to paste "Total Recall" all over the front cover (or was that due to Paul Williams ?), despite the story on which the film was (loosely) based being included.

These stories contain a wealth of ideas that must be hard to match by anyone. The idea that Dick was maybe going a little crazy in his later years is refuted for me by the quality of stories like "I hope I Shall Arrive Soon", from 1980, just two years before he died. There are some previously unpublished stories, for which completists may buy this book, but I think it would serve as a good introduction for someone new to his work, as it covers a wider period than the earlier volumes in the series.

Dick's notes and comments on the stories are a plus, giving valuable insights into the man and his work, much of which concerns the human condition rather than SF hardware. He had his flaws of course, and Tom Disch has an amusing comment in his evaluation at the start of the book: "Dick's aesthetic failings could become virtues for his fellow SF writers, since it is so often possible for us to take the ball he fumbled and continue for a touchdown."

This series has been an excellent project. For the sheer weight of originality and ideas these collected stories would take some beating.



DREAM FINDER by Roger Taylor  
Headline, 436 pp, £14.95, h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

A Dream Finder is one who can guide a sleeper back through a dream that troubled or puzzled him so that the dream can be explained. Antyr is a young partly-trained Dream Finder who had the potential to be one of the most powerful of his guild, but with the death of his Father Petran, who was also leader of the guild, the profession of dream finding has fallen into disrepute, becoming the haunt of charlatans and con-men. Antyr had sunk into a drunken, disillusioned rut when he is approached by the staff of Duke Ibris, ruler of the City of Serenestad, who has been troubled by dreams that seem to point to war.

Antyr drags himself out of his alcohol-soaked torpor to guide Ibris to the source of his dreams, which turn out to be an attempt to weaken the Duke by haunting his dreams. Antyr and his Earth Holder, the wolf Tarrion, are the only buffer against the destruction of Serenestad, so they must seek out and destroy the evil blind magician and the mad warleader Ivaroth who are behind the attacks.

Taylor's previous work *THE CHRONICLES OF HAWKLAN* were at best mediocre and by comparison this novel would seem to have been written by another author, it is so good. The ideas are fresh and the plotline credible, the characters, especially those of Antyr and the long suffering Tarrion, are excellent. This is wonderful stuff.

#### CLIVE BARKER'S BOOKS OF BLOOD

Macdonald, £13.95 each, Book One 213 pp, Book Two 216 pp, Book Three 248 pp, h/bs

Reviewed by Martin Tudor

Back in 1984 a new force was unleashed on the world of horror in the form of Clive Barker and his *BOOKS OF BLOOD*. At the time they received massive critical acclaim and Barker found himself elevated to instant cult status, now Macdonald have given you another chance to discover what all the fuss was about by re-releasing the three volume set.

These stories are wonderful, some gut-churningly horrific, many quietly disturbing, but all of them well written and entertaining. It isn't often these days that I read a story that disturbs me but here we have three books full. Without exception each of these sixteen stories have played their part in disturbing my sleep and several have haunted me during the day. Amongst the most chilling are "Son of Celluloid" where the collective

passions of generations of movie goers have animated the cancer in a dying criminal, "Pig Blood Blues" a chilling tale of murder and mysticism in a Remand Centre for Adolescent Offenders and a truly macabre tale of two cities "In the Hills, the Cities".

Whatever cinematic, literary or stage triumphs there are to come, *CLIVE BARKER'S BOOKS OF BLOOD* will remain for me and many others the epitome of this modern day Renaissance man's career.

ISLE OF VIEW by Piers Anthony  
NEL, 344 pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the 13th book in the Xanth trilogy (!) and (with any luck) the last, though I have to say that a storyline does seem to creep into the words every now and then, so in that respect it is a little better than the last few in the saga. The story - such as it is - concerns the efforts of Prince Dolph and his two fiancées in their search for the kidnapped foal of Chex and Cherion centaur, their attempts to stop an inter species war on Xanth, and to resolve the problem of their three cornered betrothal. Though the story is mediocre, I defy anyone not to be moved by the author's note and I am in complete agreement with Anthony on his view about drunken drivers.

ORBITSVILLE DEPARTURE by Bob Shaw  
Orbit, 252 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Set two hundred years after *orbitville*, Shaw presents an excellent tale. A two-pronged plotline around Gary Dallen and Orbitville itself gives the reader superb entertainment. Dallen travels to Earth as a career step but his family find disaster, leaving him bitter and seeking revenge. Several plot twists find Dallen returning to Orbitville where strange events are occurring.

A remarkable climax to the story leaves the reader awestruck, and the final chapter provides a suitable finale. An excellent well told and well written story with superb characterisation and plot development. Buy this and read it.

A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA by Craig Shaw Gardner  
Headline, 280 pp, £14.95, h.b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the second of Gardner's reworkings of Richard Burton's translation of the original 1001 nights as told by Scheherazade. This

volume concerns Ali Baba, not AND the forty thieves, but AS one of the thieves.

Ali Baba, a poor woodcutter, scrapes a meagre living to support himself, wife and slave, while his no-good brother (who lives next door) is a heavy for the local mob. Whilst out woodcutting Ali Baba spies a party of horsemen enter a cave by calling - yes - "Open sesame". When they leave he opens the cave and finds treasures, a little of which he liberates. His brother discovers the treasure and forces Ali Baba back to the cave. Here they are both press-ganged into the band of forty thieves - to keep the numbers at forty no more no less - but only after Kassim has been hacked into six pieces but is still alive. They then embark on a bizarre career as reluctant thieves, encountering djinni, haunted caves, and spending a time in the Palace of Beautiful Women.

Whilst this is a credible tale in its own right, Gardner suffers (badly) by comparison with Terry Pratchett not because they both write humorous fiction but because they both have book covers by Josh Kirby. The comparison is invidious but inevitable and Gardner, though a competent story teller, is not the raconteur that Pratchett is, nor has he the wit and style of Pratchett. Amusing, but not special.

SPIDER WORLD: THE MAGICIAN by Colin Wilson  
HarperCollins, 345 pp, £14.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor

I've never been a fan of the incredibly prolific Colin Wilson so I was pleasantly surprised to discover that I enjoyed reading SPIDER WORLD: THE MAGICIAN.

THE MAGICIAN is the sequel to Wilson's THE TOWER and THE DELTA all of which are set on a post-holocaust Earth where enormous, intelligent spiders have risen to dominate the planet. The style of these books is reminiscent in many ways of Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars series, suffering from the same overly simplistic plots but enjoying a similar naivety.

Simple, straight forward, undemanding escapism, but none the worse for that.

SOUL RIDER BOOK 1. SPIRITS OF FLUX AND ANCHOR

by Jack L Chalker

ROC, 320 pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

World is a planet whose surface is covered in a formless void called flux. Only powerful magicians can form Anchors in this flux. These Anchors are islands of stability where

people can live, and their creators are treated like Kings, and revered as Gods in some cases. There is trade between the Anchors but that is controlled by Stringers, who travel between the Anchors.

When the inhabitants of the Anchors reach the age of eighteen they have to face the Census and, in a ceremony called the Paring Rite, surplus 18 year olds are struck from the population list, degraded almost to the status of animals, and traded by the Stringers at other Anchors. The choice is supposedly made by divine intervention and interpreted by the Holy Mother Church, but in reality the Priestesses of the church choose the unfortunates to be traded. Cassie, an inhabitant of Anchor Logh, has reached 18. Two days before the Census she is delayed in town and has to stay at the temple where she gets lost and witnesses the priestesses selecting those to be traded. She is seen, caught, is chosen in the rite, and leaves Anchor Logh in the train of a Stringer called Matson. However a Soul Rider, a spirit of Flux and Anchor, has entered Cassie's body and it gives her special powers to survive in the flux. Cassie discovers that the gates of Hell are situated in the flux, and the keepers of the gates are planning to attack the Anchors.

World is an interesting concept, not an entirely new idea, but well documented by Chalker. I did find it initially hard to get into but it is worth persevering with. An interesting start and a series to watch out for.

□□□□□

*I would like to remind members who take books for review that they MUST supply the review by the following month's meeting at the latest. Thank You.*

*Thanks this time to STAN ELING for his puzzle, DAVE HARDY for the cover, DTP headings, Constitution and Standing Orders, MICK EVANS for typing up the book reviews, BERNIE EVANS for the labels and editing the book reviews, TONY MORTON & RICHARD STANDAGE for their platforms, TONY BERRY for putting up with me and the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier and to all of our book reviewers.*

The contents of this issue are copyright 1992 The Birmingham Science Fiction Group, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the BSFG. All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise. This publication was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier.

## NOVACON 22

WHEN: Friday 6th November to Sunday 8th November 1992

00000

WHERE: By popular demand we return to:

the Royal Angus Hotel  
in Birmingham city centre.

NB: Due to limited space and restrictive fire regulations at the Angus we are forced to limit membership -- details of exactly how few we will be allowed to have will follow once this has been agreed with the hotel. In the meantime we strongly advise that you REGISTER EARLY...

00000

WHO: Authoress extraordinaire - STORM CONSTANTINE

00000

COST: £18 until the end of Eastercon 1992, £20 until Monday 12th October 1992 (or 4 weeks before the Convention). £25 on the door. NB POSTAL APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DEADLINE. THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME TO SORT OUT HOTEL ACCOMODATION AND CONFIRM THEM. But Bernie may be prepared to re-consider if you phone her and convince her you have a good enough excuse.

00000

COMMITTEE: The person who brought you the Wonderful TWENTYCON hasn't had enough yet - HELENA BOWLES is in the chair. Backing her are:

Bernie Evans on Registrations (when will this woman give up? Anyone willing to run a sweep?).

Richard Standage Treasurer (if we can drag him back from South America in time).

Tony Berry, Ops supremo and Guest Liason (we told him he could talk to Storm anyway, but he insisted...)

Carol Morton on Programme (Ex Newsletter Editor, Registrations bod for Twentycon, whither will our Carol go next?)

Jenny & Steve Glover are doing Publications (as well as publishing numerous fanzines, both jointly and seperately, they have run several cons and Jenny is currently editor of *MATRIX* the newsletter of the British SF Association)

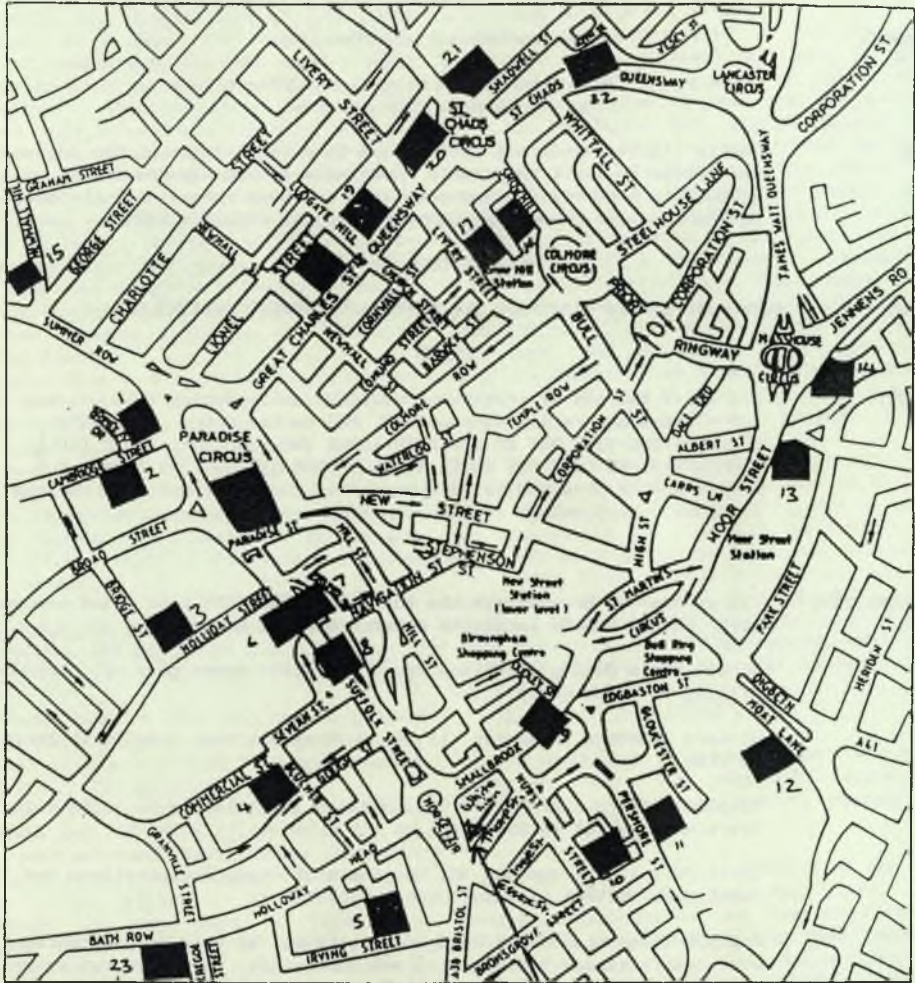
00000

PROGRAMME: At this stage you expect Programme information!

00000

HOW: That's easy make out a cheque to "Novacon 22" and post it to: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH. Further details from Bernie on (021) 558 0997.

THE NEW VENUE OF  
 THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP AS FROM  
 17 JANUARY 1992 WILL BE THE  
 UPSTAIRS FUNCTION ROOM OF THE  
 WHITE LION PUB ON THE CORNER OF  
 THORP ST. & HORSEFAIR/BRISTOL ST.  
 IN BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE



KEY TO CAR PARKS

• Multi-Storey Car Parks

- |                      |                      |                      |                        |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Brindley Drive*   | 7. Brunel Street*    | 12. Moat Lane*       | 18. Gt. Charles Street |
| 2. Civic Centre      | 8. Royal Mail Street | 13. Albert Street    | 19. Ludgate Hill       |
| 3. Holliday Street*  | 9. Dudley Street     | 14. Masshouse Circus | 20. Lionel Street      |
| 4. Blucher Street    | 10. Hurst Street     | 15. Newhall Hill     | 21. St. Chads Circus   |
| 5. Irving Street     | 11. Pershore Street* | 16. Snow Hill        | 22. Bath Street        |
| 6. Navigation Street |                      | 17. Livery Street*   | 23. Cregoe Street      |

**the White Lion**