

December 1998

Issue 327

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair-Tony Morton, Secretary-Anne Woodford, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-Rog Peyton
Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse. Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton.

BEER & SKITTLES

**At the Samson and Lion on
Friday 11th December 1998. ***

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

Forthcoming Meetings:

8 January 1999 - BSFG AGM

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), 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 Mids, 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: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane,

Trimpley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

The Samson and Lion

If anyone hasn't yet booked for the Christmas Skittle Evening at the Samson and Lion please contact Carol Morton on 01384 825386 (before 9pm please). The minibus has already been booked so you may have to make your own way there.

Notice of AGM

This is to notify members that the Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group will be held at 7.45pm on 8th January 1999 in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union Passageway). This is your chance to discuss the way the Brum Group is run and to elect committee members for the year. Please make a special effort to attend.

BSFG Committee Posts

By Bernie Evans

With the AGM looming on the 8th January 1999, it's time for all you enthusiastic members to send in your nominations for committee posts. You can, of course, nominate from the floor at the meeting if you wish, but if you KNOW you will be standing, send in your written nomination (and platform of no more than 250 words) so it can be printed in the January edition of BRUM GROUP NEWS for everyone to see. Written nominations must reach Yvonne Rowse by the 30th of December 1998 at the editorial address on the cover.

So what positions are there?

CHAIRMAN: Will chair and keep order at all meetings, and will also hold regular committee meetings (at least one committee meeting per quarter). Will contact speakers, arrange accommodation where necessary and ensure they get to the meeting on time.

SECRETARY: Should be able to type, attend all committee meetings and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee Members. Likewise the A.G.M. or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

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TREASURER: If you don't know what a treasurer does, don't bother to apply!

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Has to produce the newsletter every month. Access to a computer and desktop publishing software and/or a word processor is an advantage, but not a necessity, a typewriter and a pair of scissors will suffice. The ability to type AND meet a monthly deadline IS a necessity, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

PUBLICITY OFFICER: Will produce A4 posters, A5 flyers, and so on for meetings, and arrange for them to be displayed in local shops, libraries, and as many other outlets as possible. Will also produce general publicity for the Group, and contact radio and TV if necessary. Enthusiasm and the ability to produce new IDEAS are an important factor.

In addition two other **ORDINARY MEMBERS** may be appointed by the Committee any time during the year at the discretion of the Committee.

So, that's who we need. Which do YOU want to do?

Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

Saturday 5th Dec: 12noon. Robert Rankin will be signing APOCALYPSO (hcvr) and THE DANCE OF THE VOODOO HANDBAG (pbk). Robert Holdstock will be signing GATE OF IVORY (pbk – direct sequel to the award winning MYTHAGO WOOD.)

Forthcoming Events

16, 22, 23 NOVEMBER 1998: A CHRISTMAS CAROL a play by Shaun Sutton from the story by Charles Dickens will be staged at the Library Theatre of the Solihull Arts Complex from 7.30pm (16 & 23) and 2.30pm (22). Tickets £6.00 call Jackie Staite on 01564 775069 or Box Office on 0121 704 6962.

21-28 NOVEMBER 1998: GASPING the slightly sf, very satirical play by Ben Elton will be staged at the Main House of the Crescent Theatre,

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Sheepcote Street, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B16 8AE. Tickets £6.00 in advance, £7.00 on the door, call the Box Office on 0121 643 5858.

11 DECEMBER 1998: BSFG BEER & SKITTLES Christmas Meeting at the Samson and Lion, Wordsley including a bar meal and transport. A £5 deposit secures your place. Send a cheque made out to 'Birmingham Science Fiction Group' to 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

25 JANUARY- 6 FEBRUARY 1999: MORT adapted for the stage by Stephen Briggs, from the original novel by some guy in a funny hat will be staged at the Main House of the Crescent Theatre, Sheepcote Street, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B16 8AE. Tickets £6.00 in advance, £7.00 on the door, call the Box Office on 0121 643 5858.

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.

13-15 August 1999: WINCON V, Unicon 1999, at King Alfred's College Winchester. GoHs: John Barnes, Diana Wynne Jones, Warren Ellis. Attending £20.00 to Wincon V, 53 Havant Rd, North End, Portsmouth, Hants, PO2 7HH.

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 yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

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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 #118

By Martin Tudor

As I was writing this column I received a phonecall from Steve Green informing me of the death, on Sunday 29th November, of Vincent Clarke. After Vincent's recent illness this has not come as a surprise but it is very upsetting nonetheless. I'm sure you will read much over the next few months about what a wonderful chap Vincent was - and it will all be true.

Back when Steve Green and I first launched CRITICAL WAVE using a couple of worn-out Gestetners it was invaluable advice from Vincent (and the occasional personal appearance from Chuck Connor) that kept the duplicators working. It was Vincent who searched Kent for spare parts and rushed them to us, Vincent who tracked down a new supplier of ink, paper and (eventually) two replacement machines! More recently it was Vincent who penned the first (and to date *only*) letter of comment I received on my TAFF Trip Report - hand-written from his hospital bed!

I'm going to miss Vincent, I think we all will.

The 1998 Nova Awards were presented at Novacon 28 in the Britannia Hotel in Birmingham on the 15th November 1998. The full breakdown appears below and features quite prominently a certain newly installed Newsletter Editor (7= and 4th - not bad for the first two issues of a first fanzine, eh Yvonne?), the figure in parenthesis indicates the points scored under the voting system:

Best Fanartist

1. Don West (76)
2. Sue Mason (65)
3. Dave Hicks (60)
4. Steve Jeffery/Esjay (49)
5. Dave Mooring (37)
6. Jim Barker (22)
7. Ken Cheslin (8)
- 8= Atom (1)
Bridget Bradshaw (1)

Steve Green (1)

SMS (1)

Best Fanwriter

1. **Maureen Kincaid Speller (60)**

2. Claire Brialey (47)

3. Mark Plummer (36)

4. Christina Lake (31)

5. Martin Tudor (25)

6. Mark McCann (24)

7= Mike Abbott (19)

Yvonne Rowse (19)

9. Paul Kincaid (14)

10= Michael Ashley (12)

Debbi Kerr (12)

12. Dave Langford (11)

13. Alison Freebairn (9)

14. Judith Hanna (8)

15. Simon Ounsley (7)

16= Bridget Bradshaw (6)

Lilian Edwards (6)

Ian Sorensen (6)

Dr Plokta (6)

20. Mike Scott (5)

21= Ann Green (3)

Steve Jeffery (3)

23. John Berry (2)

24= Elizabeth Billinger (1)

Tanya Brown (1)

Steve Davies (1)

Sue Jones (1)

Alison Scott (1)

Best Fanzine

1. **BANANA WINGS (80)**

2. PLOKTA (46)

3. GOTTERDAMMERUNG (39)

4. BARMAID (30)

5= ATTITUDE (24)

SNUFKINS BUM (24)

7. SALIROMANIA (19)

8. INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER (17)

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9. DID I SAY THAT OUT LOUD? (16)
10. BOB (15)
- 11= SNUFKIN GOES WEST... (13)
TAFFLON TUDOR (13)
13. BUMPER SNUFKIN (11)
14. ANSIBLE (9)
15. THE WRONG LEGGINGS (4)
- 16= POGONOPHOBIA (3)
STANDING IN THE SHADOWS (3)
18. OLAF (2)
- 19= BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL (1)
BLIP (1)
BW: A PAIR OF WOMBATS (1)
DRUNKEN FUCKWIT (1)
FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM (1)
NEVER QUITE ARRIVING (1)
SQUIGGLEDY HOY (1)
THE UBIQUITOUS THEY (1)
THUNDERBOX (1)

(For further information contact: Tony Berry, The Nova Administrator, 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.)

Birmingham based publisher Tindal Street Press has won a National Lottery grant through the Arts Council and have announced that they will be using to promote up-and-coming fiction writers from Birmingham. The award will allow publication of novels and stories from new writers, especially young writers and those from ethnic minorities.

The first two books which will appear in October 1999, will be a novel and a collection of stories by writers under 30 on the theme of transgression. In the November 18th issue of the BIRMINGHAM VOICE Penny Rendall, one of the editors at Tindal Press, said "We are inviting submissions from writers all over Birmingham and are hoping to attract many more gems from as yet unknown writers."

If you would like your novel to be considered, send two or three chapters with a synopsis to Tindal Street Press, c/o 19 Yardley Wood Road, Birmingham, B13 9JA. Stories of no more than 5,000 words for the anthology should be sent to the same address. The deadline for submissions is January 31st 1999. Manuscripts should be typed, double-

But he will be remembered in British fandom for himself as much as for his many accomplishments. He was unfailingly kind and patient, and was always ready to help newcomers find their way into fandom. He was one of our few remaining links with earlier fannish generations, and he will be sorely missed.

Steve Green adds:

It would be tragically easy for 1990s sf fans to underestimate the debt they owe A Vincent Clarke, who died on 29 November following a lengthy illness. Vince's decades-long self-imposed exile in the wake of his marital break-up ensured his name remained virtually unknown to those entering fandom in the late 1960s and 1970s, and it is likely this injustice would have persisted had newcomer Terry Hill not spotted his name and address in an old fanzine and decided to chance a visit.

But during 1950-52, Vince and Ken Bulmer shared one of fandom's legendary addresses: 84 Drayton Park, London, aka "The Epicentre".

Two years later, he won the first British TAFF race, but was sadly unable to afford the trip, and distributed the very first "quotecards" at

Supermancon. A vocal proponent of moves to set up the first British Science Fiction Association and a founder member of OMPA (Britain's first sf amateur press association), Vince also established an extensive fanzine library and placed safeguards in his will to ensure it avoided the fate of so many such collections before it.

However, his greatest memorial is undoubtedly the generosity of heart he exhibited towards all those earned his friendship; indeed, Martin Tudor and I would have been unable to produce the early issues of *Critical Wave* without his aid. The goodwill he amassed was finally reflected in the 1995 worldcon's naming of Vince as its fan guest of honour; no one has ever been more worthy of that tribute.

(The above was originally published on the Plokta News Network. You can find this at www.plokta.com/pnn.)

It was also reported that Peggy White has had a brain tumour removed. She is reported to be doing well and is expected to be home soon. James White asks that friends not phone at present but written messages would be welcome.

spaced, on one side off the paper and be sent with an SAE. Only adult fiction will be considered.

The National Space Science Centre in Leicester has been awarded full planning permission. The innovative plans, unveiled by architects Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners, reveal that the futuristic building will appear to change colour like a mirage. The tower planned for the NSSC will be clad in plastic foil that will alter from opaque to transparent, depending on your perspective, a mosaic of insulation panels on the walls will change colour with temperature and the roofspace will be fully landscaped and planted in wave form with Alpine shrubs to change colour with the seasons.

In the planetarium dome, with its digital surround sound, you will not only be able to view the stars as if from different locations right across the globe, but you can also experience travel over the surface of the planets, down black holes, under oceans or through the centre of galaxies. The Leicester dome, one of the first planetaria to be built in the UK for over 20 years, will be the largest outside London with room inside for 200 viewers. Along with the "Electric Sky" Planetarium, the NSSC will consist of a Visitor/Exhibition Centre, the Challenger Learning Centre, the CATSAT Satellite Facility and the largest university-based Research Centre in Europe. These five components will provide a dramatic combination of educational, research and leisure activities relating to space science.

Vince Clarke

By Mike Scott and Steve Green

British fan Vince Clarke has died following a long illness

Vince Clarke died early on Sunday 29 November, having been ill for some time.

Vince had been a fan for longer than many of us, including me, have been alive. He was a fanwriter, artist, fanzine collector, magazine collector, historian, cataloguer and many other things. He was the first winner of TAFF, the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, but was never able to make the trip to the States that he so richly deserved. He was the Fan Guest of Honour at Intersection, the 1995 Worldcon.

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Ian Gunn, Australian fanwriter and artist, previous winner of GUFF has died of cancer. He leaves a widow, Karen Pender-Gunn.

Novacon 28 – a personal view

By Chris Morgan

It was great to see Brian Aldiss as sharp and witty as ever at 73. Yes, he looked old and ill, and he had a piratical eye-patch, but he was able to assure us that he remains prolific and enthusiastic about writing; he demonstrated that he is still full of strong opinions on publishers and people, still a fine raconteur. (Oh, and perhaps the newsletter should recommence the practice of a brief write-up of the previous month's meeting which are different from that advertised.) *{Any volunteers? –ed}*

The Britannia proved to be a grubby little hotel, with no road access, poor rooms and a notable lack of facilities. The staff were very friendly and helpful, though not always efficient. On Friday evening it took us 2 ½ hours to have a meal in their restaurant, despite having booked. The menu looked good, but the food was a little overdone. ('Appalling,' said Rog Peyton, a man not known for his exaggeration.)

What a shame the hotel is already booked for Novacon 29 (but maybe the alternatives are worse).

(What alternatives? Last year the Abbey Hotel was not acceptable because Lisanne Norman's motorised scooter would not fit in the lift. Unfortunately there are fewer and fewer hotels with both the function space and the bedrooms, which are in our price range. For what it's worth, I thought most of the problems were due to this being the first convention at the Britannia – next year they will believe it when the hotel liaison person says how many people will be dining and when – ed)

On the other hand, it's ideally placed for public transport, for Birmingham's wide range of restaurants and, if one should ever grow bored of the programme, for the delights of the city centre shops. The breakdown of one of the two lifts forced many people onto the stairs, and a brisk trot between the book room and bar on Floor 2 and the main programme and artshow on Floor 9 made up for the lack of a gym or pool.

Paul McAuley was a hard-working GoH. I saw him being entertaining on a couple of panels, and he was usually to be seen around the hotel.

On the whole this was a relaxing and low-key con, underprogrammed and lacking professional writers.

(Sadly it is not possible to make professional writers come to Novacon. Ken MacLeod, for instance, though booked was GoH at a convention the

weekend after Novacon and couldn't be at both. Dave Langford was GoH at a convention in the US. The writers workshop was in part designed to attract writers – ed) The bookroom was just a little too small, the artshow room far too large (high quality pictures and objects from just a handful of artists; the best items were all by Fangorn). Ian Stewart's talk about his TV lectures was hugely entertaining except for the pauses while he rewound tapes; these involved tigers, black holes, small boys and teapots that refused to break. I'm told Graham Joyce's writing workshop was excellent. The committee seemed to be doing a good job. They must have been, since events ran mostly to time with no visible problems or mistakes.

Congratulations must go to Ops for their excellent work in clearing the room and stopping conversation after each programme item, through their clever and selfless use of loud music. This may have resulted in smaller audiences, but it was undeniably an expert job.

With Stan Eling and Greg Pickersgill absent this year, the tontine of fans who've never missed a Novacon slipped to eight. The lucky ones (or sad cases) are Ray Bradbury, Vernon Brown, ½r Cruttenden, Chris and Pauline Morgan, Rog Peyton, Tim Stannard and Peter Weston. A Forrest J Ackerman Memorial zimmer frame will go to the eventual survivor.

Book Reviews

CHILD OF THE RIVER: THE FIRST BOOK OF CONFLUENCE

by Paul J McAuley, Vista, £5.99, 350 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

McAuley has a talent for creating believable alien worlds. This is one of them. But the world that he has created, Confluence, is also created. The world was built, so the inhabitants believe, by the Preservers, who then left the galaxy.

The ten thousand bloodlines who inhabit Confluence are centred around the Great river. No-one knows its source or where it goes to. Some believe it forms a continuous circle. Along the banks are endless ruins and tombs. This is a high-tech world as machines, many of them very small, are omni-present.

The central character is Yama. As a baby he was found adrift on the river, on the body of a strange woman. He has been raised by the Aedile, a kind of chief magistrate in a provincial town as his son, although they are not of the same bloodline. This is one of the mysteries set up by the narrative – what is Yama's bloodline. No-one has seen anyone quite like him before and he seems to have a talent (which he wisely keeps to himself) of controlling the machines. Throughout childhood, Yama has

invented possible scenarios concerning his heritage, but when he is sent to the main city, Ys, as an apprentice clerk, he takes the opportunity to run off – he would rather be a soldier than a clerk.

Yama's upbringing has been sheltered so the reader has the opportunity to explore and discover the world as Yama does. Like any youth, he falls foul of life's vagaries. The pace is exciting, the descriptions excellent and the plot has enough intrigue to keep the pages turning.

REAVE THE JUST by Stephen Donaldson, Harper Collins, 357 pages, hb, £17.99

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star Rating ***

This is a collection of eight stories varying in length from a mere twenty pages to a more weighty seventy four. One of the shorter ones is SF; the rest are fantasies set in one or more imaginary worlds which may or may not be the past, future or alternative versions of this one – in fact a strongly oriental flavour is identifiable in at least three.

A couple of the stories work very well: one offering a new 'take' on the old legend of vampirism and another in which rival sorcerers are to be bound by the results of a fight between martial arts champions representing each side. Most of the rest I found duller and less interesting, not least because Donaldson's inclination to verbosity (which I have remarked on before) results in most of them being stretched out to a length far beyond that which their slender themes can properly support.

To be sure, Stephen Donaldson is an accomplished and inventive writer and on one level it is possible to admire the craftsmanship of his prose and appreciate the way in which each story works itself out to a right and proper ending. It is unfortunate therefore that his insistence on exploring every nuance of thought and action on the part of his protagonists prolongs so much of his work almost to the point at which the reader is inclined to lose interest in the eventual outcome before actually reaching the end of the story, particularly when it has become obvious what the end is going to be anyway.

I did not particularly enjoy this book and I could not recommend anybody to fork out eighteen quid of their own money for it.

THE LOST CHILD by Sarah Ash, Orion, £6.99, 344 pages.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

The setting of this *The Lost Child* owes much to the predicament that the Jews found themselves in in many a European country. In this fantasy world, it is the Tsyonim who inhabit the ghetto, who are despised

and distrusted, who are scattered and blamed for the world's ills and who are also envied for their skills. One part of the story concerns the persecution which ensues when the body of a boy is found by a tailor's apprentice outside his master's home. The dead boy's mother whips up a passion for justice that seems intent on tearing the city apart. It seems that only the genocide of the Tsyonim will appease the resulting mobs.

Caught up in the situation is Lia Maurey, who finds her marriage prospects sabotaged by her future mother-in-law when it is discovered that her mother is Tsyonim. Lia is suddenly dumped in no-man's-land where the people she assumed were friends suddenly turn their backs on her and she has no cultural resonance with her mother's people.

The trigger to this situation is a talisman possessed by Jaufre d'Orbiel, the captain of the city guard, which, he thinks, will bring him immortality if only he can summon the demon it controls. As might be expected, everything goes wrong.

This is a book full of a passion which is not quite fulfilled. The intensity is damped by a characterisation which does not quite realise its full potential. The strong parallels with Judaism interfere with the originality of the plot, giving events an inevitability and the story telling is not subtle enough for the book to be regarded as allegory. (Neither does it help matters that the name of one of the main characters is consistently spelt wrong in the blurb.)

TOWER OF THE KING'S DAUGHTER by Chaz Benchley, pb,
600pp, Orbit, £6.99.

Star rating ****

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Here is the scintillating first volume of a very different fantasy trilogy. It's set in the Holy Land at the time of the Crusades, except that all the names have been changed and magic has been added. The landscape is harsh: rock and scrub; you would die quickly without water. The society is harsh: you die unless you obey absolutely – or sometimes even if you do.

Marron is a young man of humble birth, still in his teens, a recent recruit to the warrior monks of the Society of Ransom, who is learning to cope with life in the spartan fortress called Roc de Rancon. Julianne is the teenaged daughter of an important noble, promised in marriage to a young lord she has never met, brought to Roc de Rancon en route to the country of her husband-to-be. But you can relax, because this isn't a love story – though there is some unexpected sexuality among all the enforced chastity.

Magic exists in this world, but it is uncommon and excitingly presented. Early on we meet a djinni, which resembles a tall, spinning

column of dust – but speaks and has great powers. There is also a source of magical light, ‘The King’s Eye’, used by their leaders to terrify the common monks. And there is the mention of a complete country sealed by magic so that no-one can enter it.

Duty, betrayal and fanaticism are the central themes in this pacy, enjoyable book which offers a complex society and deeply developed characters. These are people you can believe in and care about. Marron is taken on as a squire by Sieur Anton, the black sheep of a good family. Julianne has come to the castle in the company of Elisande, a very enigmatic young woman of her own age, whom she met by the roadside and who knows more than she admits.

Brenchley is a skilful writer. You probably won’t have heard of him or read any of his twelve previous novels (though you really should have done) because they’re crime and horror. But don’t miss this one, which promises to be as good as Robin Hobb’s ‘Assassin’ series. A word of warning: the first chapter of *The Tower of the King’s Daughter* is slow, difficult and worth omitting. Begin with chapter 2 and you’ll be instantly captivated.

DINOSAUR SUMMER; Greg Bear, Voyager, pb, 367pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Star rating **

I found this a very odd book, reminiscent of the sort of books my father read as a child and I read later when staying with my grandparents.

I suppose it’s an alternative history book. It’s set in a 1947 where Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Lost World* was a factual book and not a novel. Dinosaurs were discovered in Venezuela and brought into North America as circus exhibits. As this novel begins the last circus dinosaurs are to be returned to their homeland.

A central character in the story is Peter Belzoni, teenage son of the still photographer for the expedition. He accompanies his father on the journey to Venezuela with the dinosaurs. His sense of wonder should, I suppose, illuminate the whole story for us. Not for me, sadly.

I’ve really struggled with this book. It’s not badly written but it has been a chore for me to read it. I’ve picked it up with increasing reluctance until, at page 189 I’ve had enough. I give up. I don’t want to read any more of it. Why? My first thought was that it was such a ‘boy’ book. Up to page 189 there are two women, the awful divorced wife who is off-stage and the government official who has to sanction the return of the dinosaurs. Bit parts. Stereotyped bit parts. This is very much adventure for the boys. No girlies thank you very much.

That's not all of it though. I've read far too much SF to be truly unable to cope with an absence of women. My biggest problem is that the characters don't move for me. The characters have no character. I can't identify with them. I have difficulty identifying them at all. Line them up and walk me in front of them and I wouldn't have a clue who they were.

So, no women. No characters. Even then, much SF that I've read and finished, sometimes even enjoyed, has been deficient in these two factors. The other thing it lacks is the big idea, sensawunda, call it what you will. Imagine an alternate world where dinosaurs have just been discovered and at least you could have the characterless characters wondering but imagine an alternative world where everyone is bored of dinosaurs? No wonder it's tedious.

Perhaps the last 170ish pages contain women, characters, and excitement. Too late, far too late. But just to make sure, I'm giving the book to a ten-year-old dinosaur expert boy of my acquaintance. I'll report back on his verdict.

Colophon

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This issue was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. For details of WAVE's competitive prices contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

By the way, thank you to the people who voted for me and for Barmaid. I feel very proud.

Ian Stewart
+
the Britannia Hotel,
Birmingham,
+
5-7 November 1999
+
lots of fun
=
NOVACON 29

Why not join us, our Guest of Honour the noted mathematician Ian Stewart, and a few hundred others for lots of fun on the 5th-7th November 1999 at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham?

Attending membership costs £28.00 until Easter 1999 after which it may rise again. Postal registrations should be received by 30th October 1999, after this time please join on the door. Supporting membership costs £15.00 throughout. Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to "Novacon 29" and sent to: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.