

Brum Group News

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

AUGUST 2001 ISSUE 359

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+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 31 Chairman: Tony Berry

**Friday 10th August
In-Group Discussion**

“Is There a Future in SF?”

Do you have an opinion on the above? Is Science Fiction as we know it declining to the point where it will be virtually non-existent in not too many years? Are the chain bookshops dictating to publishers and killing off the genre we love? Or do you believe that SF is on the comeback trail?

The above title is just one of the subjects we'll be discussing on Friday. This will be an excellent chance for you to air your views on SF and allied subjects or to just sit back and listen to other members' views. Knowing how vocal some members can be, it should prove to be a very interesting evening.

SCI-FI MOVIES ANYONE?

We have also been invited for input into a Science Fiction Film Festival here in Birmingham. It'll be taking place at Star

City, probably around the Christmas 2001 period. Obviously the vast majority of films to be shown will be the ultra-popular ones - STAR TREK, STAR WARS, 2001, CE3K, ET, and the rest of the stuff that will put bums on seats. But what of the lesser known ones? Make a short list of three lesser-known films that you think should be shown and we'll see if we can come up with the Big Three. *RGP*

The meeting will take place in the Lichfield room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passageway opposite the Odeon). It 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.

SEPTEMBER 14th MEETING - ex-Brummie and one-time SF fan **DAVID PRINGLE** is now editing the UK's premier SF Magazine, **INTERZONE**. He'll be giving an illustrated talk on the history of the magazine and show how a magazine like **INTERZONE** is viable.

Question" DID WE LAND ON THE MOON IN 1969? Answer: No! by Vernon Brown. That was last month's article - we had this response from Dave Hardy...

I think Vernon's answer was really 'YES!!!!', and quite rightly. It's a pity we have to dignify this sort of stupid programme, made only for sensationalism, with a serious reply. But sadly, a lot of people watching it will actually believe it, so we have to refute it at any opportunity. I was in Zambia for the eclipse when this programme was on, but yes, I did tape it, and still have it, though only in LP form. I could easily write my own reply, but Kim Poor (owner of the Novaspace gallery in Tucson, Arizona) has an article entitled 'One small show, one giant danger' at collectspace.com, addressing the possible repercussions of that show. It's at:

<http://www.collectspace.com/resources/moonhoax.html>

But for those who don't have access to the web, here it is:

ONE SMALL SHOW; ONE GIANT DANGER by Kim Poor

Conspiracy theorists have claimed for years that the Moon landings were faked. It used to be their ramblings were little more than an annoyance, given as much credence as flat-earthers.

Today however, their claims have begun to spread like a cancer, mostly due to the repeated airing of the FOX Network's "Conspiracy Theory: Did We Go to the Moon?". No longer limited to the ravings of loonies, support has gathered among housewives, children and those you thought knew better.

The broadcast of this program triggered widescale debate inside offices, on

the streets, at bars and just about any other place where people could gather and talk. The result has been a growing belief that the Moon landings were a Hollywood stunt -- the most expensive movie ever made -- filmed at Area 51. If the space race could not be won with technology, we did what we do best -- faked it on film.

With so many of today's movies containing astounding special effects, it isn't much of a stretch to believe a young mind might assume that the ability to fake such an event as a Moon landing has always been possible. It's equally hard to fault their reasoning -- since we can't make it to the Moon today, how could we have done so long ago? The program raises a host of questions that to non-scientific types with a "National Enquirer" mentality sound like a logical examination of the facts. Even my kids expressed concern because of schoolyard taunts related to the alleged hoax. Each of the questions can be explained, but many will take some study and guidance for a cogent and convincing argument.

I submit that all "true believers" must go forth and spread the truth (do I sound like an evangelist?). If we do not, in another generation the "Moon Hoax" could cast (at the very least) a strong shadow of doubt on the accomplishments of the early space program. There will be no one left who was present, and certainly no Apollo astronauts. Your autograph collections could become worthless, or worth less.

Sure, that sounds like an alarmist, worst-case scenario, but look at what's happening now. If you haven't already been confronted by a hoax believer (HB), it is only a matter of time. At minimum, it takes a noble exercise to debunk the major points that seem to comprise the cornerstones of an HB's arguments. The more people armed with facts, the more prepared for an HB encounter, then, to coin a phrase, that's one small step. We must be as focused and fanatic as they are.

We have the ability to inspire a whole new generation to understand the wonder and glory of what we accomplished over thirty years ago. Born-again space geeks! Of course there are those who will never submit. Evolution will take care of their kind. Of course, there will eventually come a time when people will be living on the Moon, and this whole debate will be moot, but that may be a long time in the future. We will probably have people living on Mars long before.

The foremost HB argument seems to be "Why can't you see stars in any of the pictures?" My simple answer was "You can't see stars in the daytime." Just because the sky is black doesn't mean it's night. There is still a glaringly bright Sun, Earthlight, and the landscape lit in every direction. Cameras cannot capture bright and dim objects in the same shot. Even on Earth at night, you need a long exposure to photograph stars.

Of the 20-odd HB arguments, some are based on bad science, some on bad photography (even though they often quote photographic "experts"), but most are just an ignorance of the truly alien environment of an airless Moon and how things behave there. Some astronauts report no confrontations, but others, like Neil Armstrong are called upon to "prove" they went to the Moon. Armstrong had a good retort: laser beams are regularly bounced off special reflectors on the Moon to accurately measure its distance from the Earth. "I put one of those there," counters Armstrong. "If we didn't go to the Moon, how did those get there?"

Ironically, many of the HB's arguments can be used against them. They speculate that details were "forgotten" by NASA's cinematographers, such as the lack of lunar dust billowing upon landing or the flags flapping "in the wind." However, for either of these not to have occurred, the movie set would have had to have been a near-perfect vacuum.

This is not possible. Personally, I believe Dave Scott's "hammer and leather" experiment proves it all.

Jim Lovell was asked about the HB profiled on the FOX show, Bill Kaysing and in response called him a "kook." Lovell was quickly sued for slander by Kaysing, but the case was dismissed, as Kaysing couldn't afford a lawyer (he was being evicted from his trailer park).

Conspiracy theorists are everywhere! They look just like you and me. It's them or us. The future of the world is in your hands!

KP

A few final comments of my own:

Those flags were wire-sprung to make them look as if they were being blown out by a wind. Obviously, as the astronauts moved them about, they appeared to 'flap' (like NASA wouldn't have thought of that if they were faking it!) The graticules or cross-hairs in the cameras only appear to vanish 'behind' an object where that object (like a flag, rock, or part of the spacecraft) is a glaring white. Ie, it's just 'washed out'. Oh dear, there's no exhaust plume when the Ascent Stage takes off from the Moon. Again, obviously NASA would forget something like that, wouldn't they? In fact, it's just another pointer to the shot being genuine (every artist, including yours truly, showed some sort of exhaust flame. Though 2001 got it right.).But the gases just expand outward in the near-vacuum, and vanish. Not only are there the well-known photos, film and TV footage, but there are thousands of wonderful shots of both sides of the Moon, taken from orbit. Obviously all those have to be faked too. . . I could go on, and I just wish I could confront those idiots on the programme, point by point. I just hope I'm preaching to the converted in this group; but at the eclipse, a chap there told me he believed it was all a fake! Hopefully, he doesn't any longer.

DAH

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

August 15th - Shaun Hutson - horror writer turned thriller writer - will be talking and signing at Wednesbury Library (which is on the Metro link). He'll be at the temporary Library site at the Old Post Office, Holyhead Road, Wednesbury at 7.30pm. Admission is free but tickets are essential as the building has a maximum capacity of 50. Call Wednesbury Library on (0121) 556 0351 for tickets. Tea, coffee and other refreshments will be available. Please tell them the BSEFG sent you so they will continue to send info to us!

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

October 13-14 OCTOCON - The Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Ireland. Guests: Anne McCaffrey, Kim Newman, Colin Smythe, John Higgins, Roger Gregg. Registration IE£20 (GB£16). Contact: Octocon, c/o Yellow Brick Road, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1.
website - www.octocon.com

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.

December 7-9 SMOFCON 19 (Conrunners Convention) The Monkbar Hotel, York. £25 reg. Contact: Kim Campbell, 69 Lincoln

St., Leeman Rd., York YO2 4YP. E-mail to Smofcon19@hotmail.com

March 8-10 2002 MeCoN V, Queen's University of Belfast. £10 reg. Contact: MeCoN V, c/o 30 Bendigo Street, Belfast BT6 8GD Website is www.mecon.org

March 29 - April 1 2002 HELICON 2: Hotel De France, St.Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands. £35 reg. Guests: Harry Turtledove, Brian Stableford, Peter Weston. . Contact: Helicon 2, 33 Meyrick Drive, Wash Common, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 6SY. Website is www.helicon.org.uk

SIGNINGS AT ANDROMEDA

Wednesday August 15th (1pm)

STEPHEN BAXTER will be signing copies of his new novel **MANIFOLD 3: ORIGIN** (hardcover) and **MANIFOLD 2: SPACE** (paperback).

Saturday August 18th (noon) - our very own **DAVID A HARDY** will be signing his new artbook **HARDYWARE** (hardcover).

Thursday September 6th (1pm) - US author **DAVID ZINDELL** will be signing copies of his new epic fantasy **THE LIGHTSTONE** (over 900pgs!)

All signings at 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1LT - Tel: (0121) 643 1999 (to reserve copies)

All 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.*



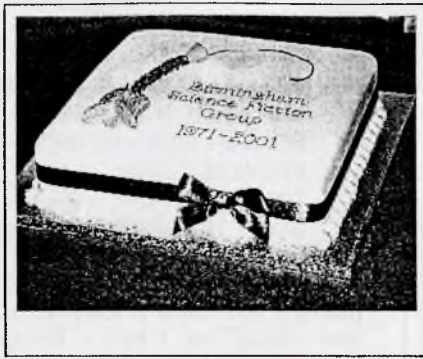
NEWS IN BRIEF. . .

I mentioned last month, the forthcoming publication of a hardcover edition of Harvard Lampoon's **BORED OF THE RINGS** but I intimated that HarperCollins were publishing it. Sorry, but it's actually a Gollancz publication ... The Gollancz Science Fiction Masterworks Hardcover series will be launched in October with no less than 10 titles! At only £9.99 each, they're a bargain. But if you want them all, start saving - fast! The final lineup - all numbered with Roman numerals - is

- I DUNE - Herbert
- II LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS - LeGuin
- III MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE - Dick
- IV STARS MY DESTINATION - Bester

- V A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ - Miller
- VI CHILDHOOD'S END - Clarke
- VII MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS - Heinlein
- VIII RINGWORLD - Niven
- IX THE FOREVER WAR - Haldeman
- X DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS - Wyndham

If you require any of these, I'd suggest putting a reservation in early. Even with 10 titles coming out, I have a feeling that at least a couple of them will go straight out of print (Nos III, IV, VI and VIII are much sought-after in hardcover) ... August sees the first UK edition of **WHEELERS** from two authors well-known to the BSFG - **Ian Stewart** and **Jack Cohen**, both of whom have spoken to the Group and also have been GoH at NOVACON. It's published in trade paperback by Earthlight ... The July issue of **LOCUS** features a cover and feature on **Harlan Ellison** ... Yet another award - the first 'Cordwainer' will be presented at this year's Worldcon, Philcon, on September 2nd. Decided by a jury - **Robert Silverberg**, **Gardner Dozois**, **John Clute** and **Scott Edelman** - it will be awarded to 'a SF or fantasy writer, living or dead, whose work embodies the spirit of **Cordwainer Smith's** fiction and deserves renewed attention'. Any suggestions out there? Surely **Jack Vance** has to win? ... The biggest selling book of the 20th century was reportedly **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** with sales of 50,000,000 copies. Sales of the Harry Potter books (four titles) have already reached 100 million!!! What is the fascination? ... **Chris Priest** has sold film rights to his World Fantasy Award winning novel **THE PRESTIGE** ... HarperCollins have bought the English language rights to the works of **C S Lewis**. A new series of *Narnia* books are planned, by writers as yet unconfirmed, the first one due out in Fall 2003 and will fill in gaps between the seven books in the series. To bring them into the modern-day and suitable for today's market, they're playing down the Christian imagery ... RGP



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!

BRING THE JUBILEE

by Ward Moore

Gollancz / 194pgs / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by William McCabe * * * *

This one of the definitive 'alternate world' novels. The book is not perfect. There are probably flaws in its extrapolation of history – especially when it comes to Europe (William V is king of England, Napoleon VI is emperor of France when the history only diverges in the 1860's in America). The writing style seems to be

wrongly dated – more 18th than 19th century. But these are petty problems. There is little science here that wouldn't have been known to the author (set at its most recent in an alternate 1940's but written in the 1950's) and none of it is explained at length.

This is the story of the United States after the Confederacy won the civil war. Since the southern states had taken this as a war of independence, the United States still exists although (since several states were conceded to the Confederacy) it is smaller and, because of heavy reparations, much poorer. Slavery no longer exists but the black population has been repatriated to Sierra Leone and extreme poverty means that some people 'indenture' themselves to large companies – effectively selling themselves as slaves for their working lives.

Hodge Backmaker is a farm-boy down on his luck who comes to New York with 3 dollars in search of whatever work he can find. He has educated himself from whatever books he can find and his favourites are American history. On his first day in the city he is beaten and robbed and taken in by a bookseller who needs someone to run errands and not ask questions. He will be provided with meals and a place to sleep and allowed to read whatever takes his fancy. After 4 years of reading he is ready to apply to every college he can think of.

Since the bookseller is really a front for a clandestine organisation called the 'Grand Army' that wants to destroy the Confederacy and restore the states he has been offered a job as a Confederate spy. He has also seen too much of the Grand Army's operations to stay, and he has the offer of a place at a college of sorts out in the country. They have several different projects at this college including a time machine.

WAM

MIDNIGHT ROBBER

by *Nalo Hopkinson*

Warner / 329pgs / £11.25 / tr pbk

Reviewed by William McCabe * * *

A second novel from the winner of the Locus / John W Campbell award for best new writer and one that is on the final ballot for this year's Hugo Awards.

This seems to be an attempt to make a solid science fiction story out of versions of old Caribbean legends. More than likely the 'legends' themselves are only stories told in a particular style.

This is the story of a young girl taken by her father, the mayor of a small colony on a distant planet, into exile on a prison colony in a separate dimension when he is convicted of murder. Once there he abuses and rapes her until, on reaching majority, she kills him. She escapes into the forest full of dangerous beasts to live with the other sentient species on this world.

Once she moves into the forest she quickly becomes a legendary character (something like Robin Hood) and there are pieces inserted here and there from this supposed mythology.

While the general story and the legends are fairly well-written there are some flaws. The frequent use of patois can make some things difficult to understand, and there are some oddities to the grammar that I can't explain either. The legendary status is achieved in a matter of a few months (and only a quarter of the book) on a world of small settlements separated by dense and dangerous forest and seems prepared for a radical change in nature should the story continue. WAM

FUTURE MEETINGS

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.



INDEX TO PHOTOS

Pg 5 - author Simon Clarke cutting the Brum Group Birthday Cake

Pg 6 - The Birthday Cake

Pg 7 - Founder members Rog Peyton & Vernon Brown cutting the cake.

Pg 8 - general view of the booze-up

Photos courtesy Dave Hardy

Newsletter 359 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.

Thanks to Dave Hardy for the article and photos and to Laurence Miller for the help in getting the technical side sorted. To William McCabe for the quick book reviews. And to William (again!) and Martin Tudor for news items.

BSFG Website address is
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)