

# **Brum** **Group** **News**

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

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*Honorary Presidents:*

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**Vernon Brown (Chairman)**

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**Alan Woodford (Treasurer)**

**Rog Peyton (Newsletter Editor)**

**+ Steve Jones & William McCabe**

**NOVACON 31 Chairman: Tony Berry**

Friday 13th July  
Award-winning SF artist

# CHRIS MOORE

Chris Moore is one of the UK's leading SF and fantasy cover artists (not to mention cover artist for thrillers, crime books, war books...etc). At this year's Eastercon in Hinckley, along with fellow SF artist Fred Gambino, he presented an overview of his work ably supported by slides. Locked away in the bookroom (what's new?) I managed to miss this programme item but heard some very good reports after the event.

So we thought it would be a good idea to get Chris along to the Brum Group to show us slides of some of his superb award-winning artwork. (As we couldn't afford to get both Chris and

Fred Gambino, we've asked Fred to come and give his half of the talk next year...).

Over the years Chris has painted covers for most publishers but the largest number have been for the now defunct Methuen SF line (notably several Clifford Simak and Ben Bova titles) and more recently most of the covers for the Millennium/Gollancz 'SF Masterworks' series. So if you liked those covers or have the slightest interest in the artwork that makes SF books sell, come along and see the work of a real talent... RGP

**AUGUST 10th MEETING** - will be an in-Group discussion on a topic to be decided. "Is SF the coming thing?" is a working title but, who knows, we may discuss something completely different (see Pg 2) - or we may have a surprise speaker....

**Question: DID WE LAND ON THE MOON IN 1969?**

**Answer: No!**

**by Vernon Brown**

You'd think that an event watched by, listened to, cheered on and celebrated by pretty well the whole world would actually have taken place, but according to a recent Channel 5 programme, the first moon landing was a hoax staged as a coldwar coup by the USA.

"Conspiracy Theory - Did We Land on the Moon?" was an hour-long programme devoted to those who believe that Apollo 11 and its successors merely took off, orbited the Earth for a few days while faked film was fed to the world's peoples, then returned to land in triumph. I know it's fashionable and profitable nowadays to defame the giants of the past - after all, it's easier to destroy than create - but this attempted debunk is a bit like a mouse attacking an elephant; irritating and difficult to squash but a pretty stupid thing to do.

However, while the conspiracy theorists were allowed to expound their ideas at length, using official videofilm and stills from the various landings to 'show' that they had been shot on Earth and/or otherwise doctored, NASA was allowed only about five minutes of snippets, taken out of context and with any explanation removed by the producers. While I like to hear different viewpoints (honest!), this was way over the top, too biased for words. To add insult to injury, the programme was sandwiched between one on aliens landing in Brazil and one on UFO's and spacedrive options (which wasn't too bad) and, together with a couple of SF films, called Sci-Fi Night, reinforcing the still all-too-common link between SF, little green men in flying saucers and people who will believe anything.

The programme appeared to have some valid points to make, such as camera-screen graticules seeming to appear behind the object photographed rather than in front, and identical- appearing terrain in photos taken miles apart, but these were swamped with discussions about odd shadows, non-appearance of stars (in day/moon light!) and men appearing to move faster when the videotape is speeded up. Then there is talk about there only being a 0.0017% chance of the mission being successful if it were really attempted, of the craft orbiting for days within the atmosphere and of space being full of radioactivity from the Sun [-cut to picture of a Hiroshima survivor-]. And no-one explained why NASA, having all that money to spend on a gigantic hoax, made such a lot of silly mistakes. It's a pity that what could have been an interesting if oddball programme was so badly executed.

*Postscript.* Just a thought - what if it is all a hoax and that they really didn't land on the Moon, and this is a deliberately clumsy government attempt to debunk any debunkers in advance by making them appear a bit semi-detached? Or perhaps the astronauts did land but were captured by aliens who faked it all before brainwashing them and returning them to Earth. Or - hang on - there's a Man in Black at the wi----!

VB

Ho! Ho! Ho! - it's a good job I knew nothing about this programme (though I heard enough about it afterwards!) - I might have ended up putting something through the TV screen....

But... WHAT DID YOU THINK? Let's have your ideas and comments on this. Did anyone tape it?

## **THE JUNE MEETING...**

The June meeting was, of course, the double event - a talk by Simon Clark on his new book THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS and the party for the Brum Group's 30th Anniversary. Well attended - we sold 60 tickets and 58 of those actually turned up on the night - and by all accounts thoroughly enjoyed by all. The 'birthday cake' turned out to be something special - it not only looked good (with a triffid on top) but it tasted good, too.

Thanks to Pat Brown for arranging the cake - and particularly for getting it so cheap. It would have cost between £125 to £150 in the shops but we got it for a mere £40. Thanks also to the publishers who very generously provided free books for everyone - John Jarrold at Earthlight, Simon Spanton at Gollancz and Tim Holman at Orbit.

AND we got letters (OK - emails if you want to be pedantic)... first off from one-time group Treasurer Margaret Thorpe...

"This is to thank Vernon, Rog and the rest of the committee for arranging the party for the Brum Group Anniversary. Walking into the room was a bit like entering a time warp. Its been, what?, sixteen or so years since we have been to a Brum Group meeting - not that

we have anything against you all; its just that the demands of the business and raising a family, working and the various disasters we call life, sort of got in the way. We were both pleasantly surprised to be able to recognise so many familiar faces. It just goes to show that Science Fiction keeps you young! The talk by Simon Clark, on his book THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS was interesting and bridged the intervening years nicely, being as it was, a sequel to one of the classic SF novels THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. I think a good time was had by all. Lets not leave it for so long before we have another party!"

*Cheers, Maggie Thorpe*

And a letter from America after someone looked at our party pics on Dave Hardy's website...

"The Brum Group's 30th Anniversary Party! A worthy celebration indeed, and one I personally would have been happy to attend had I still been in the UK.

"When I started working teck for Novacons, having been shanghaied over from <whisper> media fandom <whisper> back those many years ago, the Brum Group and indeed Novacon provided a friendly trufannish safe haven, especially at the time my first marriage acrimoniously ended. (Sample gripe: My ex- and her friends Ros and Dave Liddle were the leading lights of the "UFP" series of Trek conventions. Dave and I typically ran the teck, which is how we got asked to do the Novacons - the Liddles were local Midlanders. One year the ladies decided they'd come along with us to the Novacon. We had one double room between the four of us, Dave & I worked teck all day while the wives never left the room (or indeed the bed) the entire weekend. Sleeping on the floor is not wonderful after a rough day's graft. And if there was anything

sexual going on \*I\* never saw it. End gripe.)

"Anyhow, the above is a typical preamble to a public expression of thanks. The Brum Group (and the Novacons) were my introduction to what I like to think of as "real" fandom, and were the source of some incredibly supportive friendships which have lasted to this day, some 15 years on.

"It's probably blatantly unfair to name names, since one would not wish to risk the slight of omission, but in particular Bernie and Mick Evans, Martin Tudor (and latterly the lovely Helena Tudor), the inimitable Rog Peyton and, yes, Steve and Ann Green all conspired to make this drunken shambling dumbass feel like "one of the gang".

"It's not all that often anyone gets a chance to give public appreciation to the people who are ultimately responsible for me being here. Thanks to all, and long may ye Brum Group reign!"

Nic Farey

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

**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](mailto: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](mailto:eboracon@psych.york.ac.uk)  
website: [www-users.york.ac.uk/~amr107/eboracon/index.html](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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. . .**

There's a new book out in the States that ANDROMEDA has imported and that I think will interest many Group members - THE COMPLETE 'WAR OF THE WORLDS' edited by **Brian Holmsten & Alex Lubertozzi**. It's a large format volume that reprints **H G Wells'** original novel together with the original artwork by **Warwick Goble** from PEARSON'S magazine 1897; the full script by **Howard Koch** of the notorious **Orson Welles'** Mercury Theatre 1938 radio play that panicked a nation; reactions of people who thought the world was really ending; PLUS a CD featuring the full radio play; **Orson Welles** being interviewed the day after - and talking about it years later at the only ever meeting of **H G Wells** and **Orson Welles** as they discuss the panic they created. It's a gorgeous item.

Check it out ... Somehow, with all the awards going around recently, I completely omitted to report that the Richard Evans Memorial Award was awarded this year to **Gwyneth Jones** (NOVACON 31's Guest of Honour). This award - a cheque for £2000 - is given by a committee for a body of work (rather than a particular book or story) that has attracted critical acclaim without commensurate financial rewards ... HarperCollins have, under their Voyager imprint, started a Voyager SF & Fantasy Classics series - in 'B' format there are 6 titles released so far. **Isaac Asimov's FOUNDATION**, **Kim Stanley Robinson's RED MARS**, **Ray Bradbury's FAHRENHEIT 451**, **Aldous Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD**, **T H White's THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING** and **J R R Tolkien's THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING**. Congratulations to HarperCollins on finding yet another way to reissue **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** in a year when we are about to see new editions with movie tie-in covers anyway. I've now lost count but, with the hardcover, leather-bound hardcover, illustrated hardcovers, individual editions, omnibus editions, paperbacks with Tolkien's covers, paperbacks with mass-market appeal covers, india-paper hardcovers, the SEVEN book split editions, etc., etc., the publishers have managed to invent a whole new industry for collectors of Tolkien's works. Barely a month goes by now without the rep coming in to show us yet one more Tolkien work in a new format that is different from all the others and therefore a must to go on our shelves. Apparently one Midlands shop

has a customer who has two copies of every edition, one to read and one for the collection... Sad. Oh yes - and they're doing a special hardcover edition of **BORED OF THE RINGS**... I said **BORED OF TH**... Yawn... Zzzzzz.



## BOOK REVIEWS



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

### ***POLAR CITY NIGHTMARE***

***by Katharine Kerr and***

***Kate Daniel***

**Gollancz / 357 pgs / £6.99 / pbk**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan \* \* \* \* \***

This is one of the most enjoyable books I have read for some time. The authors have managed to combine several genres very successfully.

It is Science Fiction. Set on a planet where the only habitable areas are at the poles. Even then, it is still too hot to comfortably outside during daylight hours so most people are awake during the night. The differences

between Hagar and Earth are subtly drawn.

It is a crime novel. An artefact has been stolen from the embassy of the Carli Confederation. If it is not recovered, the political ramifications could well result in war.

It is about that American passion - baseball. The Polar City Bears have won through to the Galactic Series on a neighbouring planet. One of the players has been blackmailed into taking the artefact off world.

It is about prejudice. Yosef Mbaye, the blackmailed player, is an undeclared telepath. Telepaths are not permitted to play professional baseball. It is feared that they might cheat. Except that Yosef's abilities do not enable him to read minds. He is a good player because of his co-ordination and his skill in reading body language.

The elements of the novel are skilfully brought together with numerous plot twists. The Carli are sufficiently inscrutable to indicate alien origin without being completely unpenetrable. There is a good balance between realism and anthropomorphism. The tale leaps along at a cracking pace without sacrificing depth of characterisation. I would like to see more collaborations between these two authors.

*PM*

## ***BLOOD MUSIC***

***by Greg Bear***

**Gollancz / 262 pages / £6.99 / pbk**

**Reviewed by Dave Hardy \* \* \* \***

I picked up this review copy because, to my surprise, I didn't think I had read it before. And I was right.

This is a volume in the 'SF Masterworks' series of classic SF, and this certainly is a classic, in which even Bear excelled himself. It is also real, hard SF, so there's no point in starting it unless you either know a fair bit about cell chemistry and DNA, or are ready and willing to learn quite a lot! I still find the concept highly unlikely: that human cells can become intelligent and can organise themselves and communicate with their hosts, at first being as bright as lab rats, but ultimately changing the whole face of the Earth. But having 'suspended disbelief' to that extent (and Bear surely knows his stuff), the story is gripping and carries the reader to its stunning finale in a manner of which Clarke would be proud.

Vergil Ulam is a researcher who, when he is fired for his unorthodox methods, injects himself with his special lymphocytes as the only way of saving his experiment with biochips which he hopes will use DNA as a method of information processing. He does not even really expect them to survive - but they not only do, but they go forth and multiply within his body, then spreading elsewhere, originally by means of sex (how else?). At this point it all seemed a bit familiar - didn't this happen in a movie? From here, we follow mainly three individuals: an old college friend of Vergil, Edward Milligan; an ex-employer, Dr Michael Bernard; and a girl who is seemingly unaffected by the new cells, Suzie McKenzie. If, like me, you missed this first time round in 1985, don't miss it this time!

*DH*

## ***THE SEEDLING STARS***

*by James Blish*

Gollancz / 185 pages / £9.99 / trade pbk

Reviewed by Michael Jones \* \* \*

James Blish was one of the stars of the nineteen fifties and probably couldn't have written a bad book if he had tried. This is one of his most noted efforts, a collection of linked stories written around the theme of pantropy, the concept (not unique to him alone) that man will colonise the Universe by adapting his form to the alien and unfamiliar ecological structures of other worlds.

What this means is vividly shown in the long and frequently-anthologised central story "Surface Tension" with its dramatic scenes of water-breathing men a quarter of a millimetre tall navigating their tiny wooden "spaceship" overland from one puddle to another on a distant world.

This was the first of the stories to be written and the remaining three provide some sort of a framing structure but fail to build a satisfactorily coherent novel. They are notably weaker and give somewhat the impression of being afterthoughts rather than important new ideas.

In fact, reading it again for the first time in quite a few years, I was struck by how very "fifties" it seemed. Half a century ago its impact must have been tremendous; today the concepts are less impressive and even the writing style has dated, albeit only slightly. Nevertheless it remains an impressive accomplishment, well worth having been re-issued, and reading again.

*MJ*

## ***THE EYRE AFFAIR***

*by Jasper Fforde*

NEL / 262 pages / £6.99 / pbk

(published simultaneously in hardcover)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan \* \*

Jasper Fforde's first novel is an alternate world crime-fantasy that's clever in places but too silly to be enjoyable. It's an example of an author putting every fantasy theme he can think of into the same novel. The result is a mish-mash of unrelated and conflicting elements which lurches from one bit of contrived humour to the next.

The main plot concerns Tuesday Next (this is the narrator's name, I kid you not; if it offends you deeply you'd better stop reading now, because there's worse to come) who works for LiteraTec, the Special Operations branch that deals with literary crimes. She is pitted against Acheron Hades, an international criminal and superhuman figure, who specialises in stealing original manuscripts and changing them, causing all editions to be altered. Martin Chuzzlewit is the first to go, then Jane Eyre. The sequence in which Tuesday goes inside Jane Eyre to protect its integrity is original, mostly well written and would have made a fine novelette.

Alas, Fforde clutters up the novel with the Crimean War (still in progress after 130 years), time travel, vampires, black holes and relativity, conspiracy theories, the genetic recreation of dodos as pets, a lot of ESP powers, violent literary disputes, bureaucracy and romance. His characters, many of whom suffer from ridiculous names like Paige Turner, Dr Runcible Spoon and Ossie Mandias,

have no substance, while his baddies (no redeeming features) seem to have stepped out of a comic book. The result is a novel that's unduly difficult and unrewarding for its first half, with too much bad humour.

Fforde is a promising writer but a clumsy and inexperienced one. Apparently there will be a whole series of Tuesday Next adventures, but I won't be reading them.

CM

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

**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 16** - to be arranged. NOTE that it is one week later than normal (not the 9th) - we will NOT be

sharing an evening with NOVACON 31 due to NOVACON being out at Walsall this year.

**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.

**FEBRUARY 8 2002** - SF artist **Fred Gambino** will be talking about his art and giving a slide show of his award-winning paintings.

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**Newsletter 358** 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/](http://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](mailto:bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk))