

Brum Group News

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

NOVEMBER 2002 ISSUE 374

Honorary Presidents:

BRIAN W ALDISS

HARRY HARRISON

Committee:

Vernon Brown (Chairman)

Vicky Cook (Secretary)

Pat Brown (Treasurer)

Rog Peyton (Newsletter Editor)

+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 32 Chairman: Martin Tudor

Friday 8th NOVEMBER

QUIZ

B'ham University SF Group vs BSFG

This is the month we have our annual battle with members of the Birmingham University SF Group. Most years have been a debate but this year the University people decided they want a quiz. The questions are being prepared by one member from each side. Vernon is preparing questions on SF literature with a few movies thrown in. The University person will be preparing lots of media questions. The questions will then be shuffled and our fate will be in the lap of the gods.

Now you know what to expect, we need volunteers. Please contact me in

the daytime on 0121 477 6901 or email me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

RGP

The meeting will take place in the Lichfield room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passage almost 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.

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.

December Meeting - our Christmas Social will be on Friday, December 13th. Bad luck day! Probably because you left it too late and couldn't get any tickets!!! There's still a few left. **BUY NOW!!!**

SFF Writers Sign International Petition Against War On Iraq

Writers from around the world have signed their names to a petition against a US war on Iraq. Signers of the petition include science fiction and fantasy authors Ellen Datlow, Karen Joy Fowler, Lisa Goldstein, John Kessel, Kelly Link, and Michael Moorcock.

"Science Fiction writers have a special interest in the future and the US policy on Iraq is putting our future at risk. It's no wonder that so many fine writers in the genre are coming out in opposition to Bush and his war," said Douglas Lain, the Portland man who co-wrote the petition via email with New Zealand author Tim Jones.

"We are calling for a diplomatic solution. The United States should allow the return of UN weapons inspectors without a resolution on the use of force, and then the UN should lift the sanctions which have caused so much misery in Iraq," Tim Jones explained.

The petition states that writers and artists have a special responsibility to combat deceit and distortion, and suggests that the public is not being told the truth about the heavy civilian and military casualties a conflict with Iraq would cause.

As of the evening of October 11, there were 104 signers. The petition and list of signers is available on the internet at:

<<http://www.douglaslain.com/aawii.html>>.

NOVACON 33

Your committee has approved a request by Martin Tudor to organise the 2003 NOVACON. Martin has volunteered yet AGAIN! It will be at the Quality Inn, Walsall in November 2003. More details next month.

YOUR TOP TEN LISTS...

From our one American member, Wendell Wagner, comes these Top Ten lists...

Favourite SF Films (Alphabetically)

- ALIEN (1979, U.S., dir. Ridley Scott)
- BLADERUNNER (1982/95, U.S., dir. Ridley Scott)
- THE FANTASTIC PLANET (1973, France, dir. Rene Laloux)
- FORBIDDEN PLANET (1956, U.S., dir. Fred McLeod Wilcox)
- KING KONG (1933, U.S., dir. Merian C. Cooper)
- LA JETEE (1962, France, dir. Chris Marker)
- STAR WARS (1977, U.S., dir. George Lucas)
- THE TERMINATOR (1984, U.S., dir. James Cameron)
- THEY LIVE (1988, U.S., dir. John Carpenter)
- 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968, U.K., dir. Stanley Kubrick)

Favourite SF Long Works (25,000 words or more) (In order of preference)

1. Olaf Stapledon LAST AND FIRST MEN and STARMAKER
2. Philip Jose Farmer *The Riverworld Series*
3. Frank Herbert DUNE (and maybe

its sequels)

4. **Walter Miller** A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ
5. **Alfred Bester** THE STARS MY DESTINATION (AKA TIGER! TIGER!)
6. **Ursula K LeGuin** THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS
7. **H G Wells** THE TIME MACHINE
8. **Philip K Dick** THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE
9. **Frederik Pohl and C M Kornbluth** THE SPACE MERCHANTS
10. **Theodore Sturgeon** MORE THAN HUMAN

Favourite SF Short Works (25,000 words or less) (Alphabetically by author)

J G Ballard "The Subliminal Man"
Philip K Dick "Faith of Our Fathers"
George Alec Effinger "The Aliens Who Knew, I Mean, Everything"
Harlan Ellison "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream"
Robert Heinlein "All You Zombies"
Norman Kagan "The Mathenauts"
Daniel Keyes "Flowers for Algernon"
David I Masson "Traveler's Rest"
T L Sherred "E for Effort"
Roger Zelazny "A Rose for Ecclesiastes"

And from Coventry member **Robert Day** is this Top Ten SF novels (in alphabetical order)

Ian Banks - Use of weapons
Steven Baxter - VOYAGE
Alfred Bester - TIGER! TIGER! (aka THE STARS MY DESTINATION)
Charles Harness - THE PARADOX MEN

Robert Heinlein - THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS

Paul McAuley - THE SECRET OF LIFE

Ian McDonald - SACRIFICE OF FOOLS

Frederik Pohl & C M Kornbluth - THE SPACE MERCHANTS

Clifford Simak - WAY STATION

Bob Shaw - THE PALACE OF ETERNITY

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Actor **Richard Harris** has died at the age of 72 following shortly after the discovery of his having Hodgkin's Disease. Harris played Professor Albus Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* movies. He starred in many great movies including CAMELOT, CROMWELL and A MAN CALLED HORSE. The world has lost one of the truly GREAT actors **Wynne Whiteford**, Australian author and fan, born 1915, died September 30, 2002. His first sale was in 1934, and his first novel, BREATHING SPACE, appeared in 1980, followed by several more from Ace, from THOR'S HAMMER in 1985 to THE SPECIALIST in 1990. Probably best know to UK readers for his many stories in SF ADVENTURES, NEW WORLDS, etc. **Neil Gaiman** has won a lawsuit in Federal Court against **Todd McFarlane** concerning the creation in 1993 of several characters, including Angela, introduced by Gaiman in Issue 9 of comic book Spawn **Graham Joyce** has won the French *Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire* Award for Best translated short story - "Leningrad Nights" ...

The 2002 Sunburst Award, for best novel-length Canadian fantastic literature of the year, went to **Margaret Sweatman's** *WHEN ALICE LAY DOWN WITH PETER* (Alfred A. Knopf Canada). The award included a cash prize of \$1,000 and a 'sunburst' medal Disney's Touchstone Home Entertainment will release a double-disc 15th-anniversary Vista Series edition of *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT* on March 25, 2003, Variety reported. The release will feature rare new animation of Roger and other animated characters from the groundbreaking combination of live-action and original cartoon characters and legendary animated stars from every studio

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



<<These reviews reprinted with permission from Steve Mazey's website...
<http://www.eternalnight.co.uk> - *RGP*>>

THE GLASS MOUNTAIN

by *Jessica Rydill*

Orbit / 480 pgs / £6.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Lesley Mazey

Rating * * * * *

Having helped to defeat the evil Zahn Sarl, Annat has returned to her schooling. As she grows into a young woman, she begins to understand some of the more personal aspects of the Shamen. When a disturbing letter is

received from her brother, Malchik, Annat and her aunt Yuste travel to his university to make sure he is OK. When they arrive they find nothing but an empty room.

Meeting up again with Cluny Sorel d'Ademar they enlist the help of a detective to discover what has happened to Annat's brother. Soon they find that there is a much more malign reason for Malchik's disappearance than first suspected. Annat, her aunt, father and friends must again battle with the once dead Zahn Sarl to save Malchik and prevent Sarl from becoming all-powerful.

GLASS MOUNTAIN is the sequel to the novel *CHILDREN OF THE SHAMAN* and it picks up quite smoothly where the first book left off.

Annat, Yuda and Yuste are again pitted against the evil Zahn Sarl who has returned from the dead. Now, this 'resurrection' could have been done in a predictable manner but in *THE GLASS MOUNTAIN* the reanimation of Zahn Sarl is carried off in a slick, convincing manner.

At the start of the story we enter the world of Annat, back at school and trying not to be expelled. As introduced in the first book, Shamen are, to a great extent, bisexual and there is a well written section concerning Annat's first experiencing the nature of her sexuality and her confusion regarding her true feelings.

Yet again this is a well-written and fluid fantasy story that grips the reader until the very end. The characters and their relationships have developed over the intervening time and we learn more about the early lives of

Yuda and Yuste.

A wonderful sequel and, hopefully, there will be more to come.

LM

THE STRAW MEN

by Michael Marshall

HarperCollins/ 373pgs / £10.00 / hcvr

Reviewed by Steve Mazzy

Rating * * *

This is a little bit different from Michael Marshall (Smith)'s previous works, which I'd imagine is why he's dropped the Smith from the author name so we know this is a new move in his career. And in this novel the author has moved away from his SF/Fantasy roots and produced a dark crime thriller.

There are many strands to this book. The story opens in Palmerston on a Wednesday lunchtime in 1991. Two men enter a McDonald's restaurant and open fire killing many of the diners and staff. At the end of their killing frenzy the elder of the two killers shoots the younger and uses his blood to write 'The Straw Men' on the restaurant wall. We then move forward 11 years and the narrative picks up at the funeral of ex-CIA agent Ward Hopkins' parents, killed in a car crash. Following the funeral Ward discovers a note from his parents inside a book hidden in the cushions of his father's chair, a note telling him they are not dead. This prompts him to search their house, leading him to discover a single video cassette showing scenes from his parents lives including what appears to be a mysterious sibling of his. When he analyses this video cassette he hears the

same phrase 'The Straw Men' and so he starts trying to uncover the truth.

Meanwhile in Santa Monica, California a 14 year old girl called Sarah Becker is kidnapped from a busy shopping Promenade without anyone noticing who took her. The FBI detective investigating the case, approaches an ex-colleague named John Zandt who worked on previous cases of kidnap without matching methods to help her track the girl down in time to save her. In doing so she is taking a big risk as Zandy burned out on the case when his own daughter was kidnapped.

This is a little bit of a convoluted novel as it involves the gradual bringing together of three seemingly unconnected storylines. Added to this is the fact that the Ward Hopkins section of the tale is told in the first person from Ward's point of view, whilst the other sections are in third person, with the frequent changes coming across as forced and a little off-putting at times. I was reading this initially late at night, and had to re-read a couple of chapters as my sleep-deprived brain did not make total sense of it upon first reading.

That said there is a lot to be said for this book. Michael Marshall's prose style is very sharp with many witty quips along the way, with the best of these reserved for Ward Hopkins' inner commentary. But I found that these asides seemed at times a little out of place in the context of a story about serial killers. That however is a purely personal taste so you shouldn't let that put you off.

His characters are realistic. With just the minimum of description these people come alive, reminding you of

people you know; they have definite presence in the novel. The darker more violent moments are handled well, without the need to resort to extremes of gore. The suspense is maintained well throughout, building you up towards the story's resolution. This is a tale that would probably transfer well to the big screen, although it might be difficult to fit all of the various strands in and still make the picture in under three hours.

It was a reasonably enjoyable read, although to my taste, of a lesser standard than his SF work. But that could be because I am an SF fan above all else and part of me is disappointed that this might mean the author will produce less SF in the future. Unfortunately, this seems to be becoming a trend. SM

(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.

BRING AND BUY BOOKS

You still have the chance to sell those unwanted books - mainly turkeys, I'm sure - and realise CASH! You'll also free space on those shelves. Just grab a handful or two off the shelf, shove them in a bag, bring them along with you to the meeting, lay them out on a table and watch the vultures pounce! And this month there will be all those students in attendance looking for cheap buys. Grab their cash before they can object, stuff it in your wallet, go down to the bar and buy a round of drinks for the committee. Simple, huh? Ok, well... not quite like that. But you

CAN make money by parting with those unwanted books. You don't want to read EVERYTHING twice, surely? There ARE those books sitting there doing nothing - and trying to sell them brings so much joy and interest to the meetings.

THE RAFFLE

Raffle tickets are available as soon as you get to the meeting. You do NOT have to wait until the break when someone twists your arm - do it voluntarily.

The Group needs your cash to pay visiting authors' expenses, the salubrious surroundings of our regular meeting room, etc. It's just a quid - not even the price of half a pint! And you could WIN this month's prize...

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 6pm to 7pm monthly, at the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, B3 3HQ. It's a small friendly group meeting to discuss SF & fantasy books. Contact person is Pam Gaffney on (0121) 303 3634. Future meetings and subjects are:-

Nov 14th - THE SUMMER TREE by Guy Gavriel Kay

Dec 12th - AUTOMATED ALICE by Jeff Noon.

April 18-21 2003 - SEACON 03 - 54th National British Easter Convention will be held at the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, West Midlands. Guests of Honour are Mary Gentle, Christopher Evans and Chris 'Fangorn'

BACK IN THE FRAY!

I mentioned last month that I was going to get back into the bookselling business. Not on the scale of ANDROMEDA but I'll be dealing mail-order and internet ONLY.

Second-hand books and magazines, remainders and NEW books as and when I can get them.

When thinking of the name for my new business, I realised I was repeating exactly what I'd done 30 years ago. It was then that the name became obvious... I just hope that I don't end up doing it all over again, again.

REPLAY BOOKS

(Rog Peyton)

19 Eves Croft

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B32 3QL

Email: replayer@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

As well as selling, I need to BUY stock. If you have unwanted books to sell, review copies you don't need, please contact me

I'll be listing items on eBay as soon as I get back from NOVACON. Find me on eBay under the username 'replay_books'

Baker. Contact address is SEACON 03,
8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Herts, SG12
OHR

email - membership@seacon03.org.uk

- info@seacon03.org.uk

- programme@seacon03.org.uk

Website: www.seacon03.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

FUTURE MEETINGS

December 13th 2002 - Our Christmas Social will be at the Lighthouse, Coombs Road, Halesowen. £10 per person which includes free games of skittles, prizes if you're good (or VERY VERY unlucky), food and transport back into Birmingham City Centre. **YOU MUST HAVE A TICKET - DO NOT TURN UP ON THE NIGHT EXPECTING TO GET IN.** Tickets from Vernon or Pat Brown (address below)

January 11th 2003 - the Annual General Meeting at which you will get your chance to air your views about the group and vote for next year's committee. NOW is the time to consider standing for the committee

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Thanks to William McCabe, Martin Tudor and to LOCUS for news and info this month, not forgetting the named contributors in this issue.

The BRUM GROUP Website address is www.bsfg.freesevers.com/ Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

ABOUT US...

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, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield West Midlands, B73 5JH