

Brum Group News

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

OCTOBER 2001 ISSUE 361

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 12th October

MIKE ASHLEY

SF historian, editor, author, etc.

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

Mike has been rather busy of late - he has recently had published the first volume of **THE HISTORY OF THE SF MAGAZINES** from Liverpool University Press, with volume 2 out next year. October sees the publication of his anthology **THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF FANTASY** from Robinson while in November his biography of

Algernon Blackwood will be published, also by Robinson.

This promises to be an excellent meeting and I'll be sorry to miss it, as I'm away on holiday that week.

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.

NOVEMBER 16th MEETING - To be confirmed - but please note the date - the 16th and **NOT** the 9th of November.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

October 22 - Stan Nicholls will be running a Science Fiction and Fantasy Workshop from 2-5pm in the Shakespeare Memorial Room, Birmingham Central Library, Chamberlain Square. Tickets are £15 each - call (0121) 246 2774 for details of this and other workshops.

October 23 - as part of the Birmingham Book Festival, Paul McAuley and Stephen Baxter will be interviewed by Stan Nicholls at 7pm to 8.30pm at Waterstone's, New Street, Birmingham. Tickets will be £2 each from the Box Office. Call (0121) 605 7000, 643 2514 or 236 5622, or in person from The Ticket Shop (City Arcade) or Central Library Box Office.

The science fiction film extravaganza provisionally intended for the last weekend in October, at Star City film centre has been cancelled due to the events in New York on September 11th. Thanks for your input on films to be shown - I'll keep them on file in case the event takes place next year.

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. Email 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

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.

ANDROMEDA SIGNING SESSIONS

PETER F HAMILTON will be signing copies of his new novel FALLEN DRAGON (no it's not fantasy - he's still with hard-SF) and the non-fiction paperback THE CONFEDERACY HANDBOOK, on Friday October 12th at 1pm.

ERIC BROWN won't be signing copies of NEW YORK BLUES as, apparently, he hasn't finishing writing it yet!!!

GRAHAM JOYCE will be signing on Saturday 20th October at noon. Graham will be signing copies of his new novel SMOKING POPPY. Apparently it's about

fat boring Brummies! Graham wasn't aware of this - so come along to the signing and Graham will no doubt explain further.

ROBERT RANKIN will be signing copies of his new hardcover **THE FANDOM OF THE OPERATOR** and the paperback of **WEB SITE STORY** on Thursday, November 8th at 1pm.

TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing copies of his **TWO** new hardcovers - **THE LAST HERO** (a hardcover *Discworld* novel illustrated by Paul Kidby) and **THE AMAZING MAURICE AND HIS EDUCATED RODENTS** (a *Discworld* story for younger readers); the paperback of **THE TRUTH** (25th *Discworld* novel); the paperback of **NANNY OGG'S COOKBOOK** and the **2002 DISCWORLD DIARY** on Saturday, November 10th at noon. That's the Saturday of **NOVACON**.

All signings will be at **ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP**, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1LT. Orders may be made by phone on (0121) 643 1999. No extra charges for signed copies, no entrance fee. So why not take advantage?

2001 BRITISH FANTASY AWARDS

The 2001 British Fantasy Awards were presented on 23 September 2001 at the BFS's 30th Birthday Bash at Champagne Charlie's, Charing Cross, London.

The winners of this year's awards were:-

The August Derleth Award for Best Novel
PERDIDO STREET STATION by China Miéville (Macmillan)

Best Anthology

HIDEOUS PROGENY, edited by Brian Willis (Razorblade Press)

Best Collection

WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED by Kim Newman (Alchemy Press/ Airgedlámh publications)

Best Short Fiction

NAMING OF PARTS by Tim Lebbon (PS Publishing)

Best Artist

Jim Burns

Best Small Press

PS Publishing

Karl Edward Wagner Award

Peter Haining

NEWS IN BRIEF

...The 2001 LOCUS Awards went to Ursula K LeGuin for Best SF Novel - **THE TELLING** and Best Novelette - "The Birthday of the World" from F&SF Jun 2000; to **George R R Martin** for Best Fantasy Novel - **A STORM OF SWORDS**; to **Geoffrey A Landis** for Best First Novel - **MARS CROSSING**; to **Lucius Shepard** for Best Novella - "Radiant Green Star" (ASIMOV'S Aug 2000); to **Larry Niven** for Best Short Story - "The Missing Mass" (ANALOG Dec 2000) and speaking of **Larry Niven**, there's a new **MAN-KZIN** anthology due out real soon now - No 9 - with new stories by Niven and Poul Anderson Congratulations to Harper Collins UK on finding yet another way to publish **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** - the movie tie-in edition! In hardcover and paperback - each in separate volumes and omnibus volume. So that means we now have this vastly over-rated novel currently available in over ten different editions.

WANTED

Any photos of Group events
or Group members for a
display at **NOVACON 31**.
Photos will be well protected
and returned to owners.
Please give to **Tony Berry** at
the next meeting.



BOOK REVIEWS



(REVIEWERS please note:- in future all reviews should be emailed 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!

HARDYWARE: THE ART OF DAVID A HARDY

*Text by Chris Morgan,
Foreword by Stephen Baxter*

Paper Tiger / 128 pgs / £20.00 /hardcover
Reviewed by Ron Miller

I became aware of David Hardy's space art in 1972 when I obtained my first copy of CHALLENGE OF THE STARS, the book Hardy produced in collaboration with Patrick Moore. I had just begun experimenting with astronomical illustration and until then the only work I'd been exposed to was that of Chesley Bonestell, whose work I'd sought out since I'd been in grade school, and Ludek Pesek, whose paintings I knew only through his appearance in a 1970 issue of *National Geographic*. While all three approached their subjects with the same integrity and respect for scientific accuracy, as artists they could hardly have been more different. Bonestell's hyper-realism was so intensely compelling that it seemed to set the standard for the solar system itself. When the lunar landscape did not turn out to be as spectacularly Alpine as Bonestell had

depicted it, it really seemed as though it was the Moon that was at fault, not the artist. Pesek, on the other hand, never tried to pretend that his paintings were anything other than the product of his hand. This gave his astronomical art the appearance of *plein air* paintings - they possessed a casual naturalism made them look for all the world as though they were painted from life.

Hardy's artwork is a little harder to pigeonhole. Their brilliant colors and simple, bold designs have a decorative quality that irresistibly reminds me of the landscapes of Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood. They have a vigor and immediacy that is enormously appealing. Occasionally, this simplicity works against Hardy and a few of his paintings appear cartoonish . . . looking rather like the backgrounds for an animated cartoon. Fortunately, these are very much in the minority and the book contains not only some very fine paintings, but some of the best astronomical art done in the latter half of the twentieth century. There is for instance his beautifully-colored image of a terraformed Mars, a Dante-esque hydrogen volcano on Titan, his cover art for VISIONS OF SPACE, which in some ways a definitive space painting, 'The Way It Should Have Been', Hardy's homage to hero Chesley Bonestell, 'Proxima's Planet' and the absolutely exquisite 'Iapetus: A World in a Rock'. Unfortunately, one of my favourites is missing from the book - other than as a small reproduction of its appearance on a German SF magazine cover: the painting of the seismic exploration of Saturn's moon Titan that may be one of the best paintings of Titan since Bonestell's classic 1944 depiction.

It is hard to realize that David Hardy is one of the senior members of the space art community . . . perhaps *the* senior member if we limit ourselves to astronomical art (his youthful appearance - he looks a decade younger - may perhaps be due to his passionate interest in rock music. Then again, perhaps not). Born in 1936 he has

been working as a professional astronomical artist for nearly fifty years, making his first sale when he was 18 years old when he contributed eight black and white illustrations to Patrick Moore's *SUN, MYTHS AND MEN* . . . at the same time beginning a life-long relationship with the famed astronomer. There appears to have been no aspect of commercial art in which Hardy has *not* worked. After a stint in the RAF, he worked in the Design Office of Cadbury's where he created packaging and advertising art for the company's candies (working in a space theme whenever he could). He went freelance in the mid-60s and has since contributed artwork to virtually every imaginable medium, from book and magazine covers to record album sleeves and video games. He has made his name, however, not so much from his commercial work but from the nearly twenty books that he has illustrated – many of them of his own devising. The most outstanding of these undoubtedly being *CHALLENGE OF THE STARS*, a book that was created with the conscious intent of being an homage to the 1949 Chesley Bonestell-Willy Ley classic, *THE CONQUEST OF SPACE*. This, as I said, was my introduction to Hardy's work and was very much a major influence on my early attempts at space art. Looking through the book again vividly recalls the excitement I felt the first time I saw them. This is perhaps one of the uniquely special qualities of his work: its ability to excite and inspire even after years of familiarity.

The subjects of Hardy's books have not been limited to astronomy. There has been *DINOSAURS and ANIMALS FROM THE DAWN OF TIME* and a series that included *ROCKETS AND SATELLITES*, *LIGHT AND SIGHT*, *AIR AND WEATHER* and *ENERGY AND THE FUTURE*. *THE FIRES WITHIN*, a 1991 book about volcanoes, may be one of his very best works and includes some of the finest renderings of volcanoes and volcanic events I've ever seen. In 1990, Hardy created

VISIONS OF SPACE for Paper Tiger, a pictorial history of astronomical and space art. This oversize volume featured the work of virtually everyone who has worked in the genre for the past century, all accompanied by literate, meticulously-researched, highly-readable text. It, more than anything else, underscored Hardy's passionate devotion not only to his art but to the entire genre of astronomical painting.

HARDYWARE is a handsome volume, typical of Paper Tiger's fine work, attention to detail and exquisite color reproduction. The selection of art is profuse – perhaps too profuse, since neither animals nor humans appear to be Hardy's forte. The text especially is fine, combining extensive excerpts from interviews with the artist along with a comprehensive commentary by Chris Morgan that together succeed in bringing Hardy vividly to life. If there is any serious fault it is in the almost useless index, which lists only the titles of Hardy's paintings. With such a rich, extensive text, it's frustrating not to be able to look up names, events or places. RM

THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS
by Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter

Voyager / 312 pages / £9.99 trade pbk

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating * * * *

Before you complain that this title has been used before, by Bob Shaw, the authors know this, and in fact dedicate the book to Bob, and in the Afterword refer to 'Bob Shaw's *slow glass* classic which shares our title.' So that's OK.

This is one of those hard SF books which relies entirely on one 'new' concept, and follows it through to its ultimate conclusion. In this case, the concept is based on the 'Casimir Engine', which allows the creation of microscopic wormholes which allow one to connect from one point in space to

another. This could be from one room to the next, from one country to another – or to another star system. At first this allows only light to pass (and speech has to be lip-read – though by a computer routine), but as it develops, sounds can be heard, and eventually it is possible for the viewer to so immerse him/herself as to appear to actually *be* in that other place. This technology is masterminded by megalomaniac Hiram Patterson, head of the giant media corporation OurWorld, aided and abetted (albeit often unwillingly) by his two sons, Bobby and David.

Naturally this has great implications and uses in the areas of security and crime prevention. Especially when it is realised that the wormholes allow access not only to other points in space, but can take the viewer back in time. So one can visit the scene of a crime and see exactly who committed it, and how. But inevitably the whole thing snowballs; soon the technology becomes available not just to governments but to the ‘man in the street’. Privacy becomes a thing of the past, and every family skeleton is dug up, the background of everyone, living or historical, is revealed (including the true life of Jesus), and the whole nature of civilisation, and indeed of humanity, is changed.

There is a sub-plot: ‘The Wormwood’ – a massive asteroid (too big to deflect or destroy) which is heading towards Earth, and which will destroy it in five hundred years time. The discovery and announcement of this means that many people simply give up; even though it is far in the future, there seems to be no reason to plan for or invest in a future which no longer exists. The invention of the ‘Worm-Cam’ has an impact on this, especially as the younger generations, with Worm-Cams imbedded in their brains, become almost a new species. . . Although this is not strictly a time-travel story (because no-one travels physically), towards the end we have the sort of unfolding of great vistas of time and space in which first Clarke and latterly

Baxter excel, as we travel to the very origin of life on Earth. Mind-boggling stuff!

As usual, I cannot resist adding an artistic note. On page 137, the scene seemed oh so familiar. A huge red sun in a dark red sky, reflected in a lake or sea fringed by ice-crystals, eroded volcanic hills, the ‘W’ of Cassiopeia in the sky with an extra star at its left – our Sun. The WormCam had been sent to a planet of Proxima Centauri – but the description is surely of my painting on pages 48-49 of CHALLENGE OF THE STARS (1972 – it’s in the 1978 edition too)? So I emailed Stephen, who replied thus: “Actually I thought I was inventing that scene, especially the detail about Cassiopeia, a factoid that has always stuck in my mind, but then I remembered CHALLENGE, and looked at it again, and there it was – I’d reconstructed the scene unconsciously – so in the later drafts we made it more explicit. . . yes it was that painting!” *DAH*

DOCTOR WHO REGENERATION

by Philip Segal with Gary Russell

HarperCollins / 162 pages / £12.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Rating * * * *

The clever title refers both to the regeneration of the seventh Doctor, Sylvester McCoy, as the eighth doctor, Paul McCann, and to the regeneration of the series after an absence from the small screen of over six years. This is the story of how both came about.

In fact Philip Segal had approached the BBC with a view to developing Doctor Who for American TV some months before the last broadcast in 1989. It took four-and-a-half years of discussions and negotiations before he got the go-ahead to make a television film which might or might not be the pilot for a TV series which might or might not get made. That was in January 1994 and it was another two years before shooting started, during which a script was

prepared, scrapped, rewritten and finally abandoned and replaced by something completely different. The result was screened in May 1996 and flopped in the US where it appears to have sunk without trace, nothing having been heard of any follow-up by way of either a series or further movies. However it was much better received here, forcing the Beeb to go on record as saying that the possibility of more Doctor in the future could not be ruled out.

Who-writer Russell and Executive Producer Segal have provided a detailed account of all these events, beautifully presented and superbly illustrated. The fascination of an account like this is that it provides insights into why things turned out the way they did as well as into what got left out and what might have been. How about a regiment of Daleks with greatly enhanced capabilities (no more problems with stairs!) controlled by Roger Daltrey as the Master, with Billy Connolly as the Doctor fighting to save the universe? Segal says in the book "I truly hope that reading this book will give some of you a newly found appreciation of the craft of film making in general, as well as an awareness of what went into our film in particular." Well, he and Russell have certainly accomplished that and the book is well worthwhile even if, like me, you are not especially enthusiastic about Dr Who. (In fact, having read it I found I was motivated to watch the video again with renewed and enhanced interest.) MJ

THE SECRET OF LIFE

by Paul McAuley

Harper Collins / 518 pages / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Rating * * * * *

McAuley began writing with out-and-out space opera, but has since branched into a whole variety of other areas including apocalyptic near-futures. Here he has combined both trends in a story based on biogenetics, a subject which is beginning to

emerge as a leading topic in SF and to become a further example (if one were needed) of the way in which SF mostly follows trends in contemporary scientific culture rather than leading or directing them. The story tells how a Chinese expedition discovers microbial life on Mars and brings back a sample which escapes into the environment. An American expedition is then mounted to in an attempt to obtain further samples and discover how to counter the global threat which has been caused.

This is science fiction writing of the best kind. It eschews gung-ho adventure but is an engrossing story of scientific extrapolation concentrating on working scientists who are also real people with real motivations shaped by personal histories and strengths and weaknesses of personality. McAuley has obviously done a great deal of homework; his descriptions of Martian geology and geography must surely come from a detailed knowledge of the results of recent explorations; failing that I can only say that his imaginings (if that is what they are) have an amazingly authentic sound to them. Additionally, his background as a research biologist comes over in his fascinating accounts of how research in this area goes on - not just the science itself but also the politicking behind it and he also has something to say about the moral issues surrounding aspects of scientific research and discovery.

To be realistic, I guess this will not go down in history as one of the all-time great novels of the 21st century, but it is a really excellent book nonetheless. MJ

FUTURE MEETINGS

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.

The CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

DECEMBER 14

at the Selly Park Tavern (10 minutes bus ride from city centre). Enjoy an evening of good old-fashioned skittles - we play it the correct way (and the silly ways!). Price will be about £10 which includes hot food during the evening's festivities. The menu consists of:

Roast Chicken Breast & Chips

Lasagne & Chips

Fish & Chips

Scampi & Chips

Vegetable Lasagne & Chip

All served with a choice of salad or peas (jacket potato if preferred)

PLEASE GIVE FIRST CHOICE AND SECOND CHOICE. (This is just in case only 1 or 2 people pick one particular dish and it becomes uneconomical to do it. Unlikely, but you never know.

NOTE that this will be TICKET ONLY - there will NOT be any tickets on the door.

Tickets available from Alan Woodford at address below.

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.

MARCH 2002 - there's a VERY good possibility we've got US author **KIM STANLEY ROBINSON (RED MARS, GREEN MARS, BLUE MARS, ANTARCTICA, THE WILD SHORE, ICEHENGE, etc.)** to come and talk to the Group. Some of you may even have heard of him. Stan will be over in the UK to promote his new book (title unknown at present) and we've started negotiations with his publisher to get him to Brum. He'll almost certainly be signing at **ANDROMEDA** so things are looking good, though if he does talk to the Group it may have to be a Special, rather than the usual second Friday of the month.

Newsletter 361 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 Martin Tudor, Steve Green, all reviewers for their contributions.

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)