

# **Brum Group News**

The *Free* Monthly Newsletter of the  
**BIRMINGHAM**  
**SCIENCE FICTION GROUP**

MARCH 2001      ISSUE 354

*Honorary Presidents:*

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**Secretary: Vicky Cook**

**Treasurer: Alan Woodford**

**Newsletter Editor: Rog Peyton**

**+ Steve Jones & William McCabe**

**NOVACON 31 Chairman: Tony Berry**

Friday 9th March

## **PETER WESTON**

will be giving an illustrated talk

### **“JOHN W CAMPBELL and the ASTOUNDING days of SF”**

Peter Weston edited his own science fiction fanzine *SPECULATION* from the mid-sixties, and for many years it was considered to be the best fanzine in the US or UK for serious SF fans. His love of the Campbell era and the years that he edited *ASTOUNDING SF* (now retitled *ANALOG*) is well known.

Illustrated with slides from his large collection, Peter will be talking about one of the most important eras in the growth of science fiction - the era that gave us Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, A E van Vogt, Hal Clement, Poul Anderson and H Beam Piper to name but a few. Many

authors whose careers were launched in the 40s and 50s owed much to John W Campbell and his own particular brand of science fiction.

Come along and listen to a man whose involvement in the science fiction field has encompassed editing his own fanzine, chairing an Eastercon and not one, but two World SF Conventions, editing a trio of original anthologies entitled *ANDROMEDA* and was a co-founder of the current incarnation of the Birmingham SF Group.

You will not be disappointed.

RGP

**Peter Weston** will be giving his talk in the usual place at the usual time. Which is in the Lichfield Room on the second floor at the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passageway opposite the Odeon). The talk will commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar and be seated in plenty of time. Non-members always welcome.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**March 9-11. MECON DELTA** at Queen's University, Belfast, N Ireland. Guests of Honour are Michael Sheard, Ian McDonald, Dave Lally. Membership £17. Info from 24 Malton Court, Upper Malone Road, Belfast BT9 6HB

**April 4. Robert Rankin** will be signing at ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP (2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham) at noon. The new hardcover is WEB SITE STORY and the new paperback is WAITING FOR GODALMING. Phone 0121 643 1999 to reserve your signed copy. (And how many of you spotted the deliberate mistake in the last newsletter? Robert Rankin did NOT write PAINT YOUR DRAGON. Tom Holt was the author of that one. Nobody pointed it out to me so no prizes this month. Sorry).

**April 13-16. PARAGON - the British National Science Fiction EasterCon.** This year the venue will be the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley. Guests of Honour are Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter and Lianne Norman. Fan Guests of Honour are Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. For details of prices, etc., contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield S2 3HQ. Tel: 0114 281 1572. E-mail him at [steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk](mailto:steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk) or check out the website at [www.keepsake-web.co.uk/paragon](http://www.keepsake-web.co.uk/paragon)

**May 25-27. ECLECTICON 21** at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. Guests are Storm Constantine, Gareth Thomas, Jacqueline Pearce, Ed Bishop, Frank Maher. Membership £50. Info from 47 Bennetts Court, Bristol BS37 4XH. e-mail [eclectic21@burble.com](mailto:eclectic21@burble.com) or see website [www.eclectic21.co.uk](http://www.eclectic21.co.uk).

**May 25-27. SECCOND** at the De Vere Hotel, Swindon. Guest of Honour Paul J McAuley. Info from 19 Hill Court Road, Cheltenham, Glos GL52 3JJ. e-mail [seccond@sjbradshaw.cix.co.uk](mailto:seccond@sjbradshaw.cix.co.uk) website [www.seccon.org.uk](http://www.seccon.org.uk)

**Jun 28-Jul 1, 2001: A CELEBRATION OF BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION** at the Foresight Centre, University of Liverpool, Liverpool. Guests of Honour - Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Nicola Griffith, Gwyneth Jones, Ken MacLeod, John Clute. Guest Artist Judith Clute. Membership (including meals) £130. Authors and students £72. Info from Dr Farah Mendlesohn, Middlesex University, White Hart Lane, London N17 8HR. e-mail Andy sawyer at [asawyer@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:asawyer@liverpool.ac.uk) website [www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/200.html](http://www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/200.html)

**November 9-11 NOVACON 31** - the Birmingham SF Group's own annual convention. Guest of Honour will be Gwyneth Jones (who also writes as Ann Halam). Venue to be announced. Details from Steve Lawson at the address above. **STOP PRESS** - we have been told by NOVACON 31 chairman that they have now booked a venue! It will be in Walsall - full details next newsletter.

**Birmingham SF Readers Group** meets at 6pm on Thursdays in the Shakespeare Memorial room at the Central Library. Books shown are for discussion that night. **Mar 15** - NORTHERN LIGHTS by Phillip Pullman. **Apr 19** - CAVES OF STEEL by Isaac Asimov. **May 17** - FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON by Daniel Keyes.

*Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses.*

*Any information about forthcoming SF/Fantasy/Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at [rog@andromedabook.co.uk](mailto:rog@andromedabook.co.uk), tell me about it in the shop or phone me at the shop on 0121 643 1999.*

## SWAP & BUY BOOKS. . .

Yes, YOU can bring books to the Brum Group and make a profit from your sales. Our beloved chairman actually brought a small number of unwanted books to sell and was seriously injured in the stampede to buy his pristine unread copies (actually items he had mistakenly purchased twice!). People throwing metal money at him made his plight even worse. A well-bandaged Mr Brown was reported as saying, with a smile on his face, "Gosh, I didn't know it was so easy to make money - I took £4 tonight!"

Bring a few books with YOU next month to supplement your meagre income. There's no charge for the facility - all you need is a mug with money...

## LAST MONTH'S MEETING...

The February meeting with Graham Higgins came as a complete surprise. I'd obviously seen his name on the Pratchett graphic novels but did not know who he was or that he was from Birmingham!

His memories of working on GUARDS! GUARDS! were fascinating and when he recounted the meetings at the publishers without naming names, I found his descriptions so good, I recognised everyone he spoke about!

Altogether a very good meeting and one that I'm pleased I did not miss.

RGP

## NEWS IN BRIEF. . .

**Terry Pratchett** surprises us with yet another *Discworld* novel - the 26th - following hot on the heels of THE TRUTH. Titled THIEF OF TIME it is due out in May from Doubleday UK. This probably means we'll get two *Discworld* novels this year - May and November. The blurb for THIEF OF TIME reads:-

"Time is a resource. Everyone knows it has to be managed. And on *Discworld* that is the job of the Monks of History, who store it and pump it from the places where it's wasted (like underwater - how much time does a codfish need?) to places like cities, where there's never enough time. The full supporting cast includes Ronnie, the fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse (who left before they became famous)"

Who'd have thought it - **Terry Pratchett** writing a time-travel novel? Does this mean I'll have to read it? Well, I've got to start somewhere - haven't I? ..... Horror writer **Simon Clark** turns to SF for his next book due out in June - an authorised sequel to **John Wyndham's** classic DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS with the title - you guessed it - NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS. I'm trying to organise a signing at ANDROMEDA and also get him to do a talk to the Group. Watch this space ..... The new **Jonathan Carroll** book, THE WOODEN SEA, is one of the best novels he has written - it reads like **Philip K Dick** on speed! It's got the lot - aliens, time travel, God, and the usual mix of Carroll's weird characters and settings. Just out in the US from Tor with a tremendous cover, it is due for UK release from Gollancz in June, but hopefully they will cancel the proposed cover - it is appalling! ..... The February issue of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION included no less than 26 short short stories by **Harlan Ellison**, one for each letter of the alphabet ..... HarperCollins are issuing Tolkien's THE LORD OF THE RINGS in yet another format - paperbacks with covers based on Tolkien's original designs. The much anticipated film version of RINGS is due later this year and HarperCollins will be doing yet another issue, this time

with movie tie-in covers ..... The **Barry Levin** Most Collectable Author of the Year Award went to Britain's own **J K Rowling**. Last year it was **Peter F Hamilton**. Isn't it strange that every year the winning author is the one whose books have sold for the biggest amounts? The cynic in me is positive he's only interested in the profits his company makes. It's certainly not for the literacy - his advert in *LOCUS* spells **Anne McCaffrey** incorrectly - McCaffery. It could be just the typesetter (I suppose!) ..... And while on the subject of spelling errors - the January *BRUM GROUP NEWS* listed one of the answers to the Christmas quiz as 'Chesney Bonestall'. This should have read **Chesley Bonestell** as I'm sure many of you noticed. There's a new book out from Paper Tiger in April devoted to **Chesley Bonestell** (1888-1986) who was one of the greatest astronomical artists - if not the best - and who was a tremendous influence on a very young **David Hardy** ..... In the same month, Paper Tiger are doing an art book on the late **Richard Powers** who single-handedly changed the direction of SF art in the 1950s when he was working for Ballantine, Avon and Berkley - distinctive abstract covers that still look fresh today ..... *SPECTRUM* magazine follow up their **Keith Roberts** new novel scoop with a new story in issue 4 by **John Christopher** - his first appearance in print for many a year. And lo and behold it is announced that next month's *INTERZONE* - #165 - will be a **John Christopher** Special Issue including another new story ..... The 2000 **Philip K Dick Award** nominees have been announced. They are:- *CALL FROM A DISTANT SHORE* by **Stephen L Burns** (Roc

US); *MIDNIGHT ROBBER* by **Nalo Hopkinson** (Warner US); *ONLY FORWARD* by **Michael Marshall Smith** (Bantam US/Voyager UK); *BROKEN TIME* by **Maggy Thomas** (Roc US); *EVOLUTION'S DARLING* by **Scott Westerfield** (4 Doors 8 Windows US); *THE BRIDGE* by **Janine Ellen Young** (Warner US/Earthlight UK). Only the Smith and Young titles have been published in the UK. My money goes on **Nalo Hopkinson**, about whom I keep hearing great things. Must read her ..... The new **Alfred Bester** book - *REDEMOLISHED* - is now published in trade paperback (no hardcover at all!). It's a collection of 10 stories, 3 articles, 4 essays, 5 interviews plus the first publication anywhere of the deleted prologue to *THE DEMOLISHED MAN!!!* ..... *ARES EXPRESS*, **Ian McDonald's** 'sequel' to *DESOLATION ROAD* will be published in hardcover by Earthlight in March and they'll be reprinting *DESOLATION ROAD* in paperback the same month. Text of *DESOLATION ROAD* will follow the Drunken Dragon Press edition which was the First Edition of the author's preferred text and the first hardcover edition - published here in Birmingham, if you remember ..... *NESFA* Press have issued Vol 1 of the Complete Short Stories of **William Tenn**, titled *IMMODEST PROPOSALS*. Also the Complete Short SF of **Fredric Brown**, titled *FROM THESE ASHES*. Both will be available from *ANDROMEDA* in March. Also available will be their *Boskone Special*; this year by their **George R R Martin**. Following fairly quickly will be Vol 2 of the Complete Short Fiction of **William Tenn** called

HERE COMES CIVILIZATION ..... That other US publisher of beautifully produced classic SF, Haffner Press, will be issuing Vol 4 of the Collected Short Fiction of **Jack Williamson** - SPIDER ISLAND in the near future while MARTIAN QUEST: THE EARLY BRACKETT by **Leigh Brackett** was scheduled for December 2000 but has still to appear. They have also bought rights to DETOUR TO OTHERNESS by **Henry Kuttner** and **C L Moore**. Presumably a collection of their best work? All will be available from ANDROMEDA ..... And finally, we've heard that **David Gerrold** has at last completed *War Against the Chtorr* Vol 5 but apparently Bantam are no longer interested - they've allowed volumes 1 to 4 go out of print. So David has now to find another new publisher who will obviously want to reissue the first four before they publish the new book.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Rating system:-*

- 5 star - excellent. A must to read.
- 4 star - very good.
- 3 star - good but flawed.
- 2 star - very average.
- 1 star - read only if there's nowt on telly.
- 0 stars - Turkey! Turkey! Turkey!

### ***THE COLLECTED STORIES of Arthur C. Clarke***

**Gollancz / 966 pgs / £20 / Hardcover**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

**Rating \* \* \* \* \***

As titled, this is a complete collection of Clarke's short fiction spanning sixty-four years of his writing career and incorporating several pieces

which have never before appeared in book form. (In fact, I discovered a couple of items which have been omitted, though probably for good reasons. I also spotted several typographical errors carried over from a previous book publication).

The collection is neatly framed by his earliest and somewhat undistinguished effort to his latest, a "collaboration" written by Stephen Baxter which constructs a new edifice from the same theme and events and takes it to levels of social extrapolation, emotional content and literary quality undreamed of half a century ago. In between the stories cover every aspect of SF, from amusingly ingenious to inventively prescient, and range from those which are, quite frankly, somewhat pedestrian to others which have the emotional content to stir the soul. It has to be said that Clarke was never a literary genius and his writing style always left something to be desired, particularly in his earlier years, but the never ending flow of ideas and invention always made up for his stylistic shortcomings and there are enough really special bits of writing - most notably but certainly not only "The Star" for example - to compensate for any amount of lesser work. In essence, therefore, the individual stories vary from good to near-miraculous.

What I was surprised to find was that 899 ( 93% ) of these pages come from the twenty-five years between 1946 and 1971, while a mere 37 pages cover the next thirty years to the present day. Clarke now relies largely on other hands to convert his ideas into the written word and it is pretty unlikely that there will ever be much, if anything to add to this

collection. It will therefore remain as a fascinating study of the work of a man whose contribution to SF is impossible to overstate. It is interesting to see how his writing has always kept pace with contemporary science, with some ideas returning for further development and I was also intrigued to find several stories which later became the basis for full-length novels.

The 93% which I mentioned earlier constituted the contents of several book collections published during the same period and frequently reprinted. There can therefore be few readers without some degree of familiarity with what is here and because of that it is difficult to give a star rating as so many people will be in a position to provide their own. However, it is well worthwhile having it all together in one volume and in my case simply being stimulated to read the stories again was a rewarding exercise worth a top five stars. *MJ*

***LONGTUSK* by Stephen Baxter**

**Millennium SF / 290pgs / £5.99 / pbk**

**Reviewed by David Hardy**

**Rating \* \* \* \***

This is book 2 in the *Mammoth* trilogy, and sequel to *SILVERHAIR*. However, whereas that book was set in roughly the present day, this volume takes us back to 16,000 BC.

This series is very different from Stephen Baxter's more usual space or time epics, but no less compelling. They have apparently been compared to *WATERSHIP DOWN* - presumably because the animals speak to each other (in English, for convenience!). But any such resemblance is surely superficial. Baxter has always done his research and knows all about the mammoths' natural

methods of communication too, such as contact rumbles and smell, as well as their interaction with other creatures and hominids. And about their mating habits, migration patterns, and all else necessary to make this another well-rounded novel.

The Fireheads (humans) are invading mammoth territory and, as we discover, have already 'domesticated' their cousins, the mastodons. Longtusk, as a mere youngster, gets separated from his Clan, and this book is about his adventures, which make him the greatest Bull hero in the Cycle. He befriends a young Dreamer (another type of human, presumably Neanderthal, being ruthlessly exterminated by the more intelligent and aggressive Fireheads), and is later captured by Fireheads, though he never fully capitulates to them, and makes an enemy of their Shaman.

I found it quite compulsive reading, but I wonder where the next in the series is going. We've had one book set in the present, one in the past - and the Epilogue to this book refers to Mars in AD 3,000. *DAH*

***FOREVER FREE***

**by Joe Haldeman**

**Millennium / 277 pgs / £5.99 / pbk**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

**Rating \* \* \***

In 1974 Joe Haldeman accomplished the rare feat of scooping both Hugo and Nebula awards with his first novel *THE FOREVER WAR*. It was a story of war in a relativistic universe where soldiers are sent out to fight battles which will take place so far in the future that they hardly know what they will find and return to a world in which

the family and friends they knew are now long dead.

In this long-delayed sequel William Mandela and his partner Marygay, who survived the Forever War together against all the odds, are living with a handful of other veterans on a remote colony of an Earth changed beyond recognition. In the centuries during and since the war the human race has evolved into Man, a group mind like mankind's former enemy the Taurans with whom they are now at peace, the war having turned out to be merely a misunderstanding. William and the other ex-soldiers discover that they are being kept and supported as a kind of genetic reserve in case Man has to change the direction of its evolution, a situation from which they determine to escape.

Their attempt becomes a disaster and they are forced to change their plans completely and head for Earth. There they make a discovery about the Universe and their place in it which overthrows everything they ever knew or believed right down to the most fundamental concepts of understanding.

Although well-written and based on an amazing idea this book left me surprisingly disappointed. The revelation with which it is finally wound up is over-contrived and the eventual conclusion is inadequately worked-out. It is a long time since I read *THE FOREVER WAR* but my recollection is first that it did not need a sequel and second that it exhibited a freshness, a novelty, which gave it a dramatic impact which is lacking here. I wanted to read it because it is a sequel to an earlier book which mightily impressed me, but that on its own is not enough.

MJ

## OBITUARIES

### GORDON R DICKSON

We have just learned of the death of **Gordon R Dickson** on February 1st. A US newspaper cutting was faxed to *ANDROMEDA*. We don't think the news was reported in any UK newspaper. Certainly, none of us saw anything.

Dickson's most famous books - and the biggest sellers - were the *Dorsai* series which formed part of his 'Future History', the *Childe Cycle* of novels. The short version of his *Dorsai* novel *SOLDIER ASK NOT* won the Hugo for best novella. Earlier, *DORSAI* (abridged as *THE GENETIC GENERAL*) was runner-up for Best Novel, losing out to Heinlein's *STARSHIP TROOPERS*.

In more recent years his writing time had been divided between the *Childe Cycle* and his many follow-ups to his humorous fantasy, *THE DRAGON AND THE GEORGE*. His latest books were an omnibus reprinting of the *Dilbia* stories with the wonderful title *THE RIGHT TO ARM BEARS* and a new novel in the *Dragon* series, *THE DRAGON AND THE FAIR MAID OF KENT*.

I can't say I've read all of his work but personal favourites are the original three *Dorsai* books - *DORSAI*, *SOLDIER ASK NOT* and *TACTICS OF MISTAKE* and his non-*Dorsai* military novel *NAKED TO THE STARS*.

### RICHARD LAYMON

And just as I'm finishing this newsletter, news of a further loss comes along. Richard Laymon, the bestselling horror writer has died at the age of 54 from a massive heart attack on February 14th., leaving a wife and daughter. Best known for his *Beast House* series, the last of which was *MIDNIGHT TOUR*. His latest book was the

short story collection from *Headline, DREADFUL TALES*. There is at least one novel left to be published including the fourth *Beast House* novel.

He has had 37 books published under his own name plus westerns, romances and children's books under various pseudonyms.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

**APRIL 20** - please note that this meeting will be on the third Friday as the second Friday coincides with Easter when many members will be at the Annual Easter Convention in Hinckley.

**MAY 11** - Debate with Birmingham University SF Group.

**JUNE 8** - to be announced - we're trying for Simon Clark

**JULY 13** - to be announced

**AUGUST 10** - Discussion "Is SF the coming thing?"

**SEPTEMBER 14** - to be announced

**OCTOBER 12** - to be announced

**NOVEMBER 9** - shared programme item with NOVACON 31

**DECEMBER 14** - Christmas Party - Beer and Skittles evening. Price and details to be announced.

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## **A STATEMENT FROM MARTIN TUDOR**

Martin Tudor (European TAFF administrator 1996-98) has recently been made aware of an appalling oversight that occurred during his Administration.

In 1997 Paul 'Skel' Skelton contacted TAFF to offer the donation of the book and magazine collection of his recently deceased friend and sometime co-editor Brian Robinson.

The sale of this collection raised £1000 which went a long way towards paying off the TAFF debts generated after the TAFF funds were stolen; but somehow Martin failed to record his thanks to Skel and Cas Skelton for sorting out Brian's stuff, Tony Berry for transporting it, Andy Richards for agreeing to buy it without even viewing it and, of course, Brian Robinson for kindly donating his collection to a good fannish cause.

A belated 'Thank you' to all those involved.

Andy Richards' Cold Tonnage Books can be contacted on 01276 475388 or check

<http://www.coldtonnage.demon.co.uk>

**BRUM GROUP Website address is**  
[www.bsfg.freesevers.com/](http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com/)

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the second Friday of each month at the Britannia Hotel, New Street. Membership is £16 per year per person (or £21 for two members living at the same address). This includes the 12 free issues of the Newsletter plus reduced entrance fee at each meeting. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Birmingham Science Fiction Group' and sent to our Treasurer, Alan Woodford, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN (e-mail enquiries [bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk](mailto:bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk))