

Brum Group News

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

AUGUST 2002 ISSUE 371

Honorary Presidents:

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HARRY HARRISON

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Vicky Cook (Secretary)

Pat Brown (Treasurer)

Rog Peyton (Newsletter Editor)

+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 32 Chairman: Martin Tudor

Friday 9th AUGUST

HOLIDAY SOCIAL

No speaker this month as many members will be on holiday. And not really worth booking our usual venue either. But to have no meeting at all seems very, very wrong. So a programme-free social meeting seems to be in order.

We had previously suggested that we would be meeting at the Tap and Spile in Gas Street, just off Broad Street, but on reflection we thought that Broad Street on a hot summer Friday evening might be far too hectic and crowded. Too many drunks around - and adding even *more* drunks in the form of BSFG members might be too much for the police to handle.

So what we gonna do then? I suggested having a meal out somewhere but we've probably left it too late to guarantee a booking anywhere. But let's not rule out the possibility.

Vernon has suggested that we meet at 8.00pm in the first floor bar (or is it designated a mezzanine floor?) at the **Britannia Hotel, New Street** (entrance in Union Passage almost opposite the Odeon, New Street). At the bottom of the ramp from New Street Station, turn right, cross over the road and you'll find Union Passage about 20-30 yards along.

We can have a drink, chat and decide where to go by 8.30pm. Sounds good?
RGP

September Meeting - Liz Holliday, editor of the new SF magazine 3SF will be talking to the Group about editing, short stories, the new magazine, ODYSSEY and why it failed...

From METRO Thursday August 1st

GIANT SQUID TAKE OVER THE WORLD

“It has long been the stuff of myth and legend.

With eyes as large as a human head and weighing 40st, giant squid have taken over the world.

But this isn't the stuff of science fiction. Australian scientists have discovered that 60ft tentacled monsters of the deep take up more space on the planet than people.

Global warming has led to the sexually prolific creatures mating more often and growing bigger, eating anything in their path. A drop in the number of whales, their main predators, has also helped them become the big fish of the high seas.

The findings, published in the AUSTRALASIAN SCIENCE journal, may explain a 50ft female squid washed up in Tasmania and a 10ft monster caught off Scotland in January.”

< < Also in the same newspaper... > >

THE 2M-TON SPACE INVADER

“A crater formed by the impact of an enormous meteorite 65 million years ago has been discovered off the Yorkshire coast.

Found by chance 3280ft under the North Sea, it measures 1.9 miles wide and nearly 1000ft deep. It was probably created when a 2-million-ton meteorite smashed into the shallow waters which covered most of Britain at the time, scientists said. They

named it Silverpit and called it a 'wonderful find', although it is relatively small compared with other major craters, such as the 93-mile-wide Chicxulub in Mexico. Silverpit, 87 miles east of Scarborough, was discovered by a scientist examining seismic data for oil giant BP.”

Diagrams alongside this report also said

“The meteor would have been about 650ft in diameter, weighing 2 million tons, and would have been travelling at thousands of miles an hour.”

“The energy force on impact would have been equivalent to 2000 megatons of TNT - or more than 100,000 Hiroshima bombs.”

BESTSELLING SF IN UK

According to Book Track, the top eight bestselling SF books in the UK, in the year ending March 16 2002 were:-

LOOK TO WINDWARD by Iain M Banks (2001) 57,089 copies sold
THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TRILOGY by Douglas Adams (1992) 25,935 sold
COLONY by Rob Grant (2001) 22,645 sold
REVELATION SPACE by Alastair Reynolds (2001) 17,873 sold
HOUSE HARKONNEN by Brian Herbert & Kevin J Anderson (2001) 17,857 sold
THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY by Douglas Adams (1979) 11,490 sold

CONSIDER PHLEBAS by Ian M Banks (1992) 10,832 sold
DUNE by Frank Herbert (1968) 10,685 sold.

The top 5 SF authors were:-

	units	titles
Ian M Banks	115,137	16
Douglas Adams	73,000	18
Herbert & Anderson	37,059	8
Arthur C Clarke	35,577	38
Stephen Baxter	34,701	24

The top 5 Fantasy authors were:-

J R R Tolkien	1,007,134	25
Terry Pratchett	797,685	69
David Gemmell	114,131	43
Raymond Feist	87,499	22
Robert Jordan	86,128	28

J K Rowling does not feature as her books are classed as 'children's'. Her works are currently selling at the rate of 20,000 copies per week!

THE PRISM AWARD WINNERS

The 2002 Prism Award winners for science fiction and fantasy romance novels published in 2000 were:-

Light Paranormal Category

JUST WEST OF HEAVEN

by Kathleen Kane

Fantasy Category

GODDESS BY MISTAKE

by P.C. Cast

Time Travel Category

ACROSS A MOON-SWEPT MOOR

by Julie Moffett

Futuristic Category

SCOUT'S PROGRESS

by Sharon Lee & Steve Miller

(Sharon Lee & Steve Miller also took second place with LOCAL CUSTOM)

Dark Paranormal Category
DANEGELD by Susan Squires

THE SPECTRUM AWARD

The 2002 Spectrum Award recognises work of special interest to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people from 2001. The finalists are:-

Best Novel

BOUNCING OFF THE MOON

David Gerrold (Tor)

DREAMER

Steven Harper (Roc)

THE GHOST SISTER

Liz Williams (Bantam)

THE KAPPA CHILD

Iiromi Goto (Red Deep Press)

KUSHIEL'S DART

Jacqueline Carey (Tor)

A PARADIGM OF EARTH

Candas Jane Dorsey (Tor)

POINT OF DREAMS

Melissa Scott & Lisa Barnett (Tor)

THE SONG OF THE EARTH

Hugh Nissenson (Algonquin)

Best Short Fiction

"The Anthvoke" Steve Berman

"The Devil and Mrs Faust"

Ian Phillips

"If On a Moonlit Night"

M Shayne Bell

"Kindred" Alexis Glynn Latner

"Love On a Stick" Carrie Richerson

"Passing" Mark Tiedemann

"Shiomah's Land" Nisi Shawl

"Soul of Light" Catherine Asaro

"Triangle" Ellen Klages

Best Other Work

BENDING THE LANDSCAPE

ed by Nicola Griffith & Stephen Pagel

(anthology/Overlook Press)
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER
 by Joss Whedon (TV)
CHARM SCHOOL (comic)
CODENAME: KNOCKOUT #0 - #6
 by Robert Rodi (DC comics)
GREEN LANTERN #137 & #140
 Judd Winick (DC comics)
SEXTOPIA
 ed Cecilia Tan (anthology/Circler Press)
TRYSTS Steve Berman
 (collection/Lethe Press)
X-FORCE #117-118 (Marvel comic)

THOSE LISTS....

Well - a FEW of you actually read the June newsletter and sent in some lists. **BUT NOT VERY MANY OF YOU.** So I'll keep collecting the lists of favourite books and films but just include the random lists for now.

From member **Paul Thompson** in Holland...his three biggest hates:-

- 1) Absolutely, without a shadow of doubt anything containing the word 'Pokemon'.
- 2) " " " " anything containing the words 'Dragonball Z'.
- 3) British beer served in a Dutch bar - somehow it will ALWAYS be served at several degrees below the freezing point of water!

And the speakers he'd like to see at the Brum Group?

ANY (will I ever make it to a Brum Group meeting?)

From member **Robert Day** in Coventry - on authors he'd like to see at the Brum Group...

"There's a whole range of new British SF writers who I'd like to know more about, and who I've missed through not doing as many conventions lately as I used to. Steve Baxter and Paul McAuley are now old hat - didn't I see a publisher's blurb somewhere describing someone as 'a Steve Baxter for the new century'? But I'd turn out to see the likes of Eric Brown, John Meaney, China Mieville, Alastair Reynolds or Adam Roberts. I'd also like to see Ben Jeapes talking about being a small publisher. But the guy I rate remains Ian McDonald."

<< And don't forget that Ian McDonald is Guest of Honour at this year's NOVACON (see elsewhere in this newsletter for details) - RGP >>

From member **Pauline Morgan** here in Brum...top 5 speakers she'd like to see at the Brum Group...

- 1) Lisanne Norman
- 2) Ben Jeapes
- 3) Kate Jacoby
- 4) John Meaney
- 5) Sally Spedding

<< That makes two requests for Ben Jeapes and John Meaney. I believe John has a new book out in the not too distant future so we'll try and arrange a talk by John. Ben Jeapes is actually the publisher of the new SF magazine 3SF which launches later this year...we've got the magazine's editor talking to us in September but it might be a good idea to invite Ben next year as a follow-up after the magazine has had time to settle down. - RGP >>

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... ANDROMEDA vacated 2-5 Suffolk Street and went into storage at Walsall. It has now found new premises at 1 Suffolk Street (!!!) and should be operational by the time you read this Congratulations to **Terry Pratchett** on winning the **Carnegie Medal Award** for **THE AMAZING MAURICE AND HIS EDUCATED RODENTS** - a humorous young adult novel set in the *Discworld* universe congratulations also to **David Gemmell** who has won this year's **Prix Tour Eiffel** for best SF/fantasy novel for **LEGENDE** (**LEGEND**, 1984). The prize is 15,000 euros And again to **Neil Gaiman** for winning the **Bram Stoker Award** for **AMERICAN GODS** The judges for the **James White Award 2002** will be **Orson Scott Card, Michael Carroll, Christopher Fowler, Graham Joyce** and **David Pringle**. Closing date for the entries is August 20th and the Award ceremony will be at **NOVACON 32** **John R Douglas** has taken over as news editor of **SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE** from **Andrew I Porter** who founded the magazine in 1978. The next issue sees a title change to just **CHRONICLE** publisher **Dark Tales** has closed down and is currently liquidating its stock at up to 70% discount on their website at <http://www.darktales.com> SF artist **Ron Walotsky** (b. 1943) died July 29th after a year's illness. He had painted hundreds of cover paintings for books and magazines including over 50 covers for **FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION** mag author **Laurence M Janifer** (b.1933) died July 10th. He was

co-author with **Randall Garrett**, using the pseudonym 'Mark Phillips', of **BRAIN TWISTER** ("That Sweet Little Old Lady" in **ASTOUNDING 1959** - it never appeared in the UK reprint due to the paper-strike that year), and the sequels **THE IMPOSSIBLES** (ASF 1960 as "Out Like a Light") and **SUPERMIND** (ASF 1960-61 as "Occasion for Disaster"). More recently he was author of the trilogy **SURVIVOR, KNAVE IN HAND** and **KNAVE AND THE GAME**. Strangely, **Janifer** never had a single book published in the UK **Robert L Forward**, 69, has been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and is expected to survive another 6 to 12 months the movie **SPIDER-MAN** has broken the on-line record for the most continuity errors with over 120 spotted by sharp-eyed viewers **Glen Cook** has sold a new *Garrett P.I.* novel to Roc **Stephen King** has finally completed the 5th *Dark Tower* book and is already one third through the final 6th volume anybody seen the new animated **DAN DARE** on Channel 5? If so, how about some short reviews? **RGP**

LOST CHEQUE

Someone recently sent Vicky a cheque for BSGF membership. Unfortunately, her handbag with the cheque in it was stolen and she can't remember who the cheque was from. Have you sent a cheque recently that hasn't been cashed? Contact Vicky if you think it was your cheque...her email is aunico@hotmail.com



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.

ARES EXPRESS

by Ian McDonald

Earthlight / 553 pages / £7.99 pbk

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating * * * * *

Imagine a terra-formed Mars criss-crossed by an efficient railway system. Habitation is sparse, distances are vast. The live-aboard crew of the trains has a society developed from the necessity to keep the system running. Then throw in a wild card.

The plot at the beginning sounds a little familiar - Sweetness is born into an Engineer family, she wants to drive the train but women don't do that. Her marriage is arranged with a Steward boy from a different train. She doesn't like the idea so she runs away. At this point, though, any expectations the reader has go haywire as Sweetness gets caught up in the machinations of Devastation Harx.

Superficially, he appears to be an evangelist. He harbours ambitions to destroy the network of satellites that keeps the atmosphere breathable. Sweetness, unknowingly, has something he needs to complete his plans - the soul of Catherine of Tharsis who has been masquerading as Sweetness's imaginary dead twin. She flees through a surreal landscape where giant furniture adorns the hills. She spends time with the children of Worldroof, on the

outside of the glass dome covering Grand Valley, the site of the original landings (a fascinating culture in its own right).

In recent years, there have been a number of novels set on Mars (Kim Stanley Robinson, Anne Gay, etc.) but McDonald provides his own slant on it. He is not content with devising one new culture; the world is visualised as a whole and has several. There is not just one take on scientific extrapolation, there are several; and what in other hands would have been plot clichés, become fresh looks at familiar ideas. The characters are finely drawn and the places are real, touches of wit and humour add levity to what could have been dull. McDonald has produced another masterpiece. PM

<< **ARES EXPRESS** is, of course, set in the same universe as Ian's first novel, **DESOLATION ROAD**, also republished by Earthlight. The text follows that of the Drunken Dragon Press edition which was the author's preferred text, and NOT the text of previous paperback editions - *RGP* >>

A YEAR IN THE LINEAR CITY

by Paul diFilippo

PS Publishing / 80pgs / limited edn

hardcover £25 / limited edn trade pbk £8

Reviewed by Steve Mazey

Rating * * * * *

The Linear City is a long seemingly unending street - Broadway. Either side of this street are all the buildings needed for human existence - factories, shops, apartment blocks etc - separated into blocks by the cross streets that extend just to the end of the building facing onto Broadway. Behind the buildings to one side is a river, behind the other train tracks. Beyond these are the realms of the dead, from where the bright Fisherwives or dark Yardbolls come

to collect the dead to take them to their final destination.

This book tells of Diego Patchen of the 10,394,850th Block of Broadway in the borough of Gritsavage, a writer of cosmogonic fiction (this world's name for SF) in the pulp magazines of his time; of his dying father, his firewoman Amazonian girlfriend (Volusia Bittern), his drop out boyhood friend (Zohar Kush), the Borough's mayor (the wonderfully Dickensian-named Jobo Copperknob) a jazz musician (Rumbold Prague) and a newsstand vendor (Snarky Chuff) amongst many other players.

The story is told by way of four episodes of Diego's life during one year although with some threads running throughout. We gain insight into his relationship with his dying father; we observe him try to help his friend Kush; we hear of how his and his girlfriend's respective careers bloom; and finally we follow him on his trip to far distant blocks on a cultural exchange.

These individual tales though are not the main attraction for me with this book. There are two things I simply cannot recommend highly enough in this book - the setting and the actual writing itself. The street-world on a world with two suns, with its 'Far Side of the Tracks' and 'The Other Side' physical representations of the incorporeal Heaven and Hell in Christian religion; the cultural differences shown by people separated by thousands of blocks; the lack of progression in areas of technology; the jazz clubs and radio stations are wonderfully described and blend to give this a feeling of a distorted 1930's America. The writer's actual prose is wonderful. Right from the opening phrase - "February, and his father could talk only of his own impending death" - the writing style is wonderful, aided greatly by some of the invented words the author uses as part of

the dialects of the Boroughs we encounter, highlight, without seeming forced, the differences between this world and any equivalent it may have in the USA of the early 20th Century.

I've never read any Paul di Filippo before this, but I now have two more of his books on order. This is stunningly good fiction!
SM

<< This review is reprinted with permission from Steve's SF website...
<http://www.eternalnight.co.uk> - RGP >>

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

September 13-15 - OXONMOOT 2002 at St Anthony's College, Oxford. Tolkien Society event. Info at the website
www.tolkiensociety.org/oxon/index.html

September 20-22 - ELSTERCON 2002 at Haus des Buches, Leipzig, Germany. Gurests are Tim Powers, Mary Doria Russell, Paul J McAuley, etc. Info from Dirk-Berger @gmxdotde
website: www.fksfl.de

October 19-20 - OCTOCON at the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin, Ireland. Guest of Honour: China Mieville. UK agent for the con is Dave Lally, 64 Richbourne Terrace, London SW8 1AX.
email: info@octocon.com
website: www.octocon.com/2002/index.php

November 1-3 - NOVACON 32 - the Birmingham SF Group's very own convention will be held at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall, UK. Guest of Honour - Ian McDonald, author of *DESOLATION ROAD*, *ARES EXPRESS*, *CHAGA*, etc., etc. Cost of registration is £35 - send to NOVACON 32, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.
email: xl5@zoom.co.uk

NOVACON is the one event that YOU should be attending! It is not too soon to register! Especially if you require a single room. **BOOK NOW!**

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.

FUTURE MEETINGS

October 11th - our speaker will be local comics writer, Ian Edgington. Ian has written a series of sequels to the new PLANET OF THE APES movie, published in comics form.

November 8th - the annual competition versus the Birmingham University Science Fiction Group. At their request, this year will be a quiz.

December 13th - Christmas Social - Tickets will cost £10 which will include a basket or balti meal, prizes and return transport back to Birmingham City Centre. Getting there:- the #9 bus goes from Colmore Row to Halesown town centre. There are plenty of taxis nearby and the fare from Halesown to the Lighthouse pub is about £3 (divided by 4 is only 75p each). Tickets will be available (from September meeting) to members and their friends, relations, whatever. Bring them along to make it a great fun-filled evening.

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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, Pat Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wyld Green, Sutton Coldfield West Midlands, B73 5JH