

October 2000

Issue 349

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 & 31 Chairman-Tony Berry.

This month's meeting is on

13th October 2000

**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.**

**This month's meeting features
a Quiz between the
Birmingham SF Group and the
Birmingham University SF
Society**

Next month's meeting:

**Will be held at Novacon 30 where members will be
able to witness a presentation by Major Tate of
Spaceguard UK amongst other events.**

**More details of meetings
on the back cover.**

The Quiz

The Quiz will feature two teams of four people answering 60 questions taken at random from a "Sci-Fi Trivia" pack. May the best Group win!

Forthcoming Events by Martin Tudor

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

14 OCTOBER 2000: STEVE JONES, one of our most distinguished scientists will be signing and talking about **ALMOST LIKE A WHALE – THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES UPDATED** from 7pm-8.30pm at Waterstones, High Street, Birmingham. Tickets £2 call the Birmingham Book Festival hotline for further details of this and other events – 0121-605-7000.

19 OCTOBER 2000: TALK BY A SPACE SHUTTLE ASTRONAUT - Astronaut Don Lind flew on the Space Shuttle in 1985 as a mission specialist. He spent 20 years in NASA training as lunar module pilot on Apollo, as a backup pilot on Skylab and finally flew in space on the "Spacelab 3" mission of the fated shuttle Challenger. Don Lind will show a video of his shuttle flight. The talk will take place at the Birmingham & Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham (near the Council House) at 7.30pm on Thursday October 19th. Admission: £5.00, this is a MIDLANDS SPACEFLIGHT SOCIETY event. For more details contact the secretary: andy_salmon@compuserve.com

4 NOVEMBER 2000: Bifrost, the SFSFW (Society of Fantasy and Science Fiction Wargamers) sixth annual show – open to the public from 10am and 4pm Bifrost will be held at the Sandwell Gala Leisure Centre, Edward Street, West Bromwich. Admission to the leisure centre, known locally as the Sandwell Baths, will be £2 per person and £1 per person for concessions and £3 for families. Further information from <http://www.bifrost.org.uk/>

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

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVACON 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 £10.00 for Friday,

£20 for Saturday and £15.00 for Sunday. Contact: Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or check out www.novacon.org

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: BSGF 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 BSGF 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 Jophan Report #135 by Martin Tudor

Alan Woodford passed on the following sad news from Mary Kay Kare who posted it on rec.arts.sf.fandom: "It is with great sadness (for those of us this remarkable woman left behind) that I must announce that Nancy Tucker Shaw, widow of Bob Shaw and well-known fan in her own right, passed through the Western Gate and into eternity at 8:15am on Sunday, September 17, 2000.

Nancy had been in very poor health since her debilitating stroke on September 20, 1998 and in recent weeks had been deteriorating dramatically. Her family was called back to the hospital a few hours after they left on Saturday, and surrounded her in love for the last several hours before she passed quietly and reasonably comfortably.

Steve Green reports that at the 11th Festival of Fantastic Films in Manchester, 8-10 Sept 2000, the following awards were presented:

Best Independent Movie (Short): *La Dernier Reve (The Last Wave)*, Belgium, dir. Emmanuel Jespers

Best Independent Movie (Feature): *The Last Man*, USA, dir. Harry Ralston

Delta Award (best amateur movie): *Shrodingers Cat*, USA, dir. Nora Jacobs and John Sinclair (with a judges' commendation to *Run Monkey Run*, UK, dir. Leo Nicholson).

William McCabe and Alan Woodford report that the winners of the 2000 British Fantasy Awards were announced on 10th September at Fantasycon, the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham, England and are as follows:

The Karl Edward Wagner Award Anne McCaffrey

Best Novel August Derleth Award Indigo Graham Joyce (Michael Joseph)

Best Short Fiction White Tim Lebbon (MOT Press)

Best Anthology The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 10 Ed. Stephen Jones (Robinson)

Best Collection Lonesome Roads Peter Crowther (Razorblade Press)

Best Artist Les Edwards

Best Small Press Razorblade Press.

Forthcoming video releases: Christian Bale as yuppie serial Killer Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (16 Oct); the vaguely futuristic gangster flick *24 Hours in London* (24 Oct); *Scream 3* and Stephen King's prison chiller *The Green Mile* (both 30 Oct); the supernatural thriller *Final Destination*, top notch sequel *Toy Story 2* and big budget space drama *Mission to Mars* (all 6 Nov); telefantasy spoof *Galaxy Quest* (13 Nov); the delightful fantasy *Stuart Little* (27 Nov).

The 2000 Hugo Award Winners announced at Chicon were as follows: Best Novel *A Deepness in the Sky* by Vernor Vinge (Tor); Best Novella ""The Winds of Marble Arch" by Connie Willis (Asimov's 10-11/99); Best Novelette "1016 to 1" by James Patrick Kelly (Asimov's 6/99); Best Short Story "Scherzo with Tyrannosaur" by Michael Swanwick (Asimov's 7/99); Best Related Book *Science Fiction of the 20th Century* by Frank M. Robinson (Collectors Press); Best Dramatic Presentation *Galaxy Quest*; Best Professional Editor Gardner Dozois (Asimov's Science Fiction); Best Professional Artist Michael Whelan; Best Semiprozine *Locus* edited by Charles N. Brown; Best Fanzine *File 770* edited by Mike Glycer; Best Fan Writer Dave Langford; Best Fan Artist Joe Mayhew; John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer Cory Doctorow (2nd year of eligibility).

Toronto has won the right to host the 2003 Worldcon, Torcon 3 will be the name of the 61st World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in Toronto, Canada from August 28-September 1, 2003. Torcon 3 Guests of Honour will be George R.R. Martin, Frank Kelly Freas and Mike Glycer, with Spider Robinson as Toastmaster. Attending memberships are C\$170 or US\$115 until December 31, 2000. Discounts apply if you presupported the bid or voted in site selection. Contact Addresses: Torcon 3, P.O. Box 3, Station A, Toronto, ONT M5W 1A2 Canada, Email: info@torcon3.on.ca or check out their website: www.torcon3.on.ca

The latest TransAtlantic Fan Fund news is that 25 years after tied winner Bill Bowers was unable to make his trip in 1976, TAFF hopes to bring him to Paragon, next year's Eastercon, if his health allows. The date of the next "real" race is undecided. Meanwhile, Vijay Bowen has taken over as North American Administrator and can be contacted at: PO Box 156, Village Station, New York, NY 10014-0156, USA.

Lucasfilm, which pulled its Star Wars Trilogy collection from video stores in 1997, have announced that it will bring it back in time for the US holiday season on Nov. 21. In a news release, the company said that it will release the trilogy on videocassette only and that it will be available in both pan-and-scan and widescreen versions. The collection will also contain a ten-minute preview of Lucasfilm's upcoming *Star Wars: Episode II (2002)*, including interviews with George Lucas and members of the cast and crew.

NASA officials have denied reports that a computer hacker endangered astronauts by disrupting communications with the space shuttle *Atlantis* in 1997. The BBC claims that during a rendezvous with the Russian space station *Mir*, a hacker interfered with communications and forced the shuttle crew to use the Russian station to maintain contact with NASA.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration spokesman Bob Jacobs admitted that hackers made about 500,000 attacks on the agency last year. But he said the astronauts never used the Russian space station as a communications relay.

He confirmed that a hacker had delayed the transmission of astronaut medical data between NASA computer systems on the ground, but back-up systems corrected the problem. Ground control never lost contact with the astronauts, he added.

He said: "People try to hack into the system constantly, but any mission critical computer system is insulated from the communications network." NASA headquarters did not know who had conducted the attack, but the agency's inspector general is investigating.

The BBC's Panorama programme looked at how hackers penetrate the computer defences of countries like the United States and Britain. (Further details from the NASA web site at <http://www.Nasa.Gov>)

Douglas Adams has told fans that he has finished a new draft of a screenplay for the movie version of his comic SF novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. "I finished an all-new draft of the screenplay last week, and [director] Jay [Roach] loves it," Adams said in a post on his official web site.

Adams added, "It's the first time in all these years that we've had a screenplay which clearly works and seems to solve all the problems of it needing to be both a real version of *Hitchhiker* and also a proper movie. It's been a very hard circle to square."

The film version of Adams' popular book has been in development for years. "Please be patient," Adams asked his fans. "I have to be discreet. Don't believe anything you read here that doesn't come directly from me, especially anything from so-called 'informed, insider sources,' most of which belongs in the Half-Witted Crap Forum."

He'll be back: Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed on the dotted line to return as the killer cyborg in *Terminator 3*, according to the Hollywood trade papers. The third installment in the *Terminator* franchise is slated to go before cameras in Los Angeles in the spring of 2001, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. *Variety* reported that the film is aimed at a summer 2002 release.

It's unclear whether *Terminator* creator James Cameron will sign on to direct. Schwarzenegger has previously said he wouldn't do another *Terminator* film without Cameron, and he repeated his desire to work with Cameron on T3 during an interview on *Access Hollywood* this week.

The Reporter said the relationship is tenuous between Cameron and T3 producers Andy Vajna and Mario Kassar, and that Cameron has yet to meet with either about the project. But the trade paper cited unnamed sources as

saying that Cameron has read the T3 script and that Schwarzenegger is lobbying hard to bring Cameron on board. Variety cited unnamed sources close to Cameron as saying that the director is talking with Schwarzenegger about returning.

The film will have a budget of \$100 million. No studio has agreed to distribute the film yet.

Book Reviews

WHEN THE GODS CAME DOWN by Alan F Alford

Hodder & Stoughton; £20.00; 414pp; hb

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

Star Rating *

Alan F Alford has joined a growing band of authors who are putting into doubt the basic message that religious organisations are trying to perpetuate. As people are becoming better educated and the flow of information is becoming more easily accessible, the dogmas of the church and some of the fundamental premises of Archaeology are coming under attack. To the modern reader it is obvious that civilisation did not spring into being fully formed as was taught in schools some fifty years ago but took a much longer process of evolution. Also that so-called pre civilised man had a much better understanding of the world about him than was given credence.

The modern bible, which has undergone many revisions since the *Authorised* King James version, has been edited and altered so that it is a long way from any source material. Many of the myths and legends in the old testament were recorded from much earlier oral traditions and have no doubt been corrupted through the telling, or as Alan F Alford would have believe, that the theology of the old testament was constructed on half-truths and in some cases outright lies.

When gods came down presents an interesting hypothesis that modern religion is a dumbed down version for the masses of a much older religious truth. Also that earth was seeded by meteorites from a celestial body that exploded, eventually giving rise to the legends of ancient mythological gods who fought battles in the skies and came down from Heaven to Earth. Where the real truth lies nobody really knows but as Archaeology uncovers finds that do not fit into the comfortable niche that has underpinned our understanding of the rise of the human race more and more speculative hypothesis with surface. Some of the present 'outlandish' claims of other authors may yet turn out to be the bedrock

of our future understanding, and long forgotten knowledge that has been lost or suppressed may still surface and give support to these claims.

This book must join the growing volumes of well-researched theories that are well worth the time to read for the interested reader.

THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS by Arthur C. Clarke & Stephen Baxter

Voyager; 312 pages; £17.99; hardback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating *****

The title is taken from a story by the late Bob Shaw, to whom the book is dedicated, but it has little to do with Shaw's "slow glass". The concept behind the book is a camera (for want of a better word) which can be used to view any event anywhere in space or time at the will of the operator. This is not a new idea: a similar idea was used by Isaac Asimov in 1956 in a story entitled "The Dead Past" and before that in 1947 by the less well-known T.L. Sherred in a story called "E For Effort".

Like Clarke's previous collaborative novel "The Trigger" which I reviewed in these pages about a year ago, this one takes a new science-fictional idea and looks at its likely effect on people and society. The writers have provided a pseudo-scientific explanation for the working of the device by basing it on the use of wormholes, a concept not available to the previous authors I have mentioned and as one would expect, the explanation sounds quite plausible, at least on a surface level. However, the main purpose is not to provide an account of the device itself but rather to describe the consequences of its introduction. It all takes place in a near-future world affected by social, political and physical deterioration, complicated by the advent of the "Wormwood", a 400-kilometer astronomical body due to impact the Earth in five centuries' time. Society and people do adapt to the wholesale introduction of "WormCam" technology, but the Wormwood turns out to be something of a red herring having little effect on the eventual outcome.

Asimov's 1956 story ended with the frightening realisation that uncontrolled use of such a device would mean the end of all privacy. This book takes it from there to produce a penetrating and revealing insight into what might happen when everyone has to conduct their personal lives in a world made of glass, while open government becomes a reality, war becomes impossible and history, including the origin of all religious beliefs, is exposed to scrutiny. These developments are fascinating. Stories of history are given a new realism and there is a striking review of the four billion year story of human evolution with

a new and unexpected suggestion for the origin of life on Earth. Eventually, humanity itself becomes changed at the most fundamental level.

I feel sure that however the collaboration between the two writers may have taken place it was left largely to Baxter to wind it up and the ending has his authority stamped all over it, even though the sheer extravagance of the whole remains typical of the best of Clarke. Whether I am right or not, the result cannot be accounted as anything but a total success and is a book not to be missed.

MIKE & GABY'S SPACE GOSPEL by Ken Russell

Warner; £6.99; 207pp; pb

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

Star Rating ****

Ken Russell the *enfant terrible* of the British film industry has turned his talent to this unusual novel setting the key events of the Christians new testament into a hilarious pastiche. It treats with total irreverence the myth that some people misguidedly believe as the truth and puts a rocket up the rear end of the people that believe such books as this are heresy.

Mike and Gaby two robots from a long proud lineage of Rossum's Universal Robots were playing god and delivering to earth the first two human beings, Adam and Eve, as experimental prototypes to help in the search for a cure for their incurable disease 'rust'. Enter another robot roughly identified as Satan! From here on in everything goes haywire. Nothing, to use the term, is 'Sacred' anymore. The technical marvels of the robots help to perpetrate the so-called miracles that the son of Mary and Joseph performs as he plays the son of god A.K.A Mike & Gaby.

This short novel, somewhere between Science Fiction and a film script, is a breath of fresh air that at long last deals in a humorous fashion with the con of the Christian religion. This should be compulsory reading for all the religious fundamentalists out there, and for every one else a laugh at the original Fantasy book ever written. Ken Russell has never been one to take into account good taste and I look forward to a full-length novel from what is an auspicious debut.

ASH A SECRET HISTORY by Mary Gentle

Gollancz; 1112 pages; £20 (hardback) £ 14.99 (softbound)

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating *****

I have always liked this author's work, although some of her books have been a bit strange, to say the least. She has taken a new direction several times and here she has surpassed herself to produce something entirely new and innovative.

There are two stories in this book. Nominally, the main one is that of Ash, who lived her brief life as a leader of mercenary soldiers in the second half of the fifteenth century. As her story unfolds it looks as though a supernatural element is creeping in, but this effect is subsequently found to arise from an unknown mediaeval technology. One suspects that it might even be extraterrestrial, but when the truth is revealed it is something entirely different, possibly worse, and the book is still only half way through.

The second story supplements this by including between the chapters correspondence exchanged between author and publisher as the writing of the book progresses. The author draws on previous versions of Ash's life, supplemented by translations of hitherto undiscovered manuscripts and illuminated by archaeological research. While this goes on, however, historical records are changing before his eyes and it becomes apparent that the history in which Ash lived may not be our history. In fact, it may be that the past itself has somehow been changed, with fragments of the "lost" past lingering on or re-appearing in our present. Even his book, the book we are reading, becomes affected so that only this one copy survives. It has become part of its own story.

Although the major part of the book, the story of Ash, appears to be Fantasy it would be wrong to dismiss the whole as such. The real story is actually the modern one, and that is very much Science Fiction. And what a story it turns out to be!

The only criticism I could make of *ASH* would be its inordinate length, as the writer displays an encyclopaedic knowledge of mediaeval dress, weaponry, warfare and way of life generally. This is highly instructive, and together with one feature I particularly liked - that instead of a stilted reproduction of mediaeval speech the characters' words are "translated" into twentieth century idiom complete with four-letter words - gives an amazingly authentic atmosphere, but the sheer amount of detail does slow up the narrative in places and some of the early parts of the book can be rather slow going. However, in the later chapters the pace picks up as the two stories, one Fantasy and the other Science Fiction, mesh to produce a staggering climax as alternate histories collapse together to produce one present day.

If you only buy one more book this year, make it this one.

SALT by Adam Roberts

Victor Gollancz; 248 pp; Trade p/b; £9.99

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Adam Roberts is a new writer (certainly to me), but sadly there are no details about him in this book. (Perhaps we could get him to come and talk to the Brum Group, then we'd know more?) Peter Hamilton has written: "Adam Roberts has got what it takes" and "A fascinating concept, deftly executed", while someone (at Gollancz?) has said "SALT is a novel of remarkable power, intense beauty and profound insight. In its evocation of an alien world it compares to nothing less than DUNE." Now that is going a bit far. . . But what did I think of it? you ask.

By pure coincidence I had just re-read Eric Frank Russell's THE GREAT EXPLOSION, after nearly 40 years. Remember 'myob'? I saw definite parallels as I read SALT. Parties of star-travellers, cast adrift from Earth, and each going their separate ways and evolving their own individual civilisations, laws (or lack of them), sexual mores, ways of interacting with strangers (or not). The main difference is that while in the Russell book they are on different planets, in SALT they are on the same planet. A world of desert, with very little water, and what there is, very saline. Hence the title, of course. On the first page I read: "Sodium is what stars are made of." Really? And I always thought they were composed chiefly of hydrogen and helium in various proportions. It goes on "Sodium is the metal, curved into rococo forms, that caps the headpiece and arms of God's own throne." (How does the author know that?) I hope it never rains in heaven, as sodium burns when wet -- as the author himself points out.

The book starts with many pages of pure narrative, no dialogue, which is unusual and not normally recommended. However, it sets the scene, and we realise that throughout, the story is told by the two leaders, Petja and Barlei, of their respective cities -- Als and Senaar. There are other cities, but they seem to be under the influence of one or the other of those two, which hold diametrically opposed views on most things. It is difficult to see, in the relatively short time these people have been away from Earth, how they could grow so far apart that often they don't even understand each other. To me, this book is mainly about religion, and the way in which widely disparate cultures may yet still each righteously claim God as being on their side, even when fighting wars and breaking Commandments by killing each other. . . One may see parallels with the situation in Ireland, or Israel, or -- you name it. I didn't find it all that profound, but to be fair, it isn't a bad book for a first novel, it is well-written, and reasonably original, at least in parts, and

I suspect that the author feels strongly about his subject-matter. It will be interesting to see what he does next.

So, worth a try.

THIS IMMORTAL, by Roger Zelazny
VG (Gollancz SF Collectors' Edition); £9.99; 174pp; pb
Star rating *****
Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

Another quite wonderful book and, apparently, Zelazny's first novel. Goodness! This is a book with richness and depth; as *New Worlds* is quoted as saying on the cover, 'vivid and elliptical'. This book is a startling reminder of why the 'New Wave' was so powerful.

This time the aliens are the Vegans and we're the poor relations in the galactic empire, embarrassingly backward. Most of us have emigrated and live as low-caste immigrants in astounding luxury. Many of the few remaining humans on Earth are employed as caretakers, looking after the remaining cultural sites. Conrad Nomikos, the viewpoint character and hero of the book, is Arts Commissioner for the planet. Apparently immortal, apparently almost human, Conrad is forced to escort an important Vegan on a tour of the remaining Wonders of Earth, along with a rag-bag of other humans.

The plot is tight and well-constructed but the joy of this book is the glorious images. I love the filmed deconstruction of the pyramids, the film to be run backwards, and the inevitable outrage at this desecration. This is a beautifully written book full of sly jokes ('Armageddon has come – not with a bang, but a chequebook.') I'd have published it in the masterworks myself. Go out and buy it immediately.

WALK IN HELL by Harry Turtledove
Earthlight; £6.99; 691pp; pb
Reviewed by Chris Chivers
Star Rating ***

In this the second book in the Great War series Harry Turtledove has continued his excellent alternate history of the First World War. In the first book 'American Front' the stage is set as a divided America, (read *How Few Remain*) with the Union and the Confederacy still at odds with each other, are drawn into the fighting between Germany and the Allies in Europe.

With the Union on the German side and the Confederacy supporting the French and British cause, North America is set to fight the civil war all over again. With British help the Confederacy has managed to stave off a naval blockade by the Union forces and stalemated the Unionist push to recapture the Confederate South and so bring to a conclusion a long and painful history of a nation divided. The South has a sad lack of manufacturing facilities while the heavy industries of the North can out produce the South at every turn. However the North is fighting on two fronts with the British in Canada threatening to invade and head south as well as the dash and elan of the Southern troops. Throw into this melting pot the internal war against the Mormons in Utah for the North and the Slave uprising under the Communist banner in the South and the outcome is as the First World War became a bloody killing ground. With the advent of mechanisation the means for death and destruction become even more impersonal, with poison gas, aircraft and tanks appearing on the battle lines.

Harry Turtledove has continued his well-written first book in the series, interweaving individuals from all backgrounds into an extremely strong narrative. The characters take on a life of their own with an individual's story developing as the circumstances of war around them change. From humble slaves caught up in rebellion to pompous generals who have little or no grasp of modern warfare Harry Turtledove captures the essence of the individual superbly well. It is with no wonder that Harry Turtledove has built a large following of readers interested in alternative history. *Walk in Hell* is a definite must read.

THE DOOR INTO SUMMER by Robert Heinlein
VG (Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions); £9.99; 190pp; pb
Star Rating ****
Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

This is one of my favourite Heinlein books (along with *The Puppet Masters*). Unlike *Stranger in a Strange Land* or *Time Enough for Love*, this is still quite readable. It's a nicely constructed time-travel, wish-fulfilment novel, like *Time Enough for Love*, but without the icky quality of that book.

Dan Davis is one of Heinlein's hero-engineers, and he'd certainly be my hero for inventing Flexible Frank, the perfect house-keeping machine. According to Heinlein all women want a slave to do the cleaning for them. I certainly do. Jilted and defrauded of his business by Belle, his erstwhile fiancée, he investigates the possibility of the Long Sleep as a subtle revenge. Being a red blooded Heinlein sort of guy, though, he changes his mind and decides to fight for his rights. Belle has other ideas and forces him into the Long Sleep. He

wakes thirty years later to find a number of his inventions in common use but with a mystery surrounding their ownership.

This is an unusually sunny book for Heinlein with little of the right-wing paranoia so common. The women are either low-down rats or splendid competent-women-with-blind-spots. And there's a cat. Reading Heinlein I'm tempted to say, 'To hell with the allergies, I need a character like this in my life.'

This is a great summer feel-good novel. Give it a go.

Brum Group SKITTLES EVENING

Friday 8th December 2000

at the Selly Park Tavern,

Pershore Road, Birmingham.

(On 45 & 47 bus route, 10 minutes from city centre.)

Just £10 per person!

Includes choice of meal (details to follow), skittles and the glorious prizes! Tickets 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.



Interested in SF?
Come to Novacon
at the Britannia Hotel,
New Street, Birmingham
10th-12th November 2000



Full attending membership costs £32.00
cheques payable to “Novacon 30” to:
Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road,
Sheffield, S2 3HQ, England, e-mail
x15@zoom.co.uk, or for further
information check out [http://www.](http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html)
[cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html](http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html)

Brum Group Dates for your Diary

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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