

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 Chair-Vernon Brown, Secretary-Dave Hardy, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Newsletter & Publicity-Martin Tudor,
Ordinary Members-Anne Woodford & William McCabe, Novacon 30 & 31Chairman-Tony Berry.

This month's meeting is on 8th September 2000 at FantasyCon 24

"Our September meeting this year has been double-booked (hotel's fault) against FantasyCon so we cannot meet as usual. However, your Committee has made a special arrangement with the Con to let BSFG MEMBERS in FREE all day Friday 8th September on production of their current membership card. As day membership of FantasyCon 24 is £30 this is a bargain! If you cannot find your card contact Alan Woodford NOW on 0121-532-1110. More details inside this newsletter." -- Vernon Brown, Chairman.

Next month's meeting: A Quiz featuring the Birmingham SF Group versus the Birmingham University SF Society

7.45pm for 8pm, in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor,
Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union
Passageway). Admittance: Non-Members £4, Members
£3. Concessions for full-time students & unwaged.

More details of meetings on the back cover.

Fantasycon: An Introduction for Brum Group Members by Chris Morgan

A Fantasycon at the Britannia Hotel? Must be similar to Novacon.

Well, actually, no.

Fantasycons are smaller, more laid back, with almost as many professionals as fans. And they're different in terms of programme and genre. They're also more expensive to join: you pay more, you get more back.

There is fantasy at Fantasycon, but almost half the professionals and most of the fans are from the world of horror. (I'm always amused by the fact that while SF fans mostly avoid horror as if it had a nasty disease attached to it, fantasy fans tend to be more accepting of both SF and horror, and many more horror fans are too tied up with horror, or drunk, to notice that SF and fantasy exist.)

The guests at this year's Fantasycon (8th-10th September) are UK fantasy authors Stephen Lawhead, Storm Constantine and Stan Nicholls, together with a film actor best known for his horror roles, Doug Bradley.

While the programme isn't yet finalised (did I mention laid back? – we're a whole month and more away from the convention) a few items have become standard. Take Friday evening. The Dealers Room will be open from about 4-8pm. There'll be a fantasy quiz. Probably there'll be at least one drunken late-night panel item, with one or two panelists too many. There may be a book launch (free alcohol!) or a midnight horror reading.

Saturday should bring more panels, launches (free alcohol), readings, interviews, etc, plus the notorious Fantasycon Raffle, a slightly less than live event which fills the evening in much the same way that pus fills an untreated wound. It must be experienced to be believed. Some amazing prizes have been donated by publishers, authors and booksellers, and the ever-enthusiastic (sorry, that should be over-enthusiastic) David Howe gives them away to lucky winners during what seems like a couple of geological ages. (It's a good time to go out for a pizza.)

On Sunday morning all the professional authors present (about thirty, not one of them sober) will crowd into Waterstones (the former Dillons, half way along New Street) to perform a ritual signing, probably in blood. Sunday afternoon is devoted to an awards banquet.

The programme item I'm most looking forward to (apart from the booklaunch of *Swords of the Millennium*, a terrific anthology which I'm actually part of) is Stephen Jones interviewing David Case. Now, this Stephen Jones is the prolific horror anthologist (not the Brum Group member), and David Case is a fascinating British horror writer who produced a few memorable books and stories some thirty years ago, but who has been very busy in other genres since.

As the Brum Group has managed to arrange for members to attend the Friday evening free, I urge you to make the most of the chance. Leave your prejudices at home and go along. You may even enjoy it.

The Jophan Report #134 by Martin Tudor

On Tuesday 8th August I was stunned to receive an e-mail from Tommy Ferguson in which he passed on the news of the death of Ken Cheslin - suddenly and unexpectedly on Friday 4th August.

Based in Stourbridge, Ken was an unofficial mentor to the original BSFG back in 1961 (when he was involved with the long-disbanded Stourbridge & District Circle), a regular attendee at Novacons, where his Olaf fanzines and calendars and, more recently, reprints of classic fanzine material from the fifties were always well-received.

Steve Green writes: *"We've lost so many already, too many, this year, and losing Ken Cheslin is Fate just taking the piss. Such generosity of spirit, such idiotic selflessness in the pursuit of fannish philanthropy: Kench exemplified the best and the daftest in us.*

"Ken long realised his own fanac would be overshadowed by his efforts to ensure the work of others was preserved for generations to come, not only reprinting two classic collections of Arthur Thomson's art but adding a new volume for the Third Millennium, as well as producing a landmark library of John Berry's tales of Irish fandom. And all of this on the pittance he could scrape from his and Jean's pension.

"Take a bow, Ken: you deserve it."

The short story, A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE, mentioned by Brian Aldiss at last month's meeting is now available as a 72 page chapbook in a limited edition of 300 copies, priced at £7.95 (post free). Contact: Jim Goddard, Solaris Books. Flat 4, 13 Lockwood Street, Drifffield, East Yorkshire YO25 6RU (Tel: 01377 272022, Fax: 0870 130 8055).

Despite the fact that STAR WARS: EPISODE II isn't due for release until 2002 a startling detailed "teaser trailer" has appeared on the web at <http://www.theforce.net/theater/trailers/episodeii/>. Featuring droids, Jedi warriors, screaming space ships and all the stars, it offers tantalising clues to the direction of the fifth Star Wars movie.

However, don't get *too* excited the *Birmingham Evening Mail* reveals it is all a fake! The anonymous "director" has cleverly pieced together existing clips from the previous episodes, plus shots from such films as DUNE, IVANHOE, FIFTH ELEMENT, SPHERE, ELIZABETH and STIGMATA. Footage from

THE ENGLISH PATIENT becomes an alien landscape and charging warrior hoards from BRAVEHEART are given light sabres. All this combined with doctored footage of the new Anakin actor, Hayden Christensen, lifted from the tv series HIGHER GROUND, and a stirring John Williams score make it a stunning piece of trickery well worth checking out!

John Jarrold at Simon and Schuster has acquired a first SF novel from Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen, co-authors with Terry Pratchett of the bestselling THE SCIENCE OF DISCWORLD.

Popular speakers at both Novacon and the Brum Group, as well as well-known scientists in their own right - Stewart is a mathematician and Cohen is a reproductive biologist - the authors, who are both with the University of Warwick, have now written WHEELERS. "If you want Big Science Fiction, look no further," said Jarrold. "As you might expect from two such eminent brains, the concepts are fabulous, but the characters are also terrific - fascinating and infuriating in equal measure. I'd expect this to be the first of many novels from this team."

Between them, the authors have published around 20 previous books, including their joint title THE COLLAPSE OF CHAOS, which Penguin recently reissued. Jarrold acquired the novel from Ashley Grayson in the US. Earthlight will publish WHEELERS in summer 2001.

British director Val Guest (*The Day the Earth Caught Fire*) is a last-minute addition to the Festival of Fantastic Films line-up next month; he lives in the US these days, but is making a brief visit home to work on his forthcoming autobiography. Other guests include Brian Clements (co-creator, *The Avengers*) and actress Martine Beswick (*Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde*). Films being shown include the acclaimed new sf flick *24 Hours in London* and (UK premiere) the new Italian adaptation of Ramsey Campbell's *The Nameless*.

The Festival of Fantastic Films will be held over the weekend of 8th-10th September at the Renaissance Hotel, Manchester. £60 reg or £30 supp, to Society of Fantastic Films, 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN, (tel: 0161 707 3747).

The British Amateur Press Association, the UK's oldest surviving apa (est. 1978), has a new central mailer and is actively seeking comics fans to join its ranks. Contact: Howard Stangroom, 18 Lower Richmond Road, Putney, London, SW15 1JP (amazonboy@bigfoot.com).

Congratulations to the British Fantasy Society which has been shortlisted for the 2000 World Fantasy Award: Special Award Non-professional. Society President, Ramsey Campbell, commented: 'I'm delighted to hear that the British Fantasy Society has been nominated for a World Fantasy Award. It makes me

even prouder to be President of the Society, a position I believe is to be mine for life. Perhaps even after that I shall encourage my successor with the odd helpful whisper in their ear and by draping a bony arm around their shoulders. Good luck to us!

The World Fantasy Award winners will be announced at this year's World Fantasy Convention, taking place in Texas, USA 26-29th October.

The final shortlist for the 2000 British Fantasy Awards have been announced. The award winners will be announced at this year's FantasyCon, taking place in Birmingham 8-10th of September.

A more detailed listing of all the past award winners can be found on the BFS' website: <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs>

The Nominations for the British Fantasy Awards 2000 are:

Best Novel: *The Amber Citadel* by Freda Warrington (Earthlight); *Indigo* by Graham Joyce (Michael Joseph); *The Marriage of Sticks* by Jonathon Carroll (Gollancz); *Shelter* by Chaz Brenchley (Hodder & Stoughton); *World's End* by Mark Chadbourn (Gollancz).

Best Anthology: *999* ed. Al Sarrantonio (Avon); *The Last Continent* ed. John Pelan (Shadowlands Press); *Best New Horror 10* ed Stephen Jones (Robinson); *White of the Moon* ed Stephen Jones (Pumpkin); *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror* ed Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling (St Martin's Press).

Best Collection: *The Collected Strange Tales* by Robert Aikman (Tartarus/Durtro); *Hearts in Atlantis* by Stephen King (Hodder & Stoughton); *Lonesome Roads* by Peter Crowther (Razorblade Press); *Moonlight & Vines* by Charles de Lint (Tor); *What You Make It* by Michael Marshall Smith (HarperCollins).

Best Short Fiction: *The Entertainment* by Ramsey Campbell (999); *The Hand That Feeds* by Peter Crowther & James Lovegrove (Enigmatic Variations); *Leningrad Nights* by Graham Joyce (PS Publishing); *Where the Town goes at Night* by Tanith Lee (Interzone #147); *White* by Tim Lebbon (MOT Press).

Best Artist: Lisa Busby; Les Edwards; Gerald Gaubert; Josh Kirby; Iain Maynard.

Best Small Press: Enigmatic Press; Interzone; Kimota; Razorblade Press; The Third Alternative.

Sunday 3rd September at 5.25pm on BBC2 THUNDERBIRDS are go again! The digitally remastered puppet show hits our screens again. If you're looking for Christmas presents already *Radio Times* have 50 Tracy Islands to give away call 0901 111 4472 (calls cost 25p).

Last Month's Meeting by Martin Tudor

Brian W. Aldiss has always been a great showman and the is true of the new bearded version – a full, patriarchal beard grown, he says, as he felt it was appropriate for a Grand Master of SF! Undaunted by the small audience (always a problem with summer meetings) Brian entertained us without pause for a good hour with numerous fascinating tales. I'm always amazed that, despite the fact that I have been listening to Brian speak at least once a year since 1980, he *always* has a new story (or ten) to tell – this time was no exception.

He began by launching a withering attack on a leading British publisher who having accepted his latest novel then “sat on it” for a year before returning it – declaring they wouldn't be publishing it after all! Treatment that would be fairly appalling if the author in question was just starting out, but when the author is an award-winning author of 46 years standing... it beggars belief. Needless to say Brian is no longer with that company.

On a more upbeat note he detailed how having been in the doldrums for most of the nineties his career has suddenly picked up. First Spielberg took over the making of the film of “Supertoys Last All Summer Long” and subsequently bought two more related stories from Brian – for a very nice amount of money. Then print on demand publisher Stratus picked up 30 books from Brian's back list! All in all, things are looking up!

After his talk Brian was presented with a 75th birthday card featuring a David A Hardy print and the signatures of all those present.

Forthcoming Events by Martin Tudor

5 SEPTEMBER 2000: The Black Lodge, informal discussion group for those interested (mainly) in horror/SF movies, will be held (for this month only) at the King's Paradise balti house, corner of Stratford Road and Walford Road (opposite the Casino Royale). The table's booked for 8pm, call Steve Green on 0121-706-0108 if you are interested in attending.

7 SEPTEMBER 2000: SHAUN HUTSON will be reading from his latest novel *Exit Wounds* and signing at Waterstones, New Street from 6.30pm, tickets cost £2, redeemable against purchases of *Exit Wounds* on the night. Call 0121 631 4333 for further information.

8 SEPTEMBER 2000: FANTASYCON LAUNCH PARTY, from 15.00 join Waterstones (New Street, Birmingham) in welcoming the British Fantasy Society back to Birmingham for FantasyCon 2000. Guests of honour and wine. Call 0121 631 4333 for further information.

8 SEPTEMBER 2000: Joint meeting with FantasyCon 24 at the Britannia. Confirmed guests so far include Stephen Lawhead, Doug Bradley, Storm Constantine and Stan Nicholls, whilst included amongst the con's activities on Friday is the Fantasy Quiz, further information above. NB: You must be a BSFG member and SHOW YOUR MEMBERSHIP CARD to attend free of charge. (Day membership is £25 for BFS members and £30 for others.)

8-10 SEPTEMBER: FantasyCon 24, the annual convention of the British Fantasy Society at the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham. GoHs Storm Constantine, Stan Nicholls. Further information from 46 Oxford Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT, UK or <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/files/fc200reg4.jpg>

10 SEPTEMBER 2000: FantasyCon 2000 mass signing session at Waterstones in New Street, Birmingham between 11:00 - 12:00. The best in science fiction, fantasy and horror. More than 20 of the best in their genres will be here, including: Stan Nicholls, Stephen Lawhead, Storm Constantine, Anne Gay and many more - a coffee morning with a difference. Call 0121 631 4333 for further information.

13 SEPTEMBER 2000: PATRICK MOORE "Into Space 3, Explorers of the Skies" - in this third talk of the series Patrick Moore continues his "exploration of the heavens and tells the story of the great (and often highly eccentric) people of Astronomy & Space in this amusing and entertaining talk, moving from ancient times to the present". Oakengates Theatre, Telford. Tickets £7.50 (£6.50) call the Box Office on 01952-619020.

14 SEPTEMBER 2000: Kevin Warwick, one of the worlds leading authorities on cybernetics, will be appearing at Waterstones, New Street, Birmingham (from 6.30pm) with his robots for a lively debate on his new book, *Q.I. The Quest for Intelligence*. This is a challenging and controversial book about intelligence in humans, animals and robots. Tickets cost £2, redeemable on the night against the purchase of the book. Call 0121 631 4333 for further information.

3 OCTOBER 2000: The Black Lodge, informal discussion group for those interested (mainly) in horror/SF movies, meets at the Hoghead, Newhall Street, Birmingham city centre from 8.30pm. Contact Steve Green on 0121-706-0108 for further details.

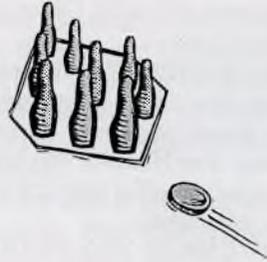
13 OCTOBER 2000: BSFG versus Birmingham University SF Society Quiz at the Britannia Hotel, New Street. 7.45 for 8pm.

10 NOVEMBER 2000: Joint meeting with Novacon 30 at the Britannia featuring a presentation by Major Tate on Spaceguard UK. BSFG members receive a free day membership on production of their BSFG membership cards at the Registration desk (£15 for non-members). Further details to be announced.

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVA CON 30 at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Chris Priest, Special Guest Rog Peyton, Guest Artist David A Hardy. Attending membership costs £32.00 in advance or £35.00 on the door. Day membership is £15.00 for Friday, £20 for Saturday and £15.00 for Sunday. Contact: Steve Lawson, Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html>

11 NOVEMBER 2000: TERRY PRATCHETT signing copies of THE TRUTH from 11am at Andromeda. Call 0121-643-1999 for further details or check <http://www.andromedabook.co.uk>

8 DECEMBER 2000: BSFG SKITTLES EVENING, at the Selly Park Tavern, Pershore Road, Birmingham. (On 45 & 47 bus route, 10 minutes from city centre.) £10 per ticket, available at Group meetings or by post (cheques to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group") from Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY9 7XN.



29 DEC 2000-1 JAN 2001: Hogmanaycon, Central Hotel, Glasgow. GoHs: Spider & Jeanne Robinson, Sydney Jordan, Archie Roy, Vince Docherty, Oscar Schwiglhofer. Membership £35.00, contact: c/o 26 Avonbank Road, Rutherglen, Glasgow, G73 2PA; john@gelsalba.demon.co.uk; www.members.tripod.co.uk/Chris_Boyce/conpage.htm

6-11 FEBRUARY 2001: THE HOBBIT by J R R Tolkien, adapted by Glyn Robbins, directed by Roy Marsden will be staged at the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham. Call 0870-607-7533 for tickets or 0121 632 5554 for further information.

13-16 APRIL 2001: Paragon, the British National SF (Easter)Con at Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lianne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership now £35 Attending, £15 Supporting, £17.50 Junior (12-16) and £15 Child (5-11), Infants free. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk or check the web site at www.keepsake-web.co.uk/paragon

29 MARCH-1 APRIL 2002: Helicon 2, the British National SF (Easter)Con, at Hotel de France, Jersey. Guests tba. Membership £30 Attending, £15 Supporting/Junior. Contact 33 Meyrick Drive, Wash Common, Berks., RG14 6SY.

Although details are correct to the best of my knowledge, I 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 me, Martin Tudor, (e-mail empties@breathemail.net). 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 - MT.]

The Roscoe Report by Steve Green

The X-Men took £4.7m in its first UK weekend, the best opening this year and historically second only to last year's *Toy Story 2*. No other film this year made it into seven figures

Martial arts maestro Jet Li - star of *Black Mask* and the only person worth watching in *Lethal Weapon 4* - has reportedly been approached to join the cast of the two *Matrix* sequels. Should save on special effects.

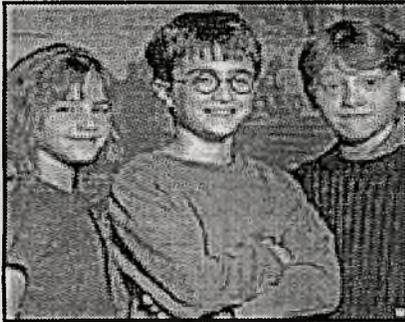
Tim Burton's remake of *Planet of the Apes* will apparently star Mark Wahlberg (indicating a shift in emphasis from the actionfest guaranteed by erstwhile director James Cameron's original casting of Arnold Schwarzenegger). Bizarrely, the project may be retitled *The Visitor*, instantly losing one of its major assets: the brandname.

Schwarzenegger, meanwhile, is presumably hoping *Terminator 3* will resurrect his floundering career. Edward Furlong may reprise his role as John Connor, possibly joining Steve Buscemi, but the lasting acrimony between original director James Cameron and ex-wife Linda Hamilton puts her own return in some doubt, despite his passing on the project due to his post-*Titanic* contract at Fox and co-producer status on the new tv series *Dark Angel*. (This also let to his bailing from the long-delayed *Spiderman* project, now being helmed by the Renaissance man himself, Sam Raimi.)

Angelina Jolie will drive a top secret car designed by Aston Martin in the new *Tomb Raider (2001)* film currently shooting at Pinewood studios. The car will be seen for the first time when the film opens, and until then nobody apart from cast and crew will get a look. The prototype V12 Vanquish has a top speed of 190 miles-per-hour and will cost between \$255,000 and \$300,000 when it comes on the market next year. Sean Connery appeared alongside an Aston Martin DB7 in many of the Bond movies. The new vehicle is made from an

aluminium and carbon fibre mix which makes it extremely light and strong, ideal for the spectacular stunts expected in *Tomb Raider (2001)*.

Doctor Who fans lamenting the collapse of yet another movie project should bear in mind the track record of its mooted director, Paul Anderson: the incomprehensible *Solaris* rip-off, (non-) *Event Horizon*, and the dialogue depleted Kurt Russell actioner, *Soldier*. It was probably a mercy killing.



Despite the rumours, Warner Brothers has announced that the title role in the film version of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* will indeed be British: 11 year-old Daniel Radcliffe (pictured with Emma Watson as Hermione and Rupert Grint as Ron), who recently took the lead in the BBC's *David Copperfield*. This should come as a relief for those outraged at reports that director Chris Columbus favoured

an American pre-teen, not least author Joanne Rowling (now tagged as Britain's highest-earning woman). The film is due for US release in November next year; no word yet on the UK schedule.

The unabridged audiobook of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* will be released as an eight-cassette set by Cover to Cover in mid-September. As with the previous two in the sequence, the reader is Stephen Fry and there are two cover designs (as well as a limited "collector's" run with coloured cassettes), but it's the longest to date - over 12 hours. A 10-CD version is due in October, at nearly twice the cost (£53 compared to £27). Cover to Cover can be contacted on 01672 562255 <email@covertocover.co.uk>.

Jeremy Bulloch has intimated he won't be joining Euan McGregor and Samuel Jackson in *Star Wars: Episode II* - but given he plays Boba Fett with a silver wastebin on his head, will anyone notice? Far more interesting are whispers that Christopher Lee will emerge from the Dark Side, as an ancient evil Jedi knight.

Talking of a galaxy far away, congratulations to Dave Prowse, who received an MBE in June for his charity work and promotion of road safety. The former Darth Vader is a regular at film festivals, raising many a laugh with his professed bewilderment at George Lucas' decision to dub James Earl Jones' bass vocals over his own West Country drawl. Imagine it now: "Get orf moi Deff Stargh!"

Rob Lowe leads a group of third-rate superheroes in *The Specials*, which will probably hit these shores in early 2001. If you can't wait, you can catch most of the likely jokes in *Mystery Men*, just out on video/DVD.

Just like the eponymous bloodsucker, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* refuses to quit its cinematic afterlife. Whilst Christopher Plummer prepares to become the latest Professor Van Helsing, alongside Johnny Lee Miller and Jeri Ryan in *Wes Craven presents Dracula 2000*, Joe Chapelle's *Dracula: A True Story* will take us back to Vlad's early days. Garlic, anyone?

Not only vampires live on after death. Those bewitched by *The Sixth Sense* and its adolescent psychic can catch up with Cole's further adventure in a new series of novels from Scholastic. First out is *Survivor*, with *Runaway* to follow in December; both should be available as US imports via Andromeda.

As *Star Trek: Voyager* enters its seventh and final season, leaving the franchise off-air for the first time in more than a decade, the cracks are beginning to show. Some of the cast welcome the rumour that they'll finally get back to Earth; others couldn't care less. Robert Beltran (Chakotay) told *Sci-Fi* only a re-focus upon the characters can restore freshness to the show: "There are no interpersonal relationships. We're basically repeating ourselves over and over."

(Male *Star Trek* fans polled by The Roscoe Report have promised to give us their opinions as soon as they've finished discussing the engineering principles behind 7 of 9's uniform.)

RIP: Sir Alec Guinness, 5 August. *The Man in the White Suit* is, of course, by far his best science fiction movie, displaying one major ingredient missing from the *Star Wars* series: *science*.

The Pagan Federation is reportedly being "swamped" with enquiries (well, about three per day) from fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. A spokesman was quoted by West Midlands Metro (4/8/00): "We explain to young callers the principal ethic of witchcraft - that you should not cause harm to anyone - and also that it's not an easy way to get a new boyfriend."

The same edition reported that *Lord of the Rings* topped a WH Smith popularity poll (the Bible came third). Catherine Cookson was favourite author, followed by Stephen King and Roald Dahl; Tolkien came 12th.

Mulder missing? Scully pregnant (again)? Par for the course at *The X-Files*, as creator Chris Carter struggles to tie up all the loose ends before the filing cabinet is slammed shut for the last time. David Duchovny signed back on with days to spare, but will appear in no more than 11 episodes; Gillian Anderson

had no choice, being already under contract. The emphasis upon background characters should help foreground the Lone Gunmen, who get their own spin-off series in the New Year.

Book Reviews

The Tower and the Hive by Anne McCaffrey

Corgi; £5.99; 396pp; pb

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

Star Rating ***

What Anne McCaffrey started with 'The Rowan' back in 1990 has taken nearly a decade to complete with this the fifth book in the series and it has not lost any of its strength in story telling over the years.

The first book in the series introduced us to the FT&T of Earth, a group of people with Psi powers and the shout of help from the humans on Deneb who are being attacked by an unknown alien race. With the defeat of the Hive's invasion of Deneb, the stage was set for the dynastic tale of the Rowan and her husband Jeff Raven and the next generations of the Raven clan. Also fighting the Hive, are the Mrdini who's worlds have been attacked for generations, and when contact is made between the Mrdini and Humans The Star League Alliance is eventually formed. With the battle being taken to the Hive rather than simply defending against their incursions Humans and Mrindi start to trace the source of the Hives home world.

The following books in the series, Damia, Damia's Children and Lyon's Pride written over the following four years chart the growth of the FT&T as well as the swelling numbers of the major clans within the organisation. The fight to control the Hives incursions into the Star League Alliance continues unabated. The young of both species being brought up together strengthen the bond between the Humans and Mrdini. As the Star League Alliance expands the search for more Telepaths and Tele-kinetics to help communications and the flow of trade between worlds is an ongoing headache for Jeff Raven 'Earth Prime'.

In this the fifth book of the series 'The Tower And The Hive' the search for worlds that have been colonised by the Hive goes on, but during the quest, subtle differences between the Hive Queens is noticed. Also that the Hive sphere's don't always pick what the Human Mrindi alliance consider suitable worlds to colonise. The search for the answers and a possible way to control the Hive is an elusive question to answer. As well as this quest for knowledge concerning the Hive there is murmuring's of discontent from certain elements within the FT&T who are not related to the prime talents within the organisation and have not received the power that they think is rightfully theirs.

Once again Anne McCaffrey has produced a novel that shows no signs of her imagination flagging. To intersperse a series of five books spanning a decade with other great works of Science Fiction is truly amazing. The freshness of each novel in the series goes without question, and this is a must for all the Anne McCaffrey fans out there.

WASP by Eric Frank Russell

VG (Gollancz Collectors' Editions); £9.99; 175p; pb

Star rating ****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

This is the first of the (relatively) new Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions that I've read. I can only say 'Hurrah!' for Orion and that nice chappie who runs the SF side.

The Collectors' Editions are bringing back many good (not to mention concise – whatever happened to slender books – the same that happened to slender fans presumably – self indulgence) out of print books. Fabulous. I do wonder why, however. Not why they're reprinting good books, but why they've chosen quite this format. The SF Masterworks has apparently the same mission. Many excellent books have been rediscovered and produced at a quite reasonable price with iffy to superb cover art. So what is the point of the Collectors' Editions? Presumably not-quite-masterworks in the traditional bright yellow colours and at quite a substantial price increase. Eh?

Most, if not all, BSFG members are old enough to have a sneaking affection for the old Gollancz yellow jackets, easily spotted on library shelves. In the same way, most of us already own the books being reprinted. I have at least half of the books advertised on the back of this particular book (including a very tatty copy of WASP). Why would people without this residual affection pay £10 or more for (admittedly good) books with no artwork when great books with good artwork are available for £6 to £7 from the same publisher? Oh well, as we have observed over the years, the ways of the marketing department are strange. Perhaps SF writers ought to examine this mindset when looking for ideas for aliens instead of the Japanese. I seem to be rambling. Sorry.

So, WASP. I like this book. It's not one of those that I've reread often over the years and it was a pleasant rediscovery. It's about James Mowry, recruited to be a 'wasp' in the war against the Sirians. Luckily James was born in Masham, capital city of Diracta – the Sirian home planet. With the removal of his wisdom teeth, pinned back ears and a few pints of purple dye, James Mowry is able to play the part of a native-born Sirian and do it well enough to fool the Sirians. This is just as well because, though Earth is technologically superior, the Sirians have ten times the population and without the action of 'Wasps' such as James, the Sirians will win the war through sheer weight of numbers.

James' job is to cause as much disruption as possible 'behind the lines'. He is to occupy the effort and attention of as much of the Sirian war machine as possible, turning their attention to quelling an initially imaginary internal rebellion instead of focussing on the war with Earth. As the recruiter says, '...in suitable circumstances, one can obtain results monstrously in excess of the effort.'

How James completes his mission is fascinating. If you thought about it you could come up with some of the ideas. Eric Frank Russell's achievement was to think of them, put them together in a splendidly entertaining book and yet manage to make the war seem petty and ridiculous. This seems to me to be an anti-war book much in the tradition of *Bill the Galactic Hero*.

James Mowry isn't a character with great depth; what he does is far more important than what he thinks or feels. He's a reluctant volunteer; no hero, merely a pawn. Similarly, the Sirians are just (purple) people, worried about their day-to-day concerns, only vaguely bothered about the war. The immediate evil for the Sirians is the Kaitempi, the secret police. For both the Sirians and for James, their own officialdom is more dangerous than the enemy.

This book was written in 1957. Apart from the computer system working on punched cards (I vaguely remember punched cards), this book is as relevant today as it ever was. Go out and buy it if you don't already own it. The extra £3 cost for the book isn't really OK but at least you get integral bookmarks and a few of these scattered through your bookcase will brighten it up.

ICE TOWER by Christopher Evans

Dolphin; £3.99; pb; 119 pp

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Or is it 'ICETOWER'? I think so, because although the (rather nice) cover clearly says ICE TOWER, inside it is always ICETOWER. While I'm at it, another couple of niggles about the cover. The front illo shows too young men standing back-to-back on the top of a tower on which they barely have room to stand. This never happens. Also -- and this complaint applies not just to this cover, but one sees it everywhere (such as in Sad Café's 'Everyday Hurts'): it is not, as it says here, "It's the same everyday." It should be "It's the same every day". Think about it (the copywriter obviously didn't!)

OK, now to the book. I didn't know when I picked up this review copy that it is a juvenile. How would I? Only by reading the small print on the credits page can one find "a Dolphin paperback by Orion Children's Books". Surely children's books should advertise this fact on the cover, along with some guide as to age suitability? Notwithstanding, this is quite an entertaining, if short, read, and I was quite pleased with myself for working out the 'word puzzle' it contains, early on. Two boys, friends, but one having seemingly turned nasty, are on their way home on the school bus. It is snowing, and the driver leaves to make a 'phone call at the top of a steep hill. One of the boys fiddles with the

hand-brake, and they hurtle downwards. . . When Rhys awakes, his friend Jack is in some sort of coma, and he has to drag him around -- fortunately getting lighter and lighter -- as he encounters a series of fantasy-type adventures in the Icetower, populated by animated paintings, a Shadowman, a Black Knight, a talking jackdaw who gives Rhys cryptic word clues, and various mythic beasts. Young teenagers should enjoy it.

Apparently this is one of the Dreamtime series, with other titles written by Stephen Bowkett, Jenny Jones and Colin Greenland. But each story is obviously quite separate and individual, except that, presumably, it takes place in this 'other', dreamlike world.

PRELUDE TO DUNE: HOUSE ATREIDES

by Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson

NEL; 604pp; £6.99; pb

Star Rating: ***

Reviewed by Michael Jones

When Frank Herbert died in 1986 he had already started work on a seventh novel in his *Dune* series. Now Brian Herbert, in collaboration with Kevin J. Anderson, has taken on the continuation of his father's work, but instead of that seventh book they have chosen to write a prequel trilogy beginning some forty years before that first epochal novel. (There is a hint that the seventh book may be completed also at some later date.)

Brian Herbert has obviously immersed himself totally in the saga of *Dune* and this new volume dovetails perfectly with those already published. The original *Dune* gave a sense of historical background and from one point of view it is interesting to see where in this background the characters are coming from and how the alliances and rivalries that shaped events in that book came to be. The earlier lives of several characters who become major players in *Dune* (Duke Leto, Baron Harkonnen, Liet Kynes, Duncan Idaho, Emperor Shaddam, etc.) are followed and doubtless subsequent volumes will fill in the gaps still remaining. However, it must never be forgotten that it is not Frank Herbert recounting these events and there is no guarantee that they are exactly what was in his subconscious over thirty-five years ago. One has to wobble whether it is right for another hand to take up the pen that he was forced to lay down, however high the motives with which it is done.

I have to say that neither Brian Herbert nor Kevin Anderson seems to be a writer of the calibre of the late Frank Herbert. The book is put together very well and the actual writing is competent and very readable, but the sheer depth which made *Dune* a milestone in SF, a ground-breaking novel which won both Hugo and Nebula awards, is not there. Nevertheless, despite the reservations I have expressed, it is an interesting and worthwhile addition to the *Dune* saga.

Brum Group Dates for your Diary

8 SEPTEMBER 2000: Special meeting at Fantasycon 24.
13 OCTOBER 2000: BSFG vs B'ham University SF Group Quiz.
10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: Special Meeting at Novacon 30.
8 DECEMBER 2000: SKITTLES EVENING at the Selly Park Tavern.
12 JANUARY 2000: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Brum Group Meeting Information

The Brum Group meets from 7.45pm for 8pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). We usually have a Speaker 8-9pm followed by an informal meeting until 10.30pm. Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine and taken to our meeting room, usually the Lichfield on the second floor. Admission discounts are at the discretion of the committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.

Committee and Contacts

Group Chairman, Vernon Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH. **Membership** (which includes 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) is £16.00 per person, or £21.00 for two at the same address. Cheques to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: The Treasurer, Alan Woodford, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN (e-mail enquiries bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). **Newsletter** Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail to empties@breathemail.net). **Web:** www.bsfg.freesevers.com/

Colophon

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