

# **Brum Group News**

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

JANUARY 2003      ISSUE 376

*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 33 Chairman: Martin Tudor**

## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Yes, here we are again - another year under our belt. A New Year in which (hopefully) your elected committee attempts to improve the Group and arrange a programme that is varied and interesting. To do this you need to elect a committee! Fairly obvious. And that's why we have ....

## THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON FRIDAY, 10TH JANUARY

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. Please note that there is no entrance charge for the AGM and non-members MAY attend but they will NOT be eligible to vote.

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.

See overleaf for the agenda of the Annual General Meeting. This is the time that you can stand for committee (providing you were a member last year!)

**February Meeting** - on the 7th (**NOT** the 14th) we will see the return of GRAHAM JOYCE whose new book, THE FACTS OF LIFE, has just been published by Gollancz.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP  
AGENDA: 10th January 2003

Meeting to be Chaired by Tim Stannard, Group Legal Officer

1. Apologies.
2. Adoption of last year's AGM Minutes (Proposer & Seconder required)
3. Group Chairman's Remarks.
4. Group Treasurer's Report.
5. Group Publicity Officer's Report.
6. Newsletter Editor's Report
7. Novacon 32 Representative's Report.
8. Adoption of reports (Items 4-7 above). Proposers & Seconders required).
9. The 2002 Committee will stand down.
10. Election of Group Chairman (current Chairman stands for re-election)
11. Election of Committee Members:
  - a) Secretary (stands for re-election).
  - b) Treasurer (stands for re-election).
  - c) Newsletter Editor (stands for re-election).
  - d) Publicity Officer (stands for re-election).
  - e) Ordinary Members
12. Novacon Chairman's Report on the Progress of Novacon 33.
13. Confirmation of Novacon 34 Chairman.
14. Review of subscription rate.
15. Appointment of Legal Officer.
16. Any Other Business.
17. Vote of Thanks to Our Presidents.
18. The 2003 Annual General Meeting will be concluded.

**Committee posts** that you can stand for are:-

**Chairman** - needs to be a strong personality to keep the committee meetings in order; has to introduce guest speakers at each meeting, so should be articulate; has to make sure that other members of the committee do the jobs asked of them and if they fail to do so, ask (with the rest of the committee's approval), for their resignation and appoint a new person to that post.

**Secretary** - needs to be able to take the minutes of all committee meetings and type up in a presentable manner, sending copies to all other committee members; write to guest speakers as required.

**Treasurer** - needs to be good with figures; be at every meeting to take entrance fees; keep check on all members whose membership lapses and write to them asking to renew; organise the monthly raffles and produce the annual accounts.

**Newsletter Editor** - has to produce a newsletter every month (without fail!). Including the preparation of masters, printing, distribution, etc. Ideally should have access to a computer, be able to spell (or know how and when to use a Spell Checker); be able to find and correlate any pieces of news; distribute review books and obtain reviews of those books for insertion in the newsletter.

**Ordinary Committee Members** - two required. These members have no specific duties but are there to help out when necessary. One of the members will be responsible for the Group's website so needs to have Internet access and a working knowledge of either HTML, a site design / management program, or both. Some skill with computer graphics and a reference to details of future guests would be an advantage.

**Novacon Chairman** - this final committee post is NOT one elected at the AGM. This post is approved by the 'current' committee each year for the following year's Novacon. This year Martin Tudor has volunteered to chair NOVAcon 33 to be held in November 2003. The committee have already approved this post.

(**Note:** Anyone wishing to chair NOVAcon 34 in two year's time should approach the committee before September 2003).

**In addition** - all committee members undertake to do the jobs they've volunteered for; be able to attend committee meetings throughout the year; to assist in ideas for programme and be willing to ensure that the Group runs smoothly and profitably throughout the year.

This may be only a hobby without any remuneration but by volunteering YOU are responsible to the whole membership. Failure to do the job you've volunteered for is letting down every single member of the Group. So unless you're committed to doing the job properly, please don't stand for election.

Anyone wishing to stand for election to any of the above posts should get a Group member to propose them and a another member to second that proposal. This may be done at the AGM itself.

## **It's Auction Time....**

The formal part of the AGM will be followed (time allowing) by an AUCTION. So bring along any old books, magazines videos, cards, artwork, records (anything from shellac through to CDs!) etc., that you no longer require. SF/fantasy/horror items are preferred but if you've got any other items that you think we can have fun with, raise a few smiles (and, lawdy, we all need a few more of those!) and more importantly, raise some money for the Group funds.

If every member brings at least one additional surprise item we can have FUN!

PLEASE ALSO NOTE THAT THIS WILL BE THE **LAST** MEETING AT THE BRITANNIA HOTEL. In February, we will be moving to a new venue - the upstairs room at the Old Joint Stock in Temple Row, just off Colmore Row. This move will be for a trial period of four months. After which.... RGP



## BOOK REVIEWS



These reviews reprinted with permission from Steve Mazey's website...

<http://www.eternalnight.co.uk> - RGP

(REVIEWERS please note:- the flow of review copies from publishers has restarted and I believe Vernon has already arranged reviews for some of the books already received. In future all reviews should be emailed direct to me at [rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)) Deadline for each issue is the 1st of the month.

### ***REDEMPTION ARK by Alastair Reynolds***

Gollancz / 567 pages / £17.99 / hardback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Rating \* \* \* \* \*

I have already written enthusiastically in these pages about Reynolds' two previous books REVELATION SPACE and CHASM CITY. This new novel is a direct sequel to the former.

One of the themes of REVELATION SPACE was the destruction some nine hundred thousand years previously of an advanced technological civilisation by a mysterious force from outside. Now in REDEMPTION ARK the same force is emerging again, this time with the apparent object of destroying humanity. It transpires that this mysterious agency – which becomes known to us as the Inhibitors – has been around since the dawn of time, ruthlessly eliminating any emergent intelligence before it becomes able to start colonising the Galaxy. Paradoxical though it may seem, the object of this programme is actually to ensure the indefinite continuation of intelligent life, three billion years into the future and beyond.

This is not made clear until close to the end of the book; meanwhile humans try to fight back and, once having discovered the threat, try either to protect themselves from, or escape altogether, the fate which the Inhibitors have in store for them. Unfortunately, rival human factions are already at war with each other and there is conflict about who is to do the protecting and who the escaping. One of the major factions in this conflict is carried over from the previous book, while others are developed from earlier work published in INTERZONE and elsewhere. In particular, this involves the Conjoiners, a group who use neural implants to meld themselves together into a single group mind and some of whom

are quite prepared to follow an agenda which excludes the rest of humanity. I feel that the author and his publisher owe us yet another book collecting and/or developing that previous work to flesh out the history of his universe.

Superbly written and full of invention, this is yet another great book by an important author. Interestingly, however, it ends with important issues unresolved – the Inhibitors have not been stopped and are still out there and, so possibly are the Conjoiners. There is room in Reynolds' universe for lots more books and I hope they will all be as good as this one. MJ

### ***PHASE SPACE by Stephen Baxter***

Voyager / 426 pages / £17.99 / hardback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Rating \* \* \* \* \*

In 2001 Stephen Baxter completed his *Manifold* series, a collection of linked novels exploring some of the advanced scientific ideas he described in his non-fiction book DEEP FUTURE. Between 1997 and 2001 he had also published a number of short stories and these are collected here.

The phase space of the title refers to the space containing all the conceivable states of the Universe and one of the stories, featuring characters from the *Manifold* novels, describes how a failed experiment opens the Earth to Phase Space. Within this space we find included stories based on alternate histories – stories of what might have happened if this or that had gone wrong with the Apollo Programme for example – and stories linked in some degree to the *Manifold* novels, although not necessarily part of them.

As befits their previous independent publication, each story is able to stand alone, although they are now linked within a very loose framework based on the failed experiment story I have just mentioned which opens the Earth to the myriad possibilities of the Manifold where anything that can happen, will. Each is a gem in its own right, superbly crafted and polished. There are strange ideas aplenty here, emotion, pathos and flashes of a rare beauty which makes one want to reach out and touch the Universe, to be a part of it.

Like most of this author's work it deserves not to be missed. MJ

### ***FIRING THE CATHEDRAL by Michael Moorcock***

PS Publishing / £25 Ltd Edn hardcover & £8 Ltd Edn pbk.

Reviewed by Steve Mazey

Rating \* \* \*

This is not the easiest book to read. It is told in very short chapters in an almost stochastic fashion with random seeming events drawing the familiar entourage of Jerry Cornelius stories together.

Jerry Cornelius has been brought up to date somewhat and now fits a little easier into the world of the 21st Century. He is still a Jesuit priest, now Monsignor Cornelius and just appointed by the secretary of the U.N. to be the first Catholic governor of Kashmir. He is still a sexual creature, that aspect of his character not suppressed for these AIDS-ridden times, but he is now portrayed as a more sober sombre-looking man. He wears a sensible business suit and has a short cut hairstyle.

The world he inhabits is a sarcastic, anarchic version of ours, with events and trends taken to extremes. London has grown ever larger and extends as far south as the Sussex coast, Scotland is now a rogue state, and the United States seems to have imploded, fracturing into a myriad group of warring factions. Indeed, war and violence seems very much to be the entire backdrop to this novella. There are many military characters popping up throughout - Major Nye, General 'Wrong-Way' Lindbergh, Captain 'Four-Eyes' Ewell and Captain Heemish 'Flash' Gordon - as well as the plot visiting many places associated with violence and war in recent years, from the WTC Memorial Hall, through Burundi to Kashmir. There are references to various ethnic groups and their clashes, and each chapter is preceded by quotations from the Economist, the all Street Journal, various other sources referring to the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the September 11th terrorist attacks.

This is by no means a straightforward story. The plot seems to proceed at random with linked vignettes setting moods and establishing ideas rather than continuing the narrative flow. To long time Michael Moorcock fans and readers of the previous Jerry Cornelius stories this is not likely to cause problems - there are enough familiar references and characters included here to make you feel at home. We meet Una Persson, Bishop Beesley, Mo Collier (who in a wonderful aside reflects on how he hates to buy dope from the clergy), and Trixie Brunner, daughter of the Baroness, amongst an enormous cast of supporting characters for so short a work.

But is this a book that would serve to introduce new readers to the world of Jerry Cornelius and the wider worlds of Michael Moorcock? Probably not. There's simply too much that needs to be known to get full value out of this. It's a book that will almost certainly appeal to anyone who's read and enjoyed the *Cornelius Quartet* but if you haven't read them, start there first - then you'll be in a position to get the most from this book.

SM

## **METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING....**

*From member Robert Day comes this little lot of metaphors used in students' papers. Enjoy.... Part 2 next month*

1. Her face was a perfect oval, like a circle that had its two other sides gently compressed by a Thigh Master.
2. His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants

in a tumble dryer.

3. The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't.

4. McMurphy fell 12 stories, hitting the pavement like a paper bag filled with vegetable soup.

5. Her hair glistened in the rain like nose hair after a sneeze.

6. Her eyes were like two brown circles with big black dots in the centre.

7. Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.

8. He was as tall as a six-foot-three-inch tree.

9. The hailstones leaped from the pavement, just like maggots when you fry in hot grease.

10. Long separated by cruel fate, the star-crossed lovers raced across the grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left York at 6:36 pm travelling at 55 mph, the other from Peterborough at 4:19 pm at a speed of 35 mph.

11. The politician was gone but unnoticed, like the full stop after the Dr. on a Dr Pepper can.

12. John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.

13. The thunder was ominous sounding, much like the sound of a thin sheet of metal being shaken backstage during the storm scene in a play.

14. The red brick wall was the colour of a brick-red crayon.

15. Even in his last years, Granddad had a mind like a steel trap, only one that had been left out so long it had rusted shut.

## **BEDS WANTED**

When we have Speakers visiting the Group from outside the local area, we usually put them up in a Hotel. However, several times Speakers have requested that they stay with a Group member rather than be put into a lonely fan-free Hotel.

We have a few members who are able to provide hospitality for visiting Speakers but this year we had an instance where all those people were on holiday and we were unable to provide fan hospitality.

Do you have a spare bed, sofa-bed or similar that you could offer if necessary? The odds are that I will only be needed once in a blue moon, but your committee would like to keep a list of all members who can provide such hospitality.

If you can help in any way, or think you may be able to help, please speak with Vernon at the AGM. Even if you think you've already indicated willingness to Vernon, please confirm.

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

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

email - [membership@seacon03.org.uk](mailto:membership@seacon03.org.uk)

- [info@seacon03.org.uk](mailto:info@seacon03.org.uk)

- [programme@seacon03.org.uk](mailto:programme@seacon03.org.uk)

Website: [www.seacon03.org.uk](http://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](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)*

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

**February 7th 2003** - GRAHAM JOYCE will be talking about, among other things, his new book THE FACTS OF LIFE - a fantasy set in Coventry during the rebuilding after World War II.

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Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue.

The BRUM GROUP Website address is [www.bsfg.freesevers.com/](http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com/)  
Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

### **ABOUT US...**

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the second Friday of each month. 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