

November 2000

Issue 350

# **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  
Friday 10<sup>th</sup> November  
at the Britannia Hotel in Birmingham**

**The BSFG is holding a joint meeting with  
Novacon at 8pm, when the guest speaker  
will be Major Tate of Spaceguard UK.**

**Admission to BSFG members who are not  
Novacon members is £4.00, which also  
includes day membership of Novacon, i.e.  
admission to all Novacon events on  
Friday (see inside for details).**

**NEXT MONTH'S MEETING:  
BEER & SKITTLES SOCIAL EVENING  
SEE PAGE THREE FOR FULL DETAILS**

**MORE DETAILS OF MEETINGS ON BACK COVER**

## **CHRISTMAS MEETING**

### **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2000**

For some years the Christmas BSFG Meeting has been a Beer and Skittle social evening at the Samson and Lion, Wordsley, providing a friendly fannish fun-filled start to the Christmas Season. One problem though has been getting there – being so far out of Town has meant organising a coach which not only pushed the price up but meant sticking to a fairly rigid timetable.

This year however we have somewhere much nearer to home at the Selly Park Tavern on the Pershore Road. It's only 10 or so minutes from the City Centre by the 45 or 47 buses, and they stop right outside the Tavern. We have booked the skittle room for the whole evening, together with our own Bar; there will be the usual skittle-based games (although you don't really have to know how to play skittles) with prizes, and a meal is included in the price of your ticket, which will cost you just £10.00.

There is a choice of four meals – Chilli Con Carne, Chicken quarter, Scampi (reformed) and Vegetable Lasagne, all with salad and coleslaw plus chips or jacket potatoes. Please give your first and second choices when buying your ticket – you will get one or the other – unless you state that you are a vegetarian in which case the Vegetable Lasagne will be ordered for you.

We have to give the Tavern final numbers of people attending and meal choices by the 1<sup>st</sup> December so please contact Alan Woodford (Treasurer) or Vernon Brown (Chairman) at Novacon, or send a cheque for £10.00 payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" to Alan at 2 Old Park Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN, to get to him before the end of November.

## **SKITTLES/SOCIAL**

## **Novacon 30 Special Meeting**

On arrival at the Britannia Hotel you should go to the Second Floor as normal where (on turning right out of the lift) you will find the Novacon Registration table in the doorway of the Lichfield Lounge. The table will be open on Friday from 2pm-6.30pm and 7pm-10pm.

If you are a member of Novacon 30 collect your pack and badge, if not you need to present your BSFG membership card and ask for the special day rate of £4. You will be given a Friday Membership Badge which you **MUST** wear at all times at the con (if you are not wearing a badge you may be asked to leave the hotel).

By the way, we will not be running the usual BSFG raffle at Novacon, but we will be running a raffle in aid of the RNIB's Talking Books for the Blind project. Authors, publishers and others have donated a number of wonderful prizes, tickets will be available from the Novacon Registration desk and from Anne Woodford – buy lots it's for a very good cause! – MT.

## **Things to do at Novacon on a Friday by Maureen Kincaid Speller**

### **6.45: Opening Ceremony**

followed immediately by:

#### **Why We Are Here**

We've got three really interesting guests with three very different backgrounds in science fiction. This is where we get a chance to find out why they are being honoured by Novacon. They will be discussing how and why they got involved with science fiction and fandom in the first place – and why they are still here; what sf has given to them – and what they have given to sf.

Dave Hardy, Rog Peyton & Christopher Priest, with Moderator Chris Morgan

### **8.00 Spaceguard**

Major Jonathan Tate of Spaceguard gives a talk about what the organisation is all about, what they are doing, and what the future might hold. *[ See below. ]*

### **9.15 Science and/or science fiction**

Hugo Gernsback saw scientification as providing ideas for scientists. John W Campbell saw science fiction as a place where scientists could try out their ideas. And just this year we have heard of a science think tank that has called on



science fiction authors for ideas they might develop. But does science fiction really have anything to contribute to science?

Amanda Baker, Simon Bradshaw and Marcus Rowland

#### **10.30 PC Art Show**

A preview of some of the CD ROM Art featuring in the Art Show over the weekend presented by the artists, including David A. Hardy and Colin Langeveld

## **Spaceguard UK by Jay Tate**

The planet Earth has a long and violent history of collisions with extraterrestrial bodies such as asteroids and comet nuclei. Several of these impacts have been large enough to cause major environmental changes, causing mass extinctions and severe alterations to weather patterns and geography. The immediate effects of a major impact, including firestorms, intense acid rain, the production of pyrotoxins and the destruction of the ozone layer, coupled with the possible triggering of volcanism and seismic activity will cause a significant environmental disaster. However, it is the vast amount of dust and debris injected into the upper atmosphere, blocking the Sun and causing phenomena similar to the nuclear winter scenario that could threaten the ecosphere on a global scale. Many smaller strikes, though not globally threatening, have caused massive damage to the area of impact, and often at considerable distance. Water covers two thirds of the Earth's surface, and a major impact at sea will have far-reaching and catastrophic effects due to the production of a massive tsunami by the force of the impact. The spread of human settlement, civilisation, and particularly urbanisation, makes it much more likely that a future impact, even relatively small, could result in the massive loss of human life and property.

The chance that you will be killed by an asteroid impact is measurably higher than the probability that you will meet your end in a plane crash or die of food poisoning. Major cosmic impacts do not occur very often, but when they do, they have the potential to kill billions. Massively more destructive than a global nuclear war, this is the hazard that is most likely to precipitate the end civilisation as we know it. In recent years astronomical, geological and palaeontological investigations have shown that the Earth has been subject to a number of such catastrophes in the past, and will definitely be again in the future unless we take steps to intercede and protect ourselves. The cometary impacts on Jupiter in 1994 showed what happens when a planet is struck in this way; but we now have the technological capability to ensure that the Earth is not the next to suffer.

Despite the global scientific consensus on the nature and gravity of this threat, there is currently no co-ordinated international response. In the United Kingdom, the Department of Trade and Industry has established a government task force to investigate ways in which the United Kingdom could contribute to an international Spaceguard project. The task force will report to ministers in September 2000.

*[Jay Tate is the director of Spaceguard UK. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the international Spaceguard Foundation, a consultant to the International Astronomical Union Working Group on Near Earth Objects, a member of the Clementine 2 Science Definition Team, an associate COSPAR and a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. During the day he is an officer in the Royal Regiment of Artillery.]*

### **Forthcoming Events by Martin Tudor**

**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:** 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 (£4 for members see cover for details), £20 for Saturday and £15.00 for Sunday. Contact: Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or check out [www.novacon.org](http://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:** 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

## *The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group*

Schwighofer Membership £35.00, contact: c/o 26 Avonbank Road, Rutherglen, Glasgow, G73 2PA; [john@gelsalba.demon.co.uk](mailto:john@gelsalba.demon.co.uk); [www.members.tripod.co.uk/Chris\\_Boyce/conpage.htm](http://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](mailto:steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk) or check the web site at [www.keepsake-web.co.uk/paragon](http://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](mailto: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: Fangs, But No Fangs By Steve Green**

Pop quiz: are the schedulers at Channel 4's T4 slot (a) morons, (b) cynical morons or (c) cynical morons who believe we're even greater morons than they? No sooner had they cocked up the premier episode of *Angel* by running it a week before the BBC screened the *Buffy* two-parter which set up the spin-off series, than they shifted it forward a full thirty-five minutes and ripped out any material unsuitable for a nervous eight year-old (ie. virtually all the action sequences and any visual effects scarier than David Boreanaz's quiff) in order that two 43-minute shows can now fit into a 90-minute gap on commercial tv.



Do the math: the result is frequently an unwatchable shambles, with subliminal plots and strobe scripting. And as for the hard-won continuity between the two shows... (*Buffy* creator Joss Whedon was reportedly told by one network exec that the current dovetailing wasn't "written in stone", and responded by sending him a brick with the word "Angel" carved into it).

In an official response to the hundreds of fans who've e-mailed complaints to C4's website, a spokesman wrote: "Channel 4 believe [*sic*] that *Angel* is a series with a very wide appeal. After much debate it was felt that the best way to bring the programme to the broadest possible audience was to play it in a 6pm timeslot. We believe that this has allowed many younger viewers who may not otherwise be able to see it in a post-watershed slot to have access to, and enjoy the programme. However the Channel does recognise that there is a demand amongst fans of the programme for a post watershed screening that will allow them to see a fully intact and uncut version of the show. Therefore we will begin a repeat showing of the series in an appropriate late slot from early in the New Year. We hope this will allow fans of the programme both young and old (and all those in between!) to be able to enjoy the adventures of their favourite vampire in an appropriate format."

Well, that's alright then. After all, Warner Brothers has just released the first 13 episodes on videotape, so it's not as if the material is actually unavailable, simply a little painful on the pocket-money. They must be crying all the way to the bank.

Channel 5's relentlessly hip horror anthology *Urban Gothic* has been greenlit for a second season. Meanwhile, Davinia Taylor told *Maxim* she was underwhelmed by her first-season appearance as a consort of the Devil: "It was actually the most embarrassing acting job of my life. I was stone sober and had never met the guy before. I had to get all my kit off and they just said, 'Action!'. I'd forgotten how to do it and I was more nervous of people walking their dogs and having a gawp. Anyway, we ended up doing it there all night with all the tramps wandering about. Not what you could call an erotic experience." Quite, but I'm sure it entertained the tramps.

One of last year's sleeper hits, Joe Aherne's *Ultraviolet* is set to return to the small screen but, sadly, no one at Channel 4 had the guts to back a second season, so it's off to the States for a swift remodel. Judging by the treatment accorded *Fawlty Towers*, *Men Behaving Badly* and *Absolutely Fabulous* in their US incarnations, all that's new and original will be torn out to make it palatable for the millions of brain-dead couch potatoes across the Big Pond - by which point Channel 4 will probably find a slot for it in the T4 schedule, right alongside the emasculated *Angel*. Figures.

## The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

*(As this column went to press, Channel 4 announced it was affording a full hour to the single episode of Angel being shown on 3 November. -- SCG)*

### Letters

20 September 2000

Martin

I just wanted to say thanks for the review of World's End in the Brum SF Group's newsletter, which was just forwarded to me. It was very much appreciated.

And that was a great idea you had about me getting together with Robert Holdstock. I thoroughly admire his work and would love to bounce thoughts back and forth with him.

Thanks again.

best

Mark Chadbourn

*[Thanks for the letter Mark. A review of the second volume of the Age of Misrule trilogy, DARKEST HOUR will appear next month. Mark has since added that the third and final volume, ALWAYS FOREVER, should be out summer 2001, "barring absolute laziness on (his) part" - I'm looking forward to it. MT.]*

### The Jophan Report #136 by Martin Tudor

Science fiction writer and artist Keith Roberts died on 5th October 2000. He was assistant editor of 'Science Fantasy' while Harry Harrison (honorary president of the BSFG) was editor, and later took over as editor; he also did the cover paintings for the magazine - the one for 'Make Room! Make Room!' appears on the main menu page of the MR!MR! chapter on the Harry Harrison website.

The winners of the 2000 World Fantasy awards were announced at the World Fantasy Convention, at Corpus Christi, Texas, 26-29<sup>th</sup> October. The British Fantasy Society won the 2000 Special Non-Professional Award. Nominees and



winners in all categories were as follows:

**Life Achievement**

winner Marion Zimmer Bradley

winner Michael Moorcock

**Best Novel**

winner Martin Scott, *Thraxas (Orbit)*

Peter S. Beagle, *Tamsin (Roc)*

James P. Blaylock, *The Rainy Season (Ace)*

Steven Erikson, *Gardens of the Moon (Bantam Press)*

Terence M. Green, *A Witness To Life (Forge)*

Nina Kiriki Hoffman, *A Red Heart of Memories (Ace)*

**Best Novella**

winner Jeff VanderMeer, "The Transformation of Martin Lake" (*Palace Corbie* 8)

winner Laurel Winter, "Sky Eyes" (*F&SF* 3/99)

Tanith Lee, "Scarlet and Gold" (*Weird Tales Summer '99*)

Michael Meddor, "The Wizard Retires" (*F&SF* 9/99)

Lucius Shepard, "Crocodile Rock" (*F&SF* 10-11/99)

Connie Willis, "The Winds of Marble Arch" (*Asimov's* 10-11/99)

**Best Short Fiction**

winner Ian R. MacLeod "The Chop Girl" (*Asimov's* 12/99)

Eleanor Arnason "The Grammarian's Five Daughters" (*Realms of Fantasy* 6/99)

Paul J. McAuley "Naming the Dead" (*Interzone* 11/99)

Kim Newman "Amerikanski Dead at the Moscow Morgue" (999)

Robert Reed "Human Bay" (*Asimov's* 5/99)

Delia Sherman "The Parwat Ruby" (*F&SF* 6/99)

Howard Waldrop "The Dynasters Vol. 1: On the Downs" (*F&SF* 10-11/99)

**Best Anthology**

winner Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling eds. *Silver Birch Blood Moon (Avon)*

Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling eds. *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror:*

*Twelfth Annual Collection (St. Martin's)*

Don Hutchison ed. *Northern Frights 5 (Mosaic Press)*

Stephen Jones ed. *Dark Detectives: Adventures of the Supernatural Sleuths*

(*Fedogan & Bremer*)

Al Sarrantonio ed. *999: New Stories of Horror and Suspense (Avon)*

**Best Collection**

winner Charles de Lint *Moonlight and Vines (Tor)*

winner Stephen R. Donaldson *Reave the Just and Other Tales (Voyager '98;*

*Bantam Spectra)*

Stephen King *Hearts in Atlantis (Scribner)*

Tom Piccirilli *Deep Into that Darkness Peering (Terminal Fright Press)*

Darrell Schweitzer & Jason Van Hollander *Necromancies and Netherworlds*

(*Wildside Press*)

**Best Artist**

winner Jason Van Hollander

Les Edwards

Bob Eggleton

Stephen E. Fabian

**Special Award Professional**

winner Gordon Van Gelder for editing (St. Martin's and F&SF)

Seamus Heaney for the new translation of Beowulf

Warren Lapine for DNA Publications

John Betancourt for Wildside Press

Stephen Jones for The Essential Monster Movie Guide

Kim Newman for Millennium Movies

**Special Award Non-Professional**

winner The British Fantasy Society

Ken Abner for Terminal Fright Press

Dwayne Olson, Peder Wagtskjold, Scott Wyatt, for Fedogan & Bremer

Rosemary Pardoe for The Haunted Library

William K. Schafer for Subterranean Press

R.B. Russell for Tartarus Press

Judges were Suzi Baker, W. Paul Ganley, Tim Holman, Marvin Kaye, and Melissa Scott.

SILVERHEART by Michael Moorcock and Storm Constantine Will be launched on Tuesday 21st November, 2000.

John Jarrold's latest major acquisition for the Earthlight imprint at Simon & Schuster is an old friend and rival - Jane Johnson, Publishing Director of HarperCollins' SF and Fantasy imprint, Voyager.

Under the pen name 'Jude Fisher', Johnson is writing an epic fantasy series entitled FOOLS' GOLD. 'The first three hundred pages were given to me in New York by Jane's agent, Danny Baror,' says Jarrold, 'and I read them on the plane home. Knowing that Jane was the author made no difference to the fact that I was reading a terrific story with outstanding characters and an immediate feeling of quality.'

'I've known Jane for fifteen years or so - and for that entire time, she has been the publisher of J.R.R. Tolkien in the UK. Nothing could be a better grounding for writing classic fantasy.' The first book in the series, SORCERY RISING, will be published in the summer of 2002. Jarrold concluded the six-figure deal with Danny Baror soon after his return from New York.

Under the same pen name, Johnson is writing three visual companions for the live-action films of THE LORD OF THE RINGS, being directed by Peter Jackson and presently in production in New Zealand. The first film is due to premiere in December 2001.

Ramsey Campbell has written the introduction to the seventeen-year-old Peter Cook's previously unpublished horror story "Bric-a-Brac" in the latest issue of Publish and Bedazzled, the journal of the Peter Cook Appreciation Society. Details from 15 Temple Dwellings, Temple Street, Bethnal Green, London E2 6QG.

The following has been posted on the Channel 4 feedback page by Rebecca Kidman, in reaction to the scheduling and heavy re-editing of the BUFFY spin-off, ANGEL:

*"Hi,*

*"As promised, I have now set up the Angel petition. To find it go to:*

*<http://www.petitiononline.com/Angel/petition.html>*

*"It really doesn't take long and all you need is a valid email address. I've just created it, so this is the first place I have advertised it as so many people are for it here. Basically, when we have enough signatures I'll be sending it to Channel 4, T4 and Right to Reply.*

*"Thanks for your support!"*

Anne Sudworth, whose ENCHANTED WORLD has just come out from Paper Tiger, had mixed feelings on hearing that, while on show at a gallery whose name we will not mention for obvious reasons, one of her paintings had been removed by thieves from the wall and was half out of its frame when the scoundrels were disturbed: relief that the painting was safe and undamaged, of course, but still a horrible feeling of "what if?".

Her mood was improved by the news that the board of The House of Glass, the new northern regional museum, were so delighted by their big inaugural exhibition of her work that they've decided, astonishingly, to have her back for another solo show - they'd hoped for Spring 2001 but in fact she's settled with them for October 2001. Although the normal trade edition of the book sells for £20/\$29.95, there is also a limited, signed, slipcased edition with four extra loose prints in the UK (costing £75) for further details e-mail [papersnarl@aol.com](mailto:papersnarl@aol.com).



There are also plans for a limited, slipcased edition, signed by both the authors, of January's THE ART OF CHESLEY BONESTALL the whopping definitive work (complete with over 300 illustrations) on the life and art of the master.

The end of October sees the publication of Neil Wilson's SHADOWS IN THE ATTIC: A Guide to British Supernatural Fiction 1820-1950, featuring a foreword by Ramsey Campbell. The book's going to cost £45, but it weighs in at 576 pages and "Neil Wilson has identified the two hundred top writers active in the supernatural genre during its 'golden age' – from the end of the Gothic period to the birth of modern Horror. Bibliographic details of first book appearances of stories and novels are given, with separate author and title indexes. Every work listed is accompanied by informed annotations and notes. Biographical information is provided on every author included, together with sources for further research and reading, biographies, critical studies, associated works and bibliographies.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced a few days ago that it is to introduce a new Oscar for Best Animated Feature, in recognition of the "animation revival". There's been growing concern that animated movies, many of which make impressive figures at the box office, have been losing out at the Oscars: either they're treated as shorts (which of course they're not) or they find themselves being automatically passed over in the Best Movie category in favour of glitzy live-action rivals. It's expected the new award will make its first appearance in the 2002 Oscars; the only caveat is that it won't be given in years where it's felt there aren't enough animated features in the race to make an award meaningful.

As Brian Aldiss mentioned at the meeting in August House of Stratus have signed him to its continually expanding publishing list. Recently appointed a "Grand Master of Science Fiction" by the SF Writers of America and Honorary Doctor of Literature by the University of Reading, more than 30 titles will be made available within the next few months.

Stratus are working closely with the prolific author on a new work of fiction, due to be published in 2001. His long and distinguished writing career now spans over 40 years and he is still inspired to write and tour, reaching fans of all ages on an International scale.

Brian commented in the Stratus press release: "I am very pleased to be working with Stratus and delighted that from now on, none of the titles that they are publishing will be allowed to go out of print."

House of Stratus utilise digital printing technology and are the only publisher in the UK who print for themselves in this manner. From their printing plant in Thirsk, on demand production means that orders are fulfilled immediately and books will never be remaindered or pulped.

House of Stratus also believe that the key to maximising the potential of any sales is to market each author as an individual brand. David Lane, Chief Executive explains "We look at each author from a pure marketing point of view. How can we add value and increase their brand equity?" All the authors who sign to Stratus benefit from this long-term marketing philosophy for both new titles and popular re-issues.

Stratus are preparing a range of striking new covers for the Aldiss titles and Sasha Morton, Information and Events Manager for House of Stratus, says "We are looking forward to promoting Brian's work and are convinced that once the books have been given the Stratus treatment they will appeal to both his existing fans and new readers alike".

## Book Reviews

**TIME** by Stephen Baxter  
HarperCollins/Voyager; 453pp; p/b; £6.99  
Reviewed by Dave Hardy

This seems to me a more rambling novel than usual from Steve Baxter. Probably this is because it is not focused on one story-line, such as a mission to Titan, or a Moon-mission using old NASA hardware, or...

There are actually three threads here: Reid Malenfant, who has a mission to get humankind into space, with or without NASA's help; the 'Carter Prophecy' which forecasts that we have only a couple of centuries to live before we become extinct like the dinosaurs, or worse, and the efforts to confirm that by receiving messages from the future (rather as in Greg Benford's *TIMESCAPE*) and to see what we can do to avoid it; and the 'Blue Children' — a sudden epidemic of children who are 'strange', vastly more intelligent than their peers, and appear to have a secret mission of their own, regardless of the authorities' efforts to control or segregate them (often using pretty horrific and inhumane methods).

The latter theme is of course not new in SF. We all know John Wyndham's *THE CHRYSALIDS* (*MIDWICH CUCKOOS*), television's *THE TOMORROW*

## *The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group*

PEOPLE, and so on. But they are essential to the story, and indeed play an extremely important role in developments. Oh, and they all wear a blue circle.

Malenfant plans a mission to an asteroid — piloted by an intelligent squid. The squids, too, have their own story, so I suppose there are four threads really. The asteroid, Cruithne, is actually Earth's second moon, though it has a very complicated orbit, and it seems to have something to do with Earth's eventual fate, according to a message from the future. It turns out that there is some sort of alien artifact there, with a link to the blue circle which obsesses the children, and to time itself (hence the title). But I won't give any more away; read it and find out for yourself. Baxter is never afraid to take his ideas to the limit, and to encompass vast distances in time and space, and this book is no exception, while his grasp of modern scientific theories is quite spellbinding.

Steve has one habit (about which I must ask him next time I see him) which I find irritating. No, not writing as if he is an American, using words like 'gotten' — and not just in dialogue — though this is a bit odd. No: it is the fact that he capitalises the words 'Earth' and 'Moon' (quite properly, in my opinion, since they are proper nouns, though many authors do use lower-case for them.) yet uses lower case for 'sun'. What is the logic of this? It brings me up short every time I see it, and distracts me from the text I am supposed to be reading. Earth is our planet; 'earth' is soil. The Moon is our natural satellite and important to us because it lights our night sky and influences the tides, while 'a moon' is a satellite. But the Sun, as opposed to 'a sun' which means any star, is the most vital object in our Solar System since without none of the planets, or ourselves, would exist. All of them surely deserve capital initial letters. But if one *must* use lower-case, then at least let's be consistent. (Does anyone disagree? If so, please explain!)

### **WAITING FOR GODALMING by Robert Rankin**

**Doubleday; 264pp; hardcover; £16.99.**

**Reviewed by Dave Hardy.**

Oh dear. Robert Rankin has started repeating himself. If you are a regular reader of his work you may think this is a silly statement, since much of his humour is based on repetition, running jokes, recurring characters. . . I have read all his books. I think. I got the 'Brentford Triangle' trilogy after his first talk to the Brum Group on 15 February 1985 (data courtesy William McCabe), and have built up my paperback library since his last (somewhat controversial) visit. The guy makes me laugh. I well remember the looks I got from the other passengers as I sat on the sundeck of the Eclipse cruise ship last July, chortling to myself.



Well I had to cheer myself up, having seen nothing of the eclipse but a black cloud.

However, in several of his books (eg. *THE BOOK OF ULTIMATE TRUTHS*) he has a character called Cornelius Murphy, who has a very small friend called Tuppe. In *THE MOST AMAZING MAN WHO EVER LIVED*, God has closed down Hell. Etc. In several of the books one of the characters (sometimes Elvis) has a Guardian Sprout living in his head (well, you see, God ran out of people, so had to start using other creatures, ending up with vegetables. It's all quite logical.) In at least one book, only our heroes can see that some humans are really monstrous devils in disguise.

In this latest novel the main character is Icarus Smith, who encounters a very small man called Johnny Boy. And both Heaven and Hell have been closed down. And only they can see that there are monsters among us. Sound familiar? Rankin goes further though. God is murdered (by his wife, Eartha, or his son Colin?), and another recurring character, Lazlo Woodbine, an archetypal detective who always works in the first person and only does four locations — his office, the bar, the alleyway and the rooftop — is brought in to solve the murder. Or is he really Icarus Smith's brother, under the delusion that he is Lazlo Woodbine?

If you want to find out, get this book. It's still a good read, and OK for a few laughs, but as you may have gathered, it's not as original as his earlier works

## **Brum Group Dates for your Diary**

**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/](http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com/)

## **Colophon**

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