

# **Brum Group News**

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

AUGUST 2003      ISSUE 383

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**+ Steve Jones & William McCabe**

**NOVACON 33 Chairman: Martin Tudor**

**August Meeting (Friday 8th at 7.45pm)  
Novacon 33 Guest of Honour**

# **JON COURTENAY GRIMWOOD**

In the July newsletter we stated that we would not be having a speaker in August. Then we discovered that NOVACON 33 Guest of Honour, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, was travelling up to Birmingham to meet the NOVACON committee on the very weekend of our meeting! As we'd been trying, unsuccessfully, to get Jon as a speaker all year, this chance was too good to miss. We invited him and the man - he said Yes!

He is the author of REDROBE, REMIX, LUCIFER'S DRAGON and NEO ADDIX as well as the *Arabesk* sequence (his most recent work) - PASHAZADE, EFFENDI and FELAHEEN. Set in a world where Germany won the 1914-1918 war and the Ottoman Empire still dominates the Middle East, this series is gaining great popularity with each new book.

Come along and see why Jon is to be Guest of Honour at our annual convention. You will not be disappointed!

*RGP*

**September 12th Meeting** - astronomer Jonathan Tate will be our guest speaker

## **FINAL MEETING AT OLD JOINT STOCK**

Currently we meet at The Old Joint Stock, situated in the city centre in Temple Row 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...

But unfortunately, this August meeting will be the last - at least for the foreseeable future - due to the owners deciding to transform our meeting room into a restaurant. From September we will be returning to the Britannia Hotel in Corporation Street (almost opposite the Odeon cinema). RGP

## **LOST HEINLEIN NOVEL FOUND!**

*"FOR US, THE LIVING, the first novel Robert A. Heinlein wrote, has been sold to Scribner's and Pocket Books. All copies of the novel, which is believed to have been written between late 1938 and April 1939, were thought to have been lost or destroyed, but a copy was located recently and passed on to the Heinlein Society, which turned it over to Heinlein's literary estate, and which subsequently sold at auction. No publication date has yet been announced."*

The above news item appeared in LOCUS and had me wondering how a book could be published and every copy disappear and no fans knowing about it. Then I realised I'd presumed it was a published copy. It wasn't. This, of course, is the manuscript. If it was any good, why wasn't it published at the time? Has time been kind to it, or are we going to read a really dated, padded stinker?

We all know that Heinlein's early works were heavily edited to produce publishable works. Only after STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND became a bestseller did Heinlein forbid any editing to his work. The results were TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE, FRIDAY, etc. Enough said?

## **LOCUS AWARDS 2003**

**BEST SF NOVEL** - THE YEARS OF RICE AND SALT, Kim Stanley Robinson (Bantam)

**BEST FANTASY NOVEL** - THE SCAR, China Miéville (Macmillan; Del Rey)

**BEST FIRST NOVEL** - A SCATTERING OF JADES, Alexander C. Irvine (Tor)

**BEST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL** - CORALINE, Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins)

**BEST NOVELLA** - "The Tain", China Miéville (PS Publishing)

**BEST NOVELETTE** - "The Wild Girls", Ursula K. Le Guin (Asimov's, Mar 2002)

**BEST SHORT STORY** - "October in the Chair", Neil Gaiman (Conjunctions 39: The New Wave Fabulists)

**BEST COLLECTION** - STORIES OF YOUR LIFE AND OTHERS, Ted Chiang (Tor)

*BEST ANTHOLOGY* - THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION: NINETEENTH ANNUAL COLLECTION, Gardner Dozois, ed. (St. Martin's)  
*BEST NON-FICTION* - TOMORROW NOW: ENVISIONING THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS, Bruce Sterling (Random House)  
*BEST ART BOOK* - SPECTRUM 9: THE BEST IN CONTEMPORARY FANTASTIC ART, Cathy Fenner & Arnie Fenner, eds. (Underwood Books)  
*BEST EDITOR* - Gardner Dozois  
*BEST MAGAZINE* - THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION  
*BEST BOOK PUBLISHER* - Tor  
*BEST ARTIST* - Bob Eggleton

## **NEWS IN BRIEF**

.... news just in that Simon & Schuster UK are closing the Earthlight SF & Fantasy imprint started by **John Jarrold**. This month's speaker, **Jon Courtenay Grimwood** is published by Earthlight so we may get some inside information on Friday .... **Nancy Kress** won this year's John W Campbell Award for PROBABILITY SPACE (Tor US). Runners-up were **David Brin** for KILN PEOPLE and **Robert J Sawyer** for HOMINIDS .... the **Theodore Sturgeon** Award for best short SF of the year was presented to "Over Yonder" by **Lucius Shepard** .... **George** and **Jan O'Nale**, publishers of Cheap Street Press, both 56, died by their own hand in May .... Chinese news agencies report that **Zheng Wenguang**, 'the father of Chinese Science Fiction', died from heart disease in June in Beijing. Zheng, 74, published China's first SF story in 1954. It was translated into several languages. In English it was titled "The Mirror Image of the Earth" and was printed in THE PENGUIN WORLD OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION and THE ROAD TO SCIENCE FICTION VOLUME 6: AROUND THE WORLD .... ANALOG Science Fiction & Fact and ASIMOV'S Science Fiction magazines, both published by Dell Magazines, will be changing their schedules to two double issues a year, ten issues per year altogether .... Marvel Comics' **Stan Lee** has partnered with PLAYBOY to develop a cartoon TV series starring **Hugh Hefner** as the leader of an elite crime-fighting team of various Playmates of the Month, called HEF'S SUPERBUNNIES, Variety reported .... RGP

## **LOCUS MAGAZINE**

LOCUS (the Newspaper of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Field) is now available from REPLAY BOOKS, 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL. The August issue will be available just about in time for the meeting. Price will be £4.99. Email me at [replayer@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:replayer@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) to reserve a copy and I'll bring it to the meeting.



## BOOK REVIEWS



(REVIEWERS please note:- 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 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting. RGP

### *POLYSTOM* by Adam Roberts

Gollancz / 294 pages / £17.99 hardcover, £10.99 trade paperback

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating: \* \* \*

This is a pretty remarkable book. A lot more remarkable than it first appears, in fact. Indeed, I didn't realize this until some 50 pages before the end! The individual elements are not really new or original but the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, or something. . . We have here a solar system in which the planets are mere thousands of miles apart, and in which space is full of air – very rarified as you ascend from a planet's surface, but still breathable. Space is therefore not black, but pale violet, and it is possible for propeller-driven aircraft to fly from one to another within hours or days. There are also creatures, called Skywhals, which float around in this interplanetary medium. By now you may well be thinking, as I did: "Bob Shaw's Wooden Spaceships!" And there is that similarity, though this is as far as it goes. It is, however, clear that here we have a universe in which the laws of physics are different from those we are used to. But the people appear to be entirely human in appearance and behaviour, as do the surfaces of their six planets and three moons, apart from the fact that the closest to the sun is very hot and the furthest (obviously) cold.

We follow the adventures of what must surely be the most gormless 'hero' I have come across. Polystom is an aristocrat who would probably win Monty Python's 'Upper Class Twit of the Year' hands-down. He is the Fiftieth Steward of Enting (his planet), and we first encounter him flying his own 'plane to Enting's moon, 4,200 miles away, where his uncle Cleonicles lives. Cleonicles is a brilliant, but now old professor, who designed the Computational Device, a valve-and-crystal machine that could undertake huge mathematical calculations at incredible speed. We later learn that it is now mainly used to control the War which has been fought for years on the Mudworld – closest planet to the sun, officially called Aelop. But Cleonicles also holds very unorthodox views on the nature of the universe, asserting that at some distance there must be vacuum, and that the stars are in fact distant globes of fire, burning in nothingness. He tries to explain this to Polystom, but his nephew constantly attempts to look at the world in poetic ways, and simply cannot grasp science. In fact, he grasps very little, passing his life in a haze of social events, waited on by servants.

Polystom falls in love with a girl called Beeswing and marries her, but she is strange, distant and uncommunicative, and the marriage fails. Beeswing runs away and eventually dies. Polystom's uncle is also killed, apparently by vagrants from offworld who arrived by hitching a ride on a skywhal. He decides, as a 'grand gesture', to volunteer fifty of his servants to go to Mudworld to fight in the War, with himself as their Captain. He is allocated two lieutenants, Sophanes and Stetrus, usually known as 'Sof' and 'Stet', who make little attempt to hide their contempt for his effete ways. It is here that we discover that the Computational Device is hidden inside, or may even be part of, a mountain on this world, and that the War is mainly about protecting this from insurrectionists. Polystom and his men see 'ghosts', who seem very real, and these include his dead wife, Beeswing, who now seems much more communicative, and his uncle Cleonicles. To tell you more would give away too much, but this is a book which rewards the effort of reading to the end. DAH

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

**Gollancz / 646 pages / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**

**Rating: \* \* \***

This is space opera on a huge stage. It is set in the same universe as Reynolds' earlier novels but knowledge of what happened previously is not important. Like most soaps, the important things are picked up on the way or they will be slotted neatly into the text without detriment to the overall effect. Like a good soap, it also has a huge cast and the seemingly separate strands are gradually woven together.

By this time, humanity has left the safety of the home solar system to colonise other worlds. There have been crises on the way, including a Melding Plague which attacked certain metals in machines making them inoperable. One of the important factions are the Conjoiners, who have implants that enable them to speak mind to mind. Skade is intensely loyal to the Mother Nest and will do anything to ensure its survival. Clavain is a conjoiner by choice, but was born before such a thing existed - cryogenics and time dilation mean he has lived a subjective 400 years. The conjoiners have recently discovered that there is a force at work in the galaxy that is intent on destroying any intelligent species that achieves star-faring capability. To defend themselves, they believe they need the cache of doomsday weapons rediscovered after 200 years in orbit around the planet Resurgam, 15 years travel away.

The people of Resurgam are also in deep trouble as the Inhibitors are about to start the extinction of the human race with them. It is a race against time for Skade and Clavain (who has now defected from the Conjoiners) as to who will

get the weapons first, and for Volyova, who has the weapons, and Khouri to evacuate the planet.

The science here, although impossible at our present level of expertise, is plausibly described and beautifully extrapolated. The problems this novel has lie with the vast distances involved and the time it takes to traverse them. There is also a very large cast of characters to keep track of. And I suspect the story isn't over yet. This would be a good book to take on a relaxing holiday. PM

***THE DANCERS AT THE END OF TIME* by Michael Moorcock**

**Gollancz / 664 pages / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by William McCabe**

**Rating: \* \* \* \***

(Reprint omnibus of AN ALIEN HEAT, THE HOLLOW LANDS and THE END OF ALL SONGS).

Michael Moorcock has been one of the best writers in British SF for forty years or so now. He may use styles and ideas from all sorts of other sources – if you can't see Conan in Elric or Robur in Von Bek, you've missed something – and some of his ideas of style are not for everyone. How many couldn't take to Jerry Cornelius? But he can put a story together and make it work. If you haven't read any of his works before, this is a good place to start.

In this series he's doing time travel, the end of the universe and Oscar Wilde Victorian drawing room comedy. Well, that's where this comes from and some of it is quite obvious. There is no great evil out to deliver the world to the forces of chaos and the only thing that separates our hero from the love of his life is the fact that she's married and Victorian. Even the end of the universe is a trivial point at the end of the story.

The greatest flaw in this is in the comedy. There is really only one joke, with endless variations, about the strangers in an alien place. Despite the fact that current vogue at the end of time is the Victorian era, they have very little idea about it. On their visit to the 19th century they seem to wander about in a daze. In their own time a replica of New York includes the home of its greatest king, Kong the Mighty, and a copy of the *Cutty Sark* moored on the river, inside a bottle, and all of this life size.

Another variation on the theme is the alien pirates who have landed at the end of time and proceed to loot, murder and rape anything in sight – except that for these people, death hasn't been permanent for centuries; rape is thought of as a mildly amusing novelty; and most of the contents of the world are manufactured with little more than a thought. That said, there is enough scope in the gag to fill enough of the book.

It's Moorcock; it's fun; it's an easy read. What more do you want? WAM

## **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. It certainly saves on ambulance call-outs! 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**

**HISTORY OF MARS IN FACT AND FICTION** - an exhibition, as part of National Astronomy Week, will be on show **August 23-31** at Soho House Museum, Soho Avenue, Handsworth, Birmingham. Photos, models and a piece of Martian meteorite, will be among the exhibits. Phone 0121 554 9122 for details.

**THE 14TH FESTIVAL OF FANTASTIC FILMS** (Renaissance Hotel, Manchester, **August 29-31**) has announced its guest list, all stc: actors **Christopher Eccleston** (THE OTHERS, 28 DAYS LATER, SECOND COMING), **Valerie Leon**, **Marjie Lawrence**; directors **Alex Cox** (REPO MAN), **Michael Armstrong** (MARK OF THE DEVIL); sfx specialist **Bob Keen** will also be discussing his work on ALIEN, DOG SOLDIERS, etc. Registration is £70, payable to Tony Edwards, 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN. Website: < [www.fantastic-films.com](http://www.fantastic-films.com) > .

**The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group** meets on Thursdays at 6pm to 7pm monthly, in GP5 on the 5th Floor 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:-

**August 14th** - LUMINOUS - Greg Egan

**September 4th** - ENGINES OF GOD - Jack McDevitt

**NOVACON 33** - the Birmingham SF Group's very own convention will be held over the **November 7/11** weekend at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. Guest of Honour - Jon Courtenay Grimwood. Cost of registration is £35 - send to NOVACON 33, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

email - x15@zoom.co.uk **BOOK NOW!**

**THE BRITISH COSTUME CONVENTION** (SF, Media and Historical) will be now held at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall (THIS IS A CHANGE TO PREVIOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS) over the weekend of **November 15/16**. Registration is £35 until 6th October. Contact Alan Cash, 130 Hamstead Hill Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham B20 1JB  
Website: [www.britishcostumeconvention.org.uk](http://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](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)*

### **FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG**

September 12th - astronomer Jonathan Tate

October 10th - to be announced

October 31st ('November' meeting!) - Halloween Special

December 5th - Christmas Party - Skittles & Social evening - full details 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](http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com)

**NEW!** ----The email address is [bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk) ---- **NEW!**

Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

**WE'RE STILL WAITING FOR YOUR EMAIL ADDRESSES! SEND TO [rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)**

**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, Wyld Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH