

January 2001

Issue 352

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: Free

Price: Free

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 31 Chairman-Tony Berry

**The Annual General Meeting:
7.15pm for 7.30pm on
Friday 12th January 2001,
in the Lichfield Lounge,
2nd floor of the Britannia
Hotel, New Street,
Birmingham.**

**The AGM will be followed by an Auction!
Donations of auction material gratefully accepted!
A chance to dispose of unwanted Christmas presents!**

**NEXT MONTH'S MEETING:
9th February 2001 – details to be announced**

Happy New Year to all our members!

The Annual General Meeting by Martin Tudor

The AGM is scheduled to start, promptly, at 7.30pm – we ask that members arrive no later than 7pm to give them time to take their seats, pick up books to review, examine the accounts etc.

Following the AGM we hope to have an Auction to raise cash for the Group. If you have any material you would like to donate for the Auction please pass it to Vernon Brown *before* the AGM starts at 7.30pm.

As we went to press I have received confirmation of just one person standing for election – Alan Woodford will be standing for re-election as Treasurer.

It is with some regret that I report that for the first time in ten years I will not be standing for election to the BSFG Committee. It has been, for the most part, good fun but I'm afraid that my two posts on the Novacon 31 committee, Publications and Hotel Liaison, are going to monopolise my available spare time. (Especially the latter – we are still trying to strike a deal with a venue!)

Still, I hope that my standing down will make room for some new blood – anyone feel like being a donor?

BSFG: Committee Posts by Bernie Evans

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 AGM or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

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 ARE a necessity, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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?

[In order to stand for office all you need is to propose yourself at the appropriate moment in the AGM, if you have someone ready to second you all the better! Within seconds you could be ~~one of the mugs~~ a member of the Ruling Elite! - MT]

Forthcoming Events by Martin Tudor

12 JAN 2001: BSFG AGM, 7pm for 7.30pm in the Lichfield Lounge of the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham.

13 JAN 2001: ROBERT HOLDSTOCK will be signing copies of his new novel CELTIKA at Andromeda Bookshop, Birmingham from 1pm.

16-21 JAN 2001: PRINCESS BEYOND THE STARS a family pantomime by Graham Lewis, presented by Solihull Society of Arts – Drama Section, from 7.30pm at Solihull Arts Complex Theatre, matinees 2.15pm Sat and Sun.

Tickets £7 from Rachel Bannister on 0121-458-5909 or the box office on 0121-704-6962. "Princess Beyond the Stars takes place between the village of the Kingdom of Happiness and a desolate planet a trillion miles from Earth. In the age-old tradition of pantomime, the villagers are faced with having to triumph over evil, to safeguard the Kingdom from the threat posed by the all-powerful Repulsar!"

3 FEB 2001: WALSALL SF GROUP meets first Saturday of every month at 2pm in the Meeting Room of Walsall Central Library, Lichfield Street, Walsall, check http://members.nbc.com/walsall_sf/

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

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

£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
9-11 NOV 2001: NOVACON 31, the Brum Group's own sf con, Guest of Honour Gwyneth Jones, venue to be announced. Registration £32, rising after Easter, cheques payable to "Novacon 31" to Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

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 at empties@breathemail.net or the address on back cover. 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 #138 by Martin Tudor

On 6 January 2001, the domain www.britishfantasysociety.com was acquired by the BFS and later this month the BFS web site can be accessed from this address. Unlike other dot coms, the BFS state that they "do not intend to float on the stock market, become immensely rich then lose it all the following week!", but having had the BFS web site hosted from three locations in the last four years, their Webmistress thought it was about time they introduced a "once and forever" web address where you will always be able to find them.

THE SKIES OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey is published this month by Transworld's Bantam Press (price £16.99). A new novel of Pern and the Dragons: "It is 32 turns into what will be the final Pass of the Thread since the Red Star changed its orbit. Never again will Threadfall ravage the world of Pern. But there are further dangers threatening as those calling themselves the Abominators attempt to destroy what they, in their twisted thinking, feel should not be permitted to sully their world. In a series of attacks on Healer Halls, the Abominators strike, leaving chaos. In all the Weyrs, Holds and Halls there are

only a handful who realise that danger still exists above the planet, and that all the Dragonriders have achieved could be laid waste in a final, terrible moment.”

According to the Metro News Sean Bean has landed a £3million deal to play Dr Who in a film version of the classic tv series. The 41-year-old actor, best known for starring in the historical adventure series Sharpe, is to become the tenth actor to play the time traveller. Tara Fitzgerald, 33, is thought to have been recruited to play his assistant. Filming is scheduled for the spring with a reported £250million budget.

John Jarrold's latest acquisition for Earthlight, Simon & Schuster UK's SF and Fantasy list, is award-winning US author Walter Jon Williams. Jarrold has acquired three volumes of a massive SF series, DREAD EMPIRE'S FALL, from Williams' agent, Ralph Vicinanza, in New York.

“I first published Walter in 1988, at Orbit,” said Jarrold. “It's a great pleasure to be reunited with someone who is very much a friend as well as a favourite author. DREAD EMPIRE'S FALL is a terrific undertaking, a wide-screen SF series with characters and settings that span many galaxies. There are echoes of Jacobean blood tragedy as well as fast-moving plot lines. And Walter is one of the great storytellers, as well as the possessor of a telling wit. This is by far his biggest project, both in terms of length and concept.” The first volume of the series is due for publication late in 2002.

The Answers to
the Xmas Inquisition: 25 for the 25th
...as prepared by Cardinal Steve Green

[I'm sorry to have to report that as we received NO entries to last month's quiz and we have regretfully returned the Grand Prize of a £500 Andromeda Book Voucher to Rog unused... (Just kidding.) Still, a shame no one entered, here are the answers:]

Answers

1. Eddie Murphy. Luckier fans were Whoopie Goldberg, who has played Guinan on both tv and the big screen, and Christian Slater, who twisted mother Mary Jo's arm to cast him as an ensign in *Star Trek VI*.
2. Chesney Bonestall.
3. Giant rabbits; giant ants; intelligent cockroaches.
4. Serial killer Michael Myers, finally dispatched by his sibling in *Halloween H20*.
5. Floyd, originally approached to supply the music for Stanley Kubrick's version of *A Clockwork Orange*. The other groups took their title from the film or Anthony Burgess's novel.
6. Iain M Banks.

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

7. Jean-Claude Forest.
8. J K Rowling.
9. *Hannibal*.
10. *I Am Spock*. Even now the indecisive chap's presumably working on *Spock? Never Heard of the Pointy-Eared Geezer*.
11. Moya.
12. Robert Patric, formerly the liquid villain in *Terminator 2*.
13. NCC 1701-E.
14. Frank Herbert's *Dune*.
15. The Initiative.
16. Yvonne Rowse, whose *Barmaid* earned her both best fanzine and best fanwriter last year. This year it was *Plokta's* turn, with Sue Mason revisiting her success in the fan artist category.
17. Bill Rotsler.
18. All have edited *Matrix* for the BSFA.
19. Peter Roberts; Eve Harvey; Ron Bennett; Dave Langford.
20. Forrest J Ackerman, who will reportedly be attending the twelfth Festival of Fantastic Films in Manchester this coming August.

Book Reviews

SLOW LIGHTNING by Jack McDevitt

Voyager; 540 pages; £6.99; p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star Rating ****

This is a novel on the familiar theme of First Contact but as one has come to expect from this author, it is here given a new and different treatment. It actually begins as something more like a mystery or detective story as Kim Brandywine, a young professional scientist, is drawn to investigate an interstellar exploration mission which took place twenty-seven years previously. The mission returned prematurely and three of its four members, including her older (clone) sister soon after died or disappeared under circumstances which were never satisfactorily explained. Having solved that mystery, more or less, she manages to repeat their discovery with more success and all is happily resolved.

The background is that no evidence of other life in the universe has been discovered after a thousand years or more of searching and the human race is coming to accept that it is alone. The title compares the discovery of intelligent life to a lightning flash, but one which comes slowly because of the time taken for the discovery to be made. It is also an apt title for the book itself, which is quite slow-moving, particularly at first. Strictly speaking it is not until a third of

the way through that contact becomes a strong suspicion and even longer before it is seen to be definite – the reader of course knew all along, especially having read the prologue. Slow or not, however, it never fails to grip the attention and I stayed up until 2.30 a.m. to finish it!

There is a well-defined subtext going on behind the scenes in which McDevitt discusses why we need to explore the universe, why we need to find other intelligence and how bad it would be for humanity's future if a failure to find the latter were to put an end to the former. Familiar Sf tropes, but here thoughtfully spelt out and successfully integrated into the story.

If the book has a serious fault it is that everything is a little too pat. Kim Brandywine always knows what to do and is always able to get others to help her so that all her schemes work out. Even when she seems to be in trouble it is obvious that nothing irreversibly serious will happen to her and the drama and excitement of wondering if she might fail is not really there. Having said that, it remains a thoughtful and well-written piece of science fiction by one of the best authors around.

A DEEPNESS IN THE SKY by Vernor Vinge

Millennium; £6.99; 757pp; p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

Star Rating **

As advertised 'The unmissable epic prequel to the Hugo Award winning *A Fire Upon The Deep*', and a book I have not read. However after reading *A Deepness In The Sky* I think I must have missed something along the way. The story is a long but good read all on its own.

The tale is set within an expedition by the Queng Ho traders to an OnOff star that has remained a mystery to the races that inhabit the known galaxy. As the star is a variable no one has considered it worth the time and energy to mount a serious expedition in what could turn out to be a waste of time. But word has come back that there is a planet orbiting the star, which should not be there, considering the stars pulses of luminosity. The journey to the star can take many years by ramship so for many people it will be a one way trip. As the Queng Ho fleet decelerates towards the OnOff star another fleet manned by the Emergents is detected heading for the same destination. The stage is now set for a confrontation between the Emergents and the Queng Ho for the right to salvage what they could from the planet. The real joker in the pack is that the planet has a sentient race of spiders that hibernate during the great dark when the planets sun dims to nothing more than a brown dwarf.

The interplay between the two technologically superior groups and the native arachnids takes a long time to build up to its climax, and Vernor Vinge has deeply coloured each of the groups in loving detail. The story takes some time to get moving but is well worth sticking with as the pace of the action heats up. *A Deepness In The Sky* is an epic novel well written and a good read.

Brum Group Dates for your Diary

12 JANUARY 2001: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

9 FEBRUARY 2001: To be announced.

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

Contents of this issue are copyright 2001 the BSFG, on behalf of contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the BSFG.

Design by Vernon Brown. Many thanks to: STEVE GREEN, NAOMI CREEGER, CHRIS CHIVERS, MICHAEL JONES and BERNIE EVANS for their contributions. Thanks also to ALAN WOODFORD for the envelopes.

This newsletter has been compiled by Martin Tudor and printed on the Critical Wave copier, for details of Wave's competitive prices contact him at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX.