

# **Brum Group News**

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

**FEBRUARY 2002 ISSUE 365**

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Friday 8th February 2002

## **FRED GAMBINO**

Fred was born 'in the late 1950s' and educated in Derby. He attended Derby College of Art and Technology studying Graphic Design, though always wanting to pursue a career in illustration; to his delight, policy changes at the college allowed him to specialise in his final year. One of his lecturers urged him to see David Larkin, art director at Pan Books, and this meeting eventually resulted in his first commission. Soon work flowed in from Ken Simms at Sphere Books and from the Sarah Brown Agency.

For the next couple of decades illustration commissions poured in, and it became physically impossible to satisfy the demand using conventional media. He realized that digital technology was the way forward and, despite having no previous computer experience, decided to take the plunge and bought one of the first

PowerMacs. Today up to 80% of his production is produced solely on computer.

In 2000 he worked as conceptual and background artist for the new CGI film called *Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius* produced by DNA studios in Texas and distributed by Paramount. This film is expected to be released in the UK later this year. His art book *Ground Zero* was published by Paper Tiger in 2001 in hardcover @ £20.00, and Fred will show slides from this. (Info from Paper Tiger website)

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 start at 7.45pm, so please arrive early, get your drinks from the Bar, and be seated in plenty of time.

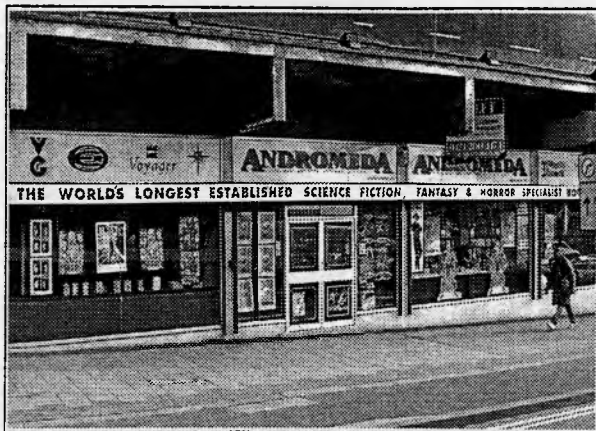
Non-members are always welcome.

### **MARCH 8TH MEETING:**

**NB Kim Stanley Robinson cannot now speak to the Group in March. Future meetings are under negotiation, so**

**WATCH THIS SPACE!**

## END OF AN ERA The shutters go up on Andromeda



Yes – take a last look. The sad news is that the **Andromeda Bookshop** – one of the oldest, largest and certainly finest SF bookshops in the world, closed its doors to the public for the last time a week ago (26 January). Rog did predict this at the AGM, at which I also rather rashly promised to help out with the Newsletter – hence this rather hastily assembled 4-page issue.

I would just like to express my own sorrow at this loss, to Birmingham and to the SF community at large, of what had become virtually an institution (at cons as well as at these and earlier premises), and congratulations to Rog Peyton and his staff on doing such a fantastic job for 30 years. The future is (as always) unknown, but I'm sure we all send our good wishes and support.

DAH



## NEWS IN BRIEF. . .

Stan Nicholls' next three books, comprising *The Quicksilver Trilogy*, will be published by Harper-Collins/Voyager.

Volume One, *Quicksilver Rising*, is scheduled for release as a trade paperback in April 2003. Volumes Two and Three, *Quicksilver Zenith* and *Quicksilver Twilight*, will appear in April 2004 and April 2005 respectively. All three volumes, running to 120,000 words each, will have subsequent mass market paperback editions.

Popular children's writer Astrid Lindgren, creator of the braided, freethinking Pippi Longstocking, died on 28 January. She was 94.

Reaching into her childhood memories of the Swedish countryside, Lindgren wrote more than 100 works, including novels, short stories, plays, song books and poetry. Her most popular character was freckled Pippi Longstocking, with her unmistakable red hair and mismatched stockings.

Also, John Buscema, comic book artist who drew Conan the Barbarian, died Jan. 10 of stomach cancer. He was 74. Buscema drew Conan,

adapted from stories by Robert Howard, for more than 25 years. He began his career in 1948, answering an ad for *The New York Times*. He later worked for Stan Lee and other comic strip creators. Buscema's books include *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* and *The John Buscema Sketchbook*.

Universal Pictures went to court Monday seeking to stop Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc. from running ads for its upcoming action film *Rollerball* that link it with last summer's breakout hit *The Fast and the Furious*. A Universal spokeswoman said the studio, a unit of Vivendi Universal, is concerned that its efforts to develop a sequel to its high-octane street-racing film could suffer from association with *Rollerball*, which has gained a reputation as a troubled picture.

Peter Crowther's **PS Publishing** website is now up and running: [www.pspublishing.co.uk](http://www.pspublishing.co.uk)

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**THE COMPLETE RODERICK** by John Sladek; Gollancz, £7.99, 611 pages.  
Reviewed by William McCabe \*\*\*

Sometimes I wonder whether Sladek has written more on robots than Asimov has. Sladek certainly takes Asimov's ideas to task frequently. Here he takes on the "three laws" again and throws in the odd trivial jibe about the title of a collection (Roderick can't find a robot called "I" in the collection "I, Robot"). I suspect there are more than a few points intended about the traditional whodunit thrown in. The great flaw here is that a book with so much parody and satire should be a whole lot funnier. In some cases it is necessary to read the notes at the end of each novel to understand that there was a joke. For instance there is a list of book titles, all of which are presumably meant

as ridiculous but only some of them made up – I understand the "The real Garbo ; Marxism and Menstruation" is bizarre but "Strange Encounters"?

The story itself revolves around the robot Roderick who grows and learns much as a normal child would do. There are the families (functional and not) that adopt him, the schools and (generally awful) teachers, and finally there are the low-paid menial jobs. Always in the background is the major corporation that wants his "secrets" and the secret government agency that wants him destroyed (and fails miserably). Surprisingly, the characters seem to re-occur throughout the story in various guises – his first "parents" show up again as the writers of popular books on the subject of robot rights, a college professor re-occurs as a tramp accused of murder.

There are a lot of good ideas here but somehow it seems to lose something in the delivery.

**FROM THE DUST RETURNED** by Ray Bradbury; Earthlight; £16.99, 204pp.  
Reviewed by William McCabe \*\*\*\*

There is much wrong with the cover of this book but, fortunately, this does not continue inside. This probably isn't, as the cover says, "his new novel". Like several of Bradbury's previous works, this may not be a novel. Some of the chapters read like short stories and several of them have already been published as such (two in the collection "The Toynbee Convector"). The book is closer to a novel than, say, "The Illustrated Man" or even "The Martian Chronicles" but there is still an element of the collection here. Neither is this entirely new – some of the stories were published in the 40's. This isn't even proper science fiction, it's much closer to the fantasy/horror that Bradbury first became famous for.

This is the story of a "family". Not the ordinary sort or even the extended sort that used to be popular in places east of here. This is the sort of family that the Addamses would be proud to have as neighbours. There's the grandmother who is older than most of the ancient civilizations that people wonder about, the fly-by-night uncle who really does, the young girl who is a bit of a dreamer but still gets out a lot that way. Then there are cousins and other relations that bear even less resemblance to . . . well . . . anything.

Comparisons with the Addams family are further justified in the author's afterword in which he explains how the (Charles Addams) cover illustration came about and that the two families developed together. Unfortunately the UK publishers have decided to opt for a cover more in line with their corporate image.

**THE FANDOM OF THE OPERATOR** by Robert Rankin; Doubleday; 288 pages, £16.99 h/c. Reviewed by Dave Hardy \*\*\*\*

OK, this is another book by Robert Rankin. One of approximately 22 that he has written. He has visited the Brum Group twice – not always to unanimous approval, but to much appreciation from the audience. So if you have never read him, you have only yourself to blame. Even the *Daily Express* said: "Everybody should read at least one Robert Rankin in their life." And you can't argue with the *Daily Express*, if you know what I mean, and I'm sure that you do. It's a tradition, or an old charter, or something.

To get to specifics, this book is a little different from most of Rankin's. True, it does take place in Brentford, as do most of his. But it doesn't follow the antics of the usual characters, such as Neville the

part-time barman at The Flying Swan and his regulars, Jim Pooley and Jon Omally. It does, however, feature the famous fictional detective, Lazlo Woodbine, and even more strongly his writer, P.P. Penrose (real name Charlie), whose death sets Gary Cheese, the hero (?) of the current work, onto a path which becomes ever more bound up with death and the dead, and even necromancy. Indeed, in the course of his new job (for life) at the Brentford Telephone Exchange, he finds himself communicating with the dead. And there are aliens. And dead aliens. Also unusually for Rankin, it follows the life of our hero through various stages, from a small boy to the age of 27 or so.

So, if you like humorous science fiction – and I use the term loosely ('science fiction', that is, not 'humorous') – you really should try this. Personally I find Rankin's writing original, irreverent, often rude, but readable, fast-moving and very funny. Take the *Express's* advice, and read a Rankin.

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Thanks to William McCabe and Dave Hardy for reviews, and Stan Nicholls and Paul Barnett for news items. This issue edited, and photos by, Dave Hardy.

**The Birmingham Science Fiction Group** meets on the second Friday of each month at the Britannia Hotel, New Street Birmingham. Membership is £16 per person (£21 for two members living at the same address), which includes the 12 free issues of the Brum Grop News plus reduced entrance fee at meetings. Cheques should be made out to 'BSFG' and sent to our Treasurer: Alan Woodford, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands DY4 7XN. E-mail enquiries to: [bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk](mailto:bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk)  
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