

Brum Group News

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

DECEMBER 2001 ISSUE 363

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 14th December

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

It's **THAT** time of year again - the time when we can all get together for a great social evening. Once again, we're off to a skittle alley - the ever-popular pass-time for non-sporty types like us.

Already we've sold over 30 tickets but we are nearing the cut-off point so if you haven't already got your ticket, phone or email **NOW** either our Treasurer Alan Woodford (see details on back page) or phone, email or collect a ticket from **ANDROMEDA**. Price is only £10 per person which includes food. When booking your ticket please state which meal is your first choice and which is your second. The choices are:-

Roast Chicken Breast & Chips

Lasagne & Chips

Fish and Chips

Scampi & Chips

Vegetable Lasagne & Chips

The event is at the Selly Park Tavern just a 10-minute bus ride from the city centre. Bus routes are the 45, 47 or 47A which leave the bottom end of Corporation Street (outside Beattie's) at approximately 15 minute intervals - and stop outside the Selly Park Tavern.

We have the use of the skittle alley from 7pm till 11pm. Food will be served between 8.30 and 9.00pm. We'll be playing traditional skittles as well as some variations that border on the downright silly. There will be prizes for winners in each of the games and for some gallant losers. There will also be a Christmas Raffle.

See you there!

JANUARY 11th MEETING - THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING where you vote for next year's committee. This will be followed by an auction where you can get books - **CHEAP!**

PANIC FRIDAY

Your Editor's apology

Even the less observant among you (with the exception of yours truly!) will have noticed the date error on the front of last month's newsletter. Yes, the November issue listed the meeting date as being in October! I don't think it confused anyone - it was an obvious error. But I did hear rumours of one member trying to hire a time-machine...

How did the error occur? Well, it was the Thursday evening before NOVACON - I suddenly remembered I hadn't done the newsletter and it HAD to go out the next day. So I stayed up typing it till I fell asleep at my computer - about 3am Friday morning. After breakfast I completed it by midday, rushing through it because I had to get it printed, get labels stuck on envelopes and get it posted. I also had to pack my clothes for NOVACON. I left home and walked down to the bus stop at the end of the road - five times, I did this because each time I remembered something I'd forgotten to pack. When I finally caught the bus, I remembered something else I'd forgotten! When I arrived at the shop (about 1pm), I had to pack all the books for the weekend - all this by 4pm (normally packing books for cons takes about a day and a half!). With the help of my staff - Harry and Arfan, the newsletter got sent out and Ped and I got the books packed by about 5pm - we had to take the books from the shop to Walsall via my home to collect something else I'd forgotten!!! I know I've been accused of cutting things fine before, but this really was Panic Friday.

RGP

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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 Turtle dove, 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.



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!

TOXICOLOGY

by Steve Aylett

Gollancz / 131pgs / £9.99 / pbk

Reviewed by William McCabe

Rating * * *

A collection of short pieces extended from the book of the same title published in 1999. Not all of these would qualify as

stories - "If Armstrong Was Interesting" is a list of the things the astronaut might have done rather than follow the script, "Bestiary" is a set of 26 definitions - one for each letter of the alphabet.

Aylett's regular style is something like Damon Runyon rewritten by William Burroughs in a world after cyberpunk. This collection of oddities includes other things that depart from that, but still show the overall style. There are still "Beerlight" stories but you will also find a couple of Wodehouse parodies (imagine Wooster as a bungling killer) and something else based on Kafka. The length (or lack of it) makes it difficult to get much out of these (only one of twenty-six pieces covers more than ten pages) but there is real style to the lack of substance. WAM

WARRIORS OF THE TEMPEST: FIRST BLOOD BOOK 3

by Stan Nicholls,

Gollancz / 280pgs / £5.99 /pbk

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating

Whether you will enjoy this book, depends on what you look for in fantasy - and what you put down before you started this one. WARRIORS OF THE TEMPEST concludes the trilogy which began with BODYGUARD OF LIGHTNING and continued with LEGION OF THUNDER.

The heroes are orcs, those nasties that got such a bad press in Tolkein's THE LORD OF THE RINGS. The pace is fast and furious with the orcs doing what they are best at - killing - a lot of the time.

The setting is Maras-Dantia, a world populated with a host of mythical creatures, including centaurs, nyadds, goblins, brownies, kobolds and harpies, from a mixture of mythologies (bells should start ringing that this is not what it seems). The ice is encroaching from the north and

puritanical humans from the south. Magic is disappearing. In volume one, Jennesta sent her crack orc division to acquire an artefact called an instrumentality. Due to a number of unfortunate circumstances, these orcs, lead by Stryke, found themselves under her death sentence and a quest to find the other four. They haven't thought as far as to what they will do once they have them.

The biggest problem is that it is often difficult to remember that Stryke and company are actually nasty viscous orcs. It is too easy to compare these unfavourably with those in Mary Gentle's GRUNTS! where the orcs were over-the-top nasty but you ended up rooting for them. Here, your sympathies are with the orcs from the beginning. PM

WHOLE WIDE WORLD

by Paul McAuley

HarperCollins / 388pgs / £16.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating

Some authors are able to construct complex alien worlds, some can extrapolate weird far future scenarios, some imagine strange space adventures for mankind or conjure near future thrillers. In various of his books, Paul McAuley has done all of these. WHOLE WIDE WORLD is near future crime. Although a cop, John Dixon has always been sidelined into the essential kinds of jobs that involve filing and information. In the beginning he is merely been given the job of collecting a couple of computers from a murder scene in order to retrieve any useful data that might be on them. The problem is that the hard drives have been stolen though it quickly becomes clear that the murder was broadcast over the Internet.

Superficially, the novel has the form of a conventional crime thriller. The detective has problems with relationships and doesn't always obey authority. He uses the usual techniques to gather some of the clues and

there are a number of possible suspects. The difference is that this is set at least ten years in the future. Between now and then there has been a revolution in British society. It has become more isolationist and much more of a 'nanny state'. The web is tightly controlled, even the mildest kind of pornography is taboo and almost everywhere you go - especially in London - you are tracked by cameras.

The pace is fast, the story telling is slick. Some of the characters are a bit conventional, but the setting is subtly drawn and for those who wish to see it, there is a warning. It is very easy to imagine that many aspects of this future are not only feasible, but are almost with us. Paul McAuley has seen the future and I don't think I like it. I liked the book, though, a lot.

PM

FUTURE MEETINGS

January 11 - the Annual General Meeting. This is where your committee reports on the past year, you have a chance to ask questions, this year's committee stands down and you get to choose a committee for next year. This will be followed by an auction conducted by yours truly.

February 8 - SF artist Fred Gambino will be talking about SF art and showing slides of the many wonderful covers he has done.

MARCH 2002 - US author **Kim Stanley Robinson**, author of **RED MARS, GREEN MARS, BLUE MARS, ANTARCTICA, THE WILD SHORE, ICEHENGE**, etc. will

be visiting the Group. Stan will be over in the UK to promote his new alternate history book - **THE YEARS OF SALT AND RICE**. He'll also be signing at **ANDROMEDA** while in Birmingham..

Newsletter 363 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.

Apologies for the credit omission in last month's newsletter. The review by Ron Miller of David Hardy's new artbook **HARDYWARE** was commissioned for and has appeared in **InfinityPlus** (www.infinityplus.co.uk). Thanks go to them for permission to reuse this review.

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)