

Brum Group News

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

JUNE 2001 ISSUE 357

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Vicky Cook (Secretary)

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Rog Peyton (Newsletter Editor)

+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 31 Chairman: Tony Berry

Friday 8th June

SIMON CLARK

and

BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP

30TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

Not often do we have a double programme but this month is somewhat special. **AND YOU MUST HAVE A TICKET TO GET IN!** Simon Clark's latest novel - **THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS** - is just published. It's an authorised sequel to John Wyndham's **THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS**. That classic novel was published exactly 50 years ago in 1951, before most of you were born. But it has never been out of print during those 50 years and it has been on the required reading list on school curriculums for most of those 50 years. So, chances are that

you've read it. Now you get the chance to hear Simon Clark talk about how the sequel came to be written.

After Simon's talk we'll be celebrating the fact that our little group is 30 years old - and this is the reason why **YOU MUST HAVE A TICKET** - there'll be a buffet, free drinks, free books and a special Triffid birthday cake. Tickets are £5 each for members and £7 for non-members - available from the Treasurer (see back page) or from **ANDROMEDA...** *(Continued on Pg 2)*

JULY 13th MEETING - top SF artist **CHRIS MOORE** will be visiting the group, talking about SF art and showing slides of his award-winning work.

But you must get your ticket by Saturday 1st June.

The talk and party will take place in the Warwick Suite - opposite our usual meeting 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. The party will start about 9pm.

RGP

THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS

Copies of THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS will be available for signing after Simon Clark's talk but if you'd rather not carry a book around with you at the party, there's the official Signing Session at ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1LT, at noon the following day - Saturday the 9th. SF artist Fred Gambino will also be signing at the shop at the same time. He'll be signing copies of his first collection of SF art - GROUND ZERO.

THE MAY MEETING

Thanks to a heavy cold, I missed the May meeting which was a debate with the Birmingham University SF Society. The motion for the debate was "This House believes that science gets in the way of good science fiction". The Brum Group was represented by Dave Hardy and our chairman Vernon who spoke against the motion. And we won! I wish I could have been there, instead

of dosing myself up with whisky and going to bed early - I actually believe in the motion. I would really have liked to see the University people win.

Sorry folks, but there's been too many SF books ruined by the authors trying to give science lessons instead of getting on with the story.

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,

To celebrate 30 years of the
BIRMINGHAM
SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

ANDROMEDA BOOSHOP

is offering

25% discount

off all second-hand items
displayed in our shop

on Saturday 9th June 2001

Offer open to all members
of the Birmingham SF Group.

(You must show your current membership card)

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP

2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1LT
Tel (0121) 643 1999 Fax (0121) 643 2001
e-mail - mailorder@andromedabook.co.uk

First published in 1962 and 1964 respectively, these are two collections of Ballard's early "inner space" stories. These were stories that broke the mould of SF - as shocking and different in their way as cyberpunk was thirty years later. They show Ballard as a technophobe, concerned with the effects upon mankind of the runaway development of science and technology during his own formative years of 1940 to 1960, from nuclear tests to computers.

In compelling near future stories such as "The Voices of Time", "Deep End" and "The Terminal Beach", scientists or obsessives (much the same thing in Ballard's view) patrol a small section of an under-populated world, noting strange and possibly subjective effects upon themselves. Only occasionally is the setting truly science fictional - Mars in "The Cage of Sand", a world subject to alien invasion in "The Watch Towers", a future that has abandoned clocks in "Chronopolis". Even the starship project in "Thirteen to Centaurus" is a multi-generation mock-up, firmly based in a hangar on Earth. My own favourite, "The Garden of Time", is a fantasy view of entropy. Also in these collections are the exquisite "The Illuminated Man", an early version of THE CRYSTAL WORLD and "The Reptile Enclosure", which will put you off ever going to the beach again.

Ballard's clear, unemotional style is still startling and undated, forty years on. Required reading. And, for the bibliographically-minded amongst you, THE VOICES OF TIME was originally published in the US in 1962

and then in the UK in 1963, with some story changes, as THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE. Later in 1985, with a few more changes, it appeared in the UK under its original title. This is the 1985 version. CM

THE KING OF DREAMS

by Robert Silverberg

Voyager / 514 pgs / £11.99 / trade paperback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating * * *

This (fairly) massive volume follows two others, equally substantial, to constitute a trilogy set in Silverberg's continuing Majipoor series. However, it works quite well as a stand-alone book: knowing that the previous two volumes exist it is easy to pick up references to events in them, but these are never awkward or obtrusive and there is no sense of needing to be familiar with the whole trilogy in order to understand what is going on.

I find this series to be an uneasy blend of SF and fantasy. The giant world of Majipoor, with a diameter at least ten times as great as that of our own planet, was settled in the distant past by colonists from Earth. They seem to exist now in a form of civilisation which is basically non-technical, although underpinned by machinery which nevertheless we never really see. However, there are no telecommunication systems and it remains unclear how the inhabitants overcome the time factor involved in travelling the huge distances involved in moving about the surface of this vast world, not to mention overcoming a surface gravity

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.*

HUGO NOMINATIONS FOR BEST NOVEL OF 2000

CALCULATING GOD
by Robert J Sawyer (Tor)

**HARRY POTTER
AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE**
by J K Rowling
(Bloomsbury; Scholastic)

MIDNIGHT ROBBER
by Nalo Hopkinson (Warner)
THE SKY ROAD
by Ken MacLeod (Orbit; Tor)
A STORM OF SWORDS
by George R R Martin
(Voyager; Bantam)

All other nominations - novellas, short
stories, etc., can be found in the May
issue of LOCUS.

NEWS IN BRIEF. . .

Just a couple of days after the May
newsletter was mailed out came the
shocking news of the death of **Douglas
Adams** who died May 11th at the age of
49 from a heart attack while working
out in the gym. His death was reported
in most newspapers and on TV news
reports. Douglas did regular signings at
ANDROMEDA for the early *Hitchhiker*
books - in fact his second signing
anywhere was at ANDROMEDA's old
premises in Summer Row where we
held the signing in Willy's Wine Bar
next door to the shop. Douglas didn't do
signings for his later books as there was
little time to arrange signings due to him
having to be locked in hotel rooms in
order to write the books he'd contracted
for. His publishers never knew when
he'd finish a book until he handed out
the last page from his hotel room.
Publication was then just a few weeks
later, everything having to be done in a
rush. The risk of arranging signings and
then having to cancel was too great.
Douglas came to speak to the Brum
Group back when we were meeting in
the old Ivy Bush in Edgabaston US
author **Rick Shelley** has also died

suddenly at the age of 54 And closer to home, **Judy Watson**, wife of author **Ian Watson**, died on Easter Saturday. No other details are available. Our condolences to Ian and daughter Jessica.

This year's **Arthur C Clarke Award** was won by **China Mieville's PERDIDO STREET STATION**. The award was presented on Saturday 19th May at a ceremony that was well attended and where the wine flowed freely. There was a committee meeting for Seacon 03 the following day and a couple of people who shall remain anonymous were still suffering If you're intending to come to the **Brum Group's 30th Anniversary Party** and **Simon Clark** talk, don't forget you can't get in on the door - you need a ticket! See front page The **2000 Nebula Award** was also presented in May - the winner in the **Best Novel** category being **DARWIN'S RADIO** by **Greg Bear**. Other winners were **Best Novella** - "Goddesses" by **Linda Nagata**; **Best Novelette** - "Daddy's World" by **Walter Jon Williams**; **Best Short story** - "macs" by **Terry Bisson** and **Best Script** was **GALAXY QUEST** by **David Howard & Robert Gordon**. The **Grand Master Award** was presented to **Philip Jose Farmer**, the **Author Emeritus Award** went to **Robert Sheckley** and the **Ray Bradbury Award** went to **2000X** - host and story editor **Harlan Ellison** **SFWA** have announced a new award - the **Harlan Ellison Award**. This year's winner was **Harlan Ellison** who presented the award to himself. No-one else is eligible for this award. **Chris Priest** is not allowed to vote This year's **Philip K Dick Award** was won

by **Michael Marshall Smith** for **ONLY FORWARD** which was published here in the UK in 1997 but only got released in the US in 2000 **Orion Publishing's** paperback **SF** line **Millennium** is no more. All **SF** - hardcover and paperback - will now be published under the **Gollancz** banner. The old **Millennium** star logo remains but the central **M** is now replaced with a **G**.



BOOK REVIEWS



(**REVIEWERS** please note:- in future all reviews should be e-mailed direct to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk). **Deadline** for each issue is the 1st of the month.

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 VOICES OF TIME

by *J G Ballard*

Phoenix / 197pgs / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by **Chris Morgan**

Rating * * * * *

THE TERMINAL BEACH

by *J G Ballard*

Phoenix / 221pgs / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by **Chris Morgan**

Rating * * * * *

about ten times Earth-normal. In fact, the size of the place is of little real importance - it could just as well have been about Earth-sized without materially affecting the plot or anything else - and the technology is only introduced as and when required instead of being fundamentally integrated into the construction of the imaginary world. Thus it becomes merely an exotic setting in which themes of rivalry and jealousy, love and hate can be played out.

The purpose of inventing such a world is, of course, that it provides scope for the telling of any number of stories and *THE KING OF DREAMS* is the seventh book set on Majipoor. Regrettably, it fails to do justice to the opportunity. Although quite a lot happens, it is not enough to support the book's considerable length with the result that it is long drawn-out and verges on the tedious. Worse, there is little change of pace: the narrative just plods along from one incident to another and when it should build up to a climax the final resolution, if it can be called that, seems to be over in an anti-climactic flash - there is little sense of the great events one had been led to expect having actually occurred.

Robert Silverberg has in the past been an author of great importance and prodigious output, with numerous awards to his name during the years when he was producing his best work. Unfortunately, on this (and perhaps other) evidence it seems that his best years are now behind him. His undoubted skill and experience prevent this book from being as indifferent as it

might have been in lesser hands, but it remains one with which to while away the time rather than one to give everything else up for.

MJ

***PRELUDE TO DUNE: HOUSE HARKONNEN* by Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson**

NEL / 626 pages / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating * *

Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson here continue the work they began in *HOUSE ATREIDES* and will conclude in a third volume still to come - the prehistory of Frank Herbert's *DUNE* saga. I said when I reviewed the earlier volume that it was "an interesting and worthwhile addition to the *Dune* saga", but on reflection, and having waded through another six hundred pages, I find I am not so sure.

The point is, after all, that *DUNE* was begun with the characters and situations already in existence and fully-formed. One never wondered why characters in the book were the way they were or how they got there, but simply took everything as a given. It is now moderately interesting to read about events in the preceding years but, as I hinted before, there must be doubts as to how close this back story is to what Frank Herbert would have written himself if he had lived long enough and ever wanted to do it.

Having said that, this book, like its predecessor, is well enough written, but lo-o-ong. I found it somewhat

tedious as the various characters progressed their lives without actually seeming to get anywhere. The trouble is of course that one has already read DUNE and one knows where and how they are going to end up anyway. Why, then, is it necessary to go through such an excruciatingly lengthy account of events which turn out to be of only moderate importance?

If you are desperate to have every scrap of writing connected in any way with the *Dune* story, or if you want a good long book to read and are not too bothered what it is, maybe this is for you. Not otherwise.

MJ

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 2002 - 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.

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Newsletter 357 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.

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)