

Brum Group News

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

APRIL 2003

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NOVACON 33 Chairman: Martin Tudor

April Meeting (Friday 11th at 7.45pm)

BEN JEAPES

A few months ago, we asked the membership who they would like to have to talk to the Group. One name kept getting mentioned - Ben Jeapes. We're pleased to announce that Ben will be our speaker for April. You see - we DO take heed of your requests!

Ben is the author of several books for younger readers including HIS MAJESTY'S STARSHIP and WINGED CHARIOT. But he is probably more well-known through his publishing company BIG ENGINE and as publisher of the new SF magazine '3SF'.

When we asked Ben to talk to the Group he expressed a preference to talk about his writing rather than his publishing exploits but obviously he will answer ANY questions you have.

RGP

OUR NEW MEETING PLACE

Currently we meet at The Old Joint Stock, ideally situated in the city centre, a few minutes walk from road, rail and Metro stations, in Temple Row

May Meeting - still to be finalised.

overlooking St Philips Cathedral. It's in the upstairs room - through the pub on right hand side, right to the back corner and up the stairs. Our meeting room is opposite the top of the stairs, slightly to the left. But the doors should be open...

RGP

The following item comes, thanks to member Robert Day, from the Internet. I received this on March 31st, and duly sent it to my little group of contacts late in the evening. Of course, when they read this the next morning on April 1st... a coincidence, I assure you!

TIME-TRAVELER BUSTED FOR INSIDER DEALING

(WEEKLY WORLD NEWS Wednesday March 19th)

By CHAD KULTGEN

NEW YORK -- Federal investigators have arrested an enigmatic Wall Street wiz on insider-trading charges -- and incredibly, he claims to be a time-traveler from the year 2256!

Sources at the Security and Exchange Commission confirm that 44-year-old Andrew Carlssin offered the bizarre explanation for his uncanny success in the stock market after being led off in handcuffs on January 28.

"We don't believe this guy's story -- he's either a lunatic or a pathological liar," says an SEC insider.

"But the fact is, with an initial investment of only \$800, in two weeks' time he had a portfolio valued at over \$350 million. Every trade he made capitalized on unexpected business developments, which simply can't be pure luck.

"The only way he could pull it off is with illegal inside information. He's going to sit in a jail cell on Rikers Island until he agrees to give up his sources."

The past year of nose-diving stock prices has left most investors crying in their beer. So when Carlssin made a flurry of 126 high-risk trades and came out the winner every time, it raised the eyebrows of Wall Street watchdogs.

"If a company's stock rose due to a merger or technological breakthrough that was supposed to be secret, Mr. Carlssin somehow knew about it in advance," says the SEC source close to the hush-hush, ongoing investigation.

When investigators hauled Carlssin in for questioning, they got more than they bargained for: A mind-boggling four-hour confession.

Carlssin declared that he had traveled back in time from over 200 years in the future, when it is common knowledge that our era experienced one of the worst stock plunges in history. Yet anyone armed with knowledge of the handful of stocks destined to go through the roof could make a fortune.

"It was just too tempting to resist," Carlssin allegedly said in his videotaped confession. "I had planned to make it look natural, you know, lose a little here and there so it doesn't look too perfect. But I just got caught in the moment."

In a bid for leniency, Carlssin has reportedly offered to divulge "historical facts" such as the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden and a cure for AIDS.

All he wants is to be allowed to return to the future in his "time craft."

However, he refuses to reveal the location of the machine or discuss how it works, supposedly out of fear the technology could "fall into the wrong hands."

Officials are quite confident the "time-traveler's" claims are bogus. Yet the SEC source admits, "No one can find any record of any Andrew Carlssin existing anywhere before December 2002."

Should anyone wish to continue following this story, please use this address...
<http://tv.yahoo.com/news/www/20030319/104808600007.html>

And on a more serious note... a letter addressed to David A Hardy...

"I thought you'd like to hear about the following asteroid name citation which appeared in the most recent batch of Minor Planet Circulars:
(13329) Davidhardy = 1998 SB32

Discovered 1998 Sept. 20 by Spacewatch at Kitt Peak.

David A. Hardy (b. 1936) is a pioneer astronomical artist whose work has appeared in numerous books and magazines, as well as on stage and in film. His own books include VISIONS OF SPACE and THE FIRES WITHIN.

It is an honor for me to have the opportunity to name this asteroid for you. It was part of my first batch of names for some fellow Astronomical Artists. I also named asteroids in this batch for Kim Poor, Don Davis, Chris Butler, Bob Eggleton and Alan Bean.....

I have a 2nd list which I hope to send out soon which includes a number of other prominent Astronomical Artists."

Dr James Scotti
Lunar & Planetary Laboratory
University of Arizona
Tucson
AZ 85721
USA

Wow! What fame! Something that the rest of us mere mortals can NEVER expect! Congratulations, Dave! Well deserved.

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... **Harry B Warner, Jr**, the 'Hermit of Hagerstown', passed away February 17th, aged 80. For over 50 years he had written thousands of letters to SF fanzines and SF histories Author **Howard Fast** died early March, aged 89. He had written over 80 novels including SPARTACUS. He published two collections of

SF/fantasy stories - THE EDGE OF TOMORROW and THE GENERAL ZAPPED AN ANGEL Other deaths were **Monica Hughes**, young adult author; **Jane Rice** who contributed to UNKNOWN WORLDS and **Fred Frierberger**, who produced the third season of the original STAR TREK series and was writer for THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS The annual 'Skylark' Award for significant contributions to SF was awarded to **Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden** **John Travolta** is to appear in a remake of HARVEY - the fantasy movie that originally starred **James Stewart** and featured a six-foot tall invisible rabbit. My news contact was not sure if Travolta was playing the rabbit or Stewart's character...!? Disney are set to remake TOPPER, the 1937 film starring **Cary Grant** and based on the novel by **Thorne Smith** And a remake of THE STEPFORD WIVES is also on the cards **John Rogers**, co-screenwriter for THE CORE, has finished a screenplay for **Isaac Asimov's Foundation** trilogy but is not sure if it will be for one, two or three movies (!!!!!) **M John Harrison's** novel LIGHT and **John Kessel's** novella "Stories for Men" were joint winners of the James Tiptree Memorial Award STARSHIP TROOPERS 2 is in the works and reportedly will be as close to the spirit of **Robert Heinlein's** novel as the first movie !!! The DVD of STAR TREK NEMESIS will include 7 scenes cut from the cinema version. They total 45 minutes! RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



(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) Deadline for each issue is the 1st of the month. RGP

***THE BLUE WORLD* by Jack Vance**
Gollancz / 190pgs / £9.99 / trade paperback
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan
Rating: * * * *

Originally published in 1966, this is still a good, fast moving story and stands up relatively well to the passage of time. Vance has always been creatively ingenious. Here, twelve generations after a space ship crashed on a planet completely covered with water, the survivors have used available, mostly plant, materials to make a reasonable life. The only blight are the indigenous aquatic creatures that periodically raid the sponges that are grown as a food supply. One in particular, known as King Kragen, is a monster and is placated as it chases away all rivals. but as it grows, so does its appetite. One man thinks they should be trying to find ways of killing it.

Although, new readers will enjoy this book, there are some differences between this and more recent SF novels. THE BLUE WORLD is short, without

the many complicated plot strands that can lose and confuse – its brevity is a strength, a technique lost to many writers of the computer age. But it doesn't have the depth of characterisation now required in any serious novel of any kind.

The science is ingenious for the sophistication of more than thirty years ago. Now, we would expect an author to have an even greater knowledge. Even though a moon is not evident around this world, there would be tidal pulls created by the sun, and as the planet is rotating, fierce currents and counter-currents would be generated as seen in the atmosphere of Jupiter which would lead to far more storms than are evident in the described situation. There is satisfaction in the knowledge that the terms the population of the Blue World give to their castes, lets the reader into a secret lost in the past. There are Swindlers (that swindle fish from the water), Hoodwinkers (who operate the communication system of lanterns and hoods – which are winked), Incendiaries, Besslers and many others which indicate that the crashed ship was en route to a penal planet.

Enjoy the skill of an old master, but don't look too deep into the swirling waters. PM

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE WORLD and Other Stories

by Ursula K LeGuin

Gollancz £9.99, 362 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Rating: * * *

LeGuin creates societies and cultures. As an anthropologist by profession, it is the inter-reactions between her peoples that are important rather than the plots. This is also where the strengths of her writings lie.

In the universe that many of her novels and stories are set, there is no faster-than-light space travel. The distance between stars is real and although travelling at near light-speed means that ship time is short, the people you have known by the time you complete a return journey are long dead. This knowledge influences the decisions characters make.

“Coming of Age In Karhide” is a return to the planet of Gethen, where the acclaimed novel THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS was set. This story is a snapshot of the society where the sex of the people alternates seen through the eyes of Sov during the change from child to adult. “The Matter of Seggri” is a compendium of accounts showing how contact with the off-world Ekumen, changed the society. Superficially, the change is from a repressive society where the sexes are segregated, to a more open one where they can mix and form relationships. There are echoes in it of Sheri Tepper's novel THE GATE TO WOMEN'S COUNTRY and a lingering feeling of perhaps imposed (better!) changes cause as many problems as they solve.

The title story, "The Birthday of the World", also features a society that has change caused by off-world visitors but this time, they are catalysts for the events that occur accelerating the dissension that is already growing within the hierarchy.

"Lost Paradises" is set aboard a generation colony ship. When the last Earth-born voyager dies, the links with home are broken and many people forget the purpose of the journey and begin to fear the discomfort and changes that planet fall will bring.

The stories were written between 1994 and 2000 and not only show a diversity of cultures but also present ethical dilemmas that afflict our Earth-bound lives. they are deep, thoughtful stories for the thoughtful reader.

PM

***BENEATH THE GROUND* edited by Joel Lane**

The Alchemy Press / 205 pgs / £10.99 / trade paperback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating: * * *

Not my usual cup of tea, this kind of thing, but I thought the local connection might provide a point of interest - The Alchemy Press is located in Acocks Green. I was, however, to be disappointed as only one of the stories is set in Birmingham. Under Birmingham I should rather say, as the common theme of all twelve is that they are set "Beneath The Ground". Down there is a whole different world of abandoned mines and old railway tunnels, not to mention caverns which were there long before men began to dig their own holes. Down there beings older than man may exist and degenerate forms of humanity may have joined with them in a domain of horrors. Anyone who descends from the familiar sunlit world of the surface into the darkness below is liable to meet only with despair, disappearance and death.

It is only to be expected that these stories vary, both in quality of ideas and quality of execution. All the writers represented here are experienced, some considerably so, yet I thought that one or two at least of these stories were not well written at all. Such of them as have kept to a reasonably straightforward style succeed better, but any attempt to reproduce the flowery metaphorical manner of H. P. Lovecraft or Clark Ashton Smith seems to have been doomed to failure - it is much more difficult to accomplish than it looks.

As far as the subject matter is concerned, I felt that the subtle novelty that would make the stories freshly entertaining was scarcely to be found - the context might be new but the horrors have nearly all been done before. I did quite enjoy reading them and the actual presentation of the book, as a book, is good. But at the end of the day it is little more substantial than the ghosts and spirits it contains.

MJ

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...

SELLING YOUR WARES...

And don't forget that YOU can bring along your unwanted books, magazines, videos, etc., and sell them to other members - NO CHARGE, NO COMMISSION. Start rummaging through your collections - you KNOW you'll never read some of that stuff again. It was very welcome to see several people selling and buying at the last 2 meetings. BRING YOUR GOODIES!

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:-

April 17 - ENCOUNTER WITH TIBER by Buzz Aldrin and John Barnes (in GP5, 5th Floor)

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
- info@seacon03.org.uk
- programme@seacon03.org.uk
Website: www.seacon03.org.uk

April 25 2003 - William Gibson will be signing copies of his new book at Waterstone's, New Street at 7pm. Tickets are £3.00 each

Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Broad Street, Birmingham (Box Office 0121 236 4455).
April 29-May 3 - Salman Rushdie's MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN will be performed by The Royal Shakespeare Company.
May 13-24 - George Orwell's ANIMAL FARM will be performed by the Northern Stage Ensemble.

May 31 - Terry Pratchett will be at the Midlands Art Centre for "Young Readers UK". He will be doing a reading and also be interviewed on stage. Time is 3pm - Price is £4.00 (£2.50 concessions) or £10.00 for a family of four including 1 or 2 adults.

November 7-11 2003 - NOVACON 33 - the Birmingham SF Group's very own convention will be held at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall, UK. Guest of Honour -Jon Coutenay Grimwood, author of RED ROBE, PASHAZADE, etc.
Cost of registration is £35 - send to NOVACON 33, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.
email: xl5@zoom.co.uk **BOOK NOW!**

November 15-16 2003 - The British Costume Convention (SF, Media and Historical) will be held in Leamington Spa. Registration is £35 until 6th October. Contact Alan Cash, 130 Hamstead Hill Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham B20 1JB
Website: www.britishcostumeconvention.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

As at the time of writing, your 'new' committee are still negotiating with several speakers - nothing has actually been finalised yet. Hopefully, several meetings will have been finalised by next month.

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Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month from which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

The BRUM GROUP Website address is www.bsfg.freesevers.com

NEW! ----The email address is bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk ---- **NEW!**

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