

Brum Group News

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

MAY 2001

ISSUE 356

Honorary Presidents:

BRIAN W ALDISS

HARRY HARRISON

Committee:

Vernon Brown (Chairman)

Vicky Cook (Secretary)

Alan Woodford (Treasurer)

Rog Peyton (Newsletter Editor)

+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 31 Chairman: Tony Berry

Friday 11th May

A DEBATE

The motion: *"This house believes that science gets in the way of good science fiction!"*

It's been a few years since we had the annual debate - sometimes heated, sometimes hilarious, sometimes both - between the two local SF groups. The Birmingham University SF Society have come up with the motion and the BSFG have elected to oppose the motion.

All the Brum Group needs now is a team of two to provide the argument against the motion. This is your group and though we've had volunteers from

your committee, it's only fair that the members be given the chance to participate. Anyone interested in taking part should phone me (Rog Peyton) on 0121-643 1999 during the daytime by Wednesday 9th at the latest. Each person will need to speak for 5 minutes maximum, and after questions and comments from the floor, the team captain will be given 2 minutes to sum up.
RGP

The debate will take place 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 debate 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.

The **JUNE 8th** meeting - British author **SIMON CLARK** will be giving a talk to the Group which ties in with the publication of his new book **THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS**. You need to order tickets for this event - see inside for further details.

TRIFFIC TRIFFIDS!

Our June meeting is, as we'd hinted last month, a talk by **Simon Clark**.

Simon has a new book, **NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS**, out in June. This is an authorised sequel to **John Wyndham's** classic **DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS** which was first published 50 years ago. If there's anyone reading this newsletter who hasn't read **DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS**, then you're either reading someone else's mail or you've been watching too much **BABYLON 5** and think you're a science fiction fan. I can't imagine there's anyone in the Brum Group who hasn't read this tremendous book.

Publishers of the book, Hodder & Stoughton have decided to do the UK launch at the Brum Group's June meeting.

BUT the June meeting is also important as the **Birmingham Science Fiction Group** is 30 years old that month. Yes, 30 years since very young versions of Vernon, Peter Weston (you remember him?) and I decided to resurrect the Group. It's been 30 years of continuous meetings, something all who have ever been involved with the Group, should be very proud of.

So June 8th promises to be something of a special evening and one that definitely should not be missed. We're still frantically trying to organise things and because it will be a special evening we've decided to sell tickets for it to make sure we're covered.

We have booked a larger room than usual, one with it's own bar. There will be a buffet and there will be a free bar! How can you afford to miss out on this Very Special Evening?

Tickets will be £5 each for members and £7 for non-members. **YOU MUST BOOK YOUR TICKET BY MAY 25TH AT THE VERY LATEST** - that gives us time to arrange things in time for the meeting, and not waste Group money, which could well happen if we don't know how many people to cater for. Send your money to the Treasurer, Alan Woodford - address at end of this newsletter, or pay him at the May meeting.

If you are in contact with past members - particularly past committee members, please tell them about the evening - let's make it a good one!

RGP

THE APRIL MEETING

Well, we promised you a good speaker and we got one! For the benefit of those who failed to make it to the meeting, we had the pleasure of welcoming **John Clute**, critic and editor of THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION and THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FANTASY. Adding to his list of credits is that of author. His first SF novel - APPLESEED - was published the week before Easter and so the timing was perfect. ANDROMEDA still has signed first editions (Orbit hardcover, £14.99) but they won't last long, so get down to the shop quickly or order by phone on 0121 643 1999.

2000 NEBULA AWARDS NOMINATIONS

Best Novel

DARWIN'S RADIO

by Greg Bear (Del Rey)

A CIVIL CAMPAIGN

by Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen)

FORESTS OF THE HEART

by Charles de Lint (Tor)

CRESCENT CITY RHAPSODY

by Kathleen Ann Goonan (Avon)

MIDNIGHT ROBBER

by Nalo Hopkinson (Warner)

INFINITY BEACH

by Jack McDevitt (HarperPrism)

Other categories - far too long to list here - are all in the April LOCUS.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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 website www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/200.html

July 21/22 - an un-named event which will be a huge gathering of horror writers is to be held here in Birmingham at the Britannia Hotel but may change to a larger hotel if they have too many bookings. It is being jointly organised by Horror World and Terror Tales websites.

e-mail to

John.B.Ford@btinternet.com

August 24-26. EBORACON MMI (UNICON 2001) at Langwith College, The University of York. Guests: Douglas Hill, Stan Nicholls, Anne Gay, Diane Duane and Peter Morwood. Membership £25 (students £20). £30 on the door. Info from 'Sparks', Mike Rennie, 68 Crichton Avenue, Burton Stone Lane, York YO30 6EE, UK.

e-mail: eboracon@psych.york.ac.uk

website: www-users.york.ac.uk/~amr107/eboracon/index.html

November 9-11 NOVACON 31 - the Birmingham SF Group's own annual convention. This year at the Quality Hotel, Walsall. Guest of Honour will be Gwyneth Jones (who also writes as Ann Halam). Details from Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield S2 3HQ Tel: 0114 281 1572 E-mail him at

steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk.

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@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk, tell me about it
in the shop or phone me at the shop on 0121
643 1999.*

NEWS IN BRIEF. . .

After 18 years or so of NOT volunteering for things, it was obvious I'd learned my lesson, I was cured, I could live a normal life - or so I thought. Then, horror of horrors, at the AGM this year I found myself volunteering to edit the BSFG's Newsletter. A slight relapse the doctor called it. Hmmph! Fat lot he knows. If it was only a 'slight relapse', how come I came away from Eastercon finding myself on the committee for the 2003 Eastercon??? Yes, dear friends, it is so. The disease has kicked back in and I can only look forward to the next two years of pain and anxiety The British SF Award was presented at Paragon (2001 Eastercon) and the Best Novel category was won by **ASH: A SECRET HISTORY** by **Mary Gentle** (Gollancz pbk / 1112pgs! / £9.99). Best short story was won by "The Suspect Genome" (the final *Greg Mandel* story) by Peter Hamilton (from INTERZONE #156) and the winner of Best Artwork went to Dominic Harman for his "Hideaway" cover for INTERZONE #157. Congratulations to everyone The hardcover **SF Masterworks** mentioned here last month will be published at the wonderfully low price of £9.99! Though **DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS**, for some reason, has slipped pub-date - it's now coming out in August, not May And other cheap hardcovers coming out will be various **H G Wells** books (about 40, I believe) at £7.99 each!!! All the SF will be included in the matching series as well as his one and only fantasy, **THE SEA LADY**, which has never had a paperback edition in the US or the UK! Many fans I've spoken to had never even heard of this title. I remember reading a

copy from Birmingham Public Libraries shortly after I'd started reading SF - way back in 1958. I've only seen one copy since then which I immediately bought for my own collection. These hardcovers will be issued by new print-on-demand publisher **HOUSE OF STRATUS** That piece of information came to light when I contacted STRATUS re some **Brian Aldiss** titles I noticed listed on a major distributors' database. I discovered that they have published no less than 34 titles by our Honorary President - as far as I could make out, everything that is currently out of print elsewhere. From the ones I've seen, they make a very attractive matching set - all in B-format at £6.99 each except **BURY MY HEART AT W H SMITH's** (extended version, previously only available in the expensive de luxe limited edition) and **TRILLION YEAR SPREE** - his history of SF written with **David Wingrove**, which are both C-format at £7.99 and £9.99. So now is the time to fill in those gaps in your Aldiss collection - and can I heartily recommend **THE BRIGHTFOUNT DIARIES?** This often overlooked masterpiece is the collected articles/stories from **THE BOOKSELLER** about Brian's time working in a bookshop, and it's amazing how little has changed (in some ways) in nearly 50 years - particularly the 'types' of customer and would-be shoplifters! Find out a little of what it's like to work in a bookshop. Brian's observations on customers is uncanny - I recognised every one of them! They, or their offspring, still come into **ANDROMEDA** Our other Honorary President, **Harry Harrison**, has a new book coming out in June in the US called **50 IN 50**. It's 50 short stories - one for each of 50 years - a collection and celebration of Harry's illustrious career. A must for every Brum Group member! Our very own **Pauline Morgan** (who writes as 'Pauline Dungate') has a new short story in a new anthology from DAW books called **VILLAINS VICTORIOUS** edited by Martin H Greenberg and John Helfers. All stories feature villains who win **China**

***SIGNING SESSIONS* at
ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP**

2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1LT

tel 643 1999 or fax 643 2001

e-mail at mail-order@andromedabook.co.uk

Saturday, May 12 (noon)

Tom Holt

will be signing his new comic-fantasy novel in hardcover, NOTHING BUT BLUE SKIES, the paperback of VALHALLA and a new paperback edition of his comic-historical THE WALLED ORCHARD.

Friday, May 18th (6pm)

Jonathan Carroll and Alastair Reynolds

will be reading extracts from and signing copies of their new books. JC's book is the brilliant THE WOODEN SEA which reads something like Philip K Dick on speed! It's got aliens, time-travel plus Carroll's usual weirdness and is Highly Recommended. AR's new book - his second - is CHASM CITY which is set in the same universe as last year's blockbuster, REVELATION SPACE. That latter is now out in paperback and will also be available for signing. Reynolds' reputation is growing fast and collecting his hardcovers now will certainly pay off in future years.

Saturday, June 9th (noon)

Fred Gambino

The SF artist's first collection of SF art, GROUND ZERO, will be out in hardcover from Paper Tiger. A superb collection!

Saturday, June 16th (noon)

There will be no less than three authors:-

Storm Constantine

will be signing her new fantasy hardcover/trade paperback, THE WAY OF LIGHT, which is vol 3 of *The Chronicles of Magrovandias*.

Vol 2 - CROWN OF SILENCE - will also be out in paperback.

Paul Cornell

New author who will be signing his first book, SOMETHING MORE
- an SF novel in hardcover and trade paperback.

Adam Roberts

completes the trio, signing copies of his second SF novel ON,
(hardcover & trade pbk), as well as the new pbk of his first SF novel SALT.

Mieville, author of the much-nominated and much-lauded PERDIDO STREET STATION also finds time to be involved in politics. He is, apparently, the official Socialist Alliance Candidate for the Regents Park and Kensington North constituency in the upcoming elections. Well, that's a new way of publicising your new book!

Iain Banks's LOOK TO WINDWARD (Orbit) was voted Novel of the Year by readers of that heavy glossy mag with the lightweight candyfloss contents SFX. Ian's response: "*It is with great humility that I accede this much coveted award from your steamed organ.*" No prizes for guessing whether Iain was simply attempting to be humorous or trying to match the general literacy of the SFX readers. Er...No, I didn't really mean that - they can't be all bad if some voted for an Iain Banks book. No, I definitely must be wrong as I seem to remember some of their readers voting for Christopher Priest's wonderful book, THE PRESTIGE a couple or so years back. I must stop making cracks against media-fans - I might need them as customers when they grow up....

SWAP & BUY BOOKS. . .

You're getting the idea. Well done. No less than three members were selling books at the March meeting. How many were actually sold has not been disclosed. Our chairman was seen to smile - once - so presumably he sold one book.

But only ANDROMEDA was selling books at the April meeting... why? Did you think everyone was spent out after Eastercon? Come ON - let's get some book swapping done! Swap or buy - we don't care. We just want everyone to read good books!

Talking of good books, I've just read the new Alfred Bester collection REDEMOLISHED which I mentioned in last month's newsletter. It's a great collection with the exception of one story which, try as I might, I could not finish.

The short novel "Hell is Forever" (over 100pgs) is worth the price alone.



BOOK REVIEWS



(**REVIEWERS** please note:- in future all reviews should be e-mailed direct to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)

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 SECRET OF LIFE

by Paul McAuley

Voyager / 391pgs / £16.99 / hcvr

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating * * * * *

Some authors will bludgeon the reader over the head with their superior knowledge, either because they have done a lot of research and don't want to waste any of it, or because it relates to their previous job. Paul McAuley is able to draw on his knowledge and paint a picture in deft strokes, as if he is gently letting you into a secret.

There are several related problems that form the main thrust of the novel. There is the search for life on Mars. The Chinese claim that they haven't discovered anything there, but are very secretive about their explorations. Then there are the slicks that have appeared in the Pacific Ocean that are killing marine life - although no-one will admit it. NASA intends to mount an expedition to discover what the Chinese have discovered, but their choice of personnel is influenced by money, in particular that provided by the Cytex organisation which is continuously looking for the profit margin in all of it.

Mariella Anders is a microbiologist whose work is highly acclaimed. However, she doesn't like the idea of selling her soul to a big corporation. She is altruistic, believing that knowledge should be shared, not parcelled out to the highest bidder. She is delighted to win a place on the next flight to Mars - but not by who she has to travel with.

This book is delightful to read, and thought provoking at the same time.

PM

SERVANT OF THE DRAGON

by *David Drake*

Millennium / 612pgs / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

Rating * * * *

This third volume of the *Lord of the Isles* wraps up the story of Garric, Sharina, Ilna and the sorceress Tenoctris. Garric, now the power behind the throne and the real ruler of the Isles, faces his greatest challenge from the dark forces that sank the Isle of Yole. Woven into this background is the task of rebuilding a government and dealing with the shallow and vain characters from Barca's Hamlet who now seek to ride on Garric's rise to power. Add to this the court intrigues and other hangers on, and Garric has his work cut out. He has to rely on his old friends Sharina, Cashel, Ilna and Tenoctris to help him understand the dark forces that are gathering.

The appearance of a shimmering blue bridge across the river, on the site of an old kingdom bridge that had been destroyed many centuries earlier, is the start of the long drawn-out battle between the forces of Garric's kingdom and the wizards that have moved through time from the demise of the old kingdom. When Sharina is pulled through into another dimension she starts her long quest that will have surprising results for her friends. She does not realise that Cashel has also gone after her with a view to her rescue. The independent

journeys that both of them make add to the forces that Garric will have to call on to defeat the dark wizards that are arrayed against him.

This book keeps the pace going that Drake set in the previous volumes. The convoluted plot line has been somewhat straightened out and the main characters have lost a little of their colour. David Drake has produced three books that provide an entertaining fantasy story with plenty of twists and turns that will keep the reader happy for many hours.

CC

PRIESTESS OF AVALON

by *Marion Zimmer Bradley and Diana L. Paxson*

HarperCollins / 382pgs / £16.99 / hcvr

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating * * *

This volume was published after Bradley's death, with the aid of Diana Paxson. It is a collaboration, although Paxson had to finish it. It is a pity she does not get a credit on the book's cover. This book is part of the *Avalon* series of which *THE MISTS OF AVALON* was the first published volume. That involved the women associated with King Arthur's court. *PRIESTESS OF AVALON* is set at an earlier time, during the Roman Empire. The principal character is Helena who was the mother of the Emperor, Constantine the Great. Like many women of the time, relatively little is known about her, but she was canonised and some sources credit her with the discovery of fragments of the True Cross. It is certain that she travelled to the Holy Land and lived to an old age. In *PRIESTESS OF AVALON*, Helena is one of the priestesses that lives on the mystic Isle of Avalon until she meets Constantius. Except for this element, historical facts are kept to wherever possible.

This is a relatively short book to encompass the whole of a long life and

performer touches it only at intervals. More than a quarter of the book is taken up with Helena's life on Avalon, before she leaves with Constantius, so that their relationship and characters, and the intricacies behind the events that follow, are only sketched in. The book disappoints because it is neither a fantasy novel or a historical one, but tries to be both and they do not mesh - it is almost two separate stories as very little of the mysticism bleeds into the known history. It will probably satisfy neither readers of fantasy or historical fiction. *PM*

FUTURE MEETINGS

JULY 13 - SF artist **Chris Moore** will be talking about his artwork and showing slides of many of his paintings.

AUGUST 10 - In-group discussion "Is SF the coming thing?"

SEPTEMBER 14 - ex-Brummie **David Pringle**, editor of the UK's most prestigious SF magazine **INTERZONE** will be giving a history of the magazine and be telling us how an SF mag's economics works in this modern-day scene.

OCTOBER 12 - long-time SF fan, editor, biographer and bibliographer **Mike Ashley** will be along to the Group to talk about the early days - "**Hugo Gernsback: The Birth and Death (?) of Science Fiction**". The talk will be illustrated with slides.

NOVEMBER 9 - shared programme item with NOVACON 31 to be announced

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

JANUARY 11 - the Annual General Meeting. The time to evaluate the previous year and to elect a new committee. Followed by an auction to raise funds for the Group.

Newsletter 356 copyright 2001 for the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. Designed by Rog Peyton. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership or, for that matter, the person giving their opinion. Some people like being controversial and may actually believe the opposite to what they say - I think I've been accused of that at various times in the past.. Don't believe everything you read

The **BRUM GROUP Website** address is www.bsfg.freesevers.com/ Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

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)