

# **Brum Group News**

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

SEPTEMBER 2003 ISSUE 384

*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**

**NOYACON 33 Chairman: Martin Tudor**

**September Meeting (Friday 12th at 7.45pm)**

***Director of the Spaceguard Centre***

# **JONATHAN TATE**

*From his official biography...*

Jonathan Tate was a serving Army Officer for 26 years, specialising in surface to air missile systems. He served in UK, Germany and Canada, but also worked in many other countries. His activities concerning the impact hazard were undertaken in a totally private capacity without the sanction or support of the Ministry of Defence.

In June 1996 Tate submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Defence and the British National Space Centre proposing the establishment of a British National Spaceguard Centre to study the threat posed to the UK by the impact of an asteroid or comet. Scientists worldwide lent their support, including Dr Arthur C Clarke, Dr Gene Shoemaker, Professor Edward Teller and many others. The Ministry of Defence dismissed the proposal, but the Department of Trade and Industry has since decided that further study is appropriate.

In January 1997 Tate established Spaceguard UK, which is now the largest independent Spaceguard organisation in the world, with a substantial national and international membership. Thanks to the efforts of the members

**October 10th Meeting** - with two meetings in October, we've got the choice of three speakers....first time ever?! Just a matter of which speaker comes to which meeting...

the subject of Spaceguard has been publicly aired in both Houses of Parliament, and Tate has been a regular contributor on television and radio, also in professional and popular journals. Tate and other members of Spaceguard UK advised the recent government Task Force on NEOs.

Aged 47, Tate is a member of the Board of Directors of the international Spaceguard Foundation, a consultant to the International Astronomical Union Working Group on Near Earth Objects, an associate of COSPAR, secretary of the All Party Astronomy and Space Environment Group (a joint House of Commons and House of Lords committee), the vice-president of the Space Development Council and a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. He is the Director of the Spaceguard Centre in mid-Wales, the co-ordinator of the Comet and Asteroid Information Network (CAIN) and leads the International Spaceguard Information Centre. The Spaceguard Centre is becoming a leading focus for public outreach and education in all matters astronomical.

## **AUCTION**

David Hardy has kindly offered for auction a proof from HARDYWARE of an asteroid striking Earth (which is what our speaker will be talking about this month). Proceeds to go to the Spaceguard Centre. Reserve on this auction will be £30.00. The auction will take place after the talk on Friday.

I think you'll all agree that this looks to be an extremely interesting meeting and an excellent meeting to return to our old meeting place, the Britannia Hotel. *RGP*

## **OUR NEW MEETING ROOM**

This month we are returning to the Britannia Hotel in Corporation Street for our monthly meetings. The entrance to the hotel is Union Passage almost opposite the Odeon cinema. Our meeting room will be shown on the display board in the foyer but will almost certainly be the Lichfield Room. *RGP*

## **THE 2003 HUGO AWARDS**

*Best Novel:* HOMINIDS by Robert J. Sawyer (ANALOG Jan-Apr 2002; Tor)

*Best Novella:* "Coraline" by Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins)

*Best Novelette:* "Slow Life" by Michael Swanwick (ANALOG Dec 2002)

*Best Short Story:* "Falling Onto Mars" by Geoffrey A Landis (ANALOG Jul/Aug 2002)

*Best Related Book:* BETTER TO HAVE LOVED: THE LIFE OF JUDITH MERRIL by Judith Merril & Emily Pohl-Weary (Between the Lines)

*Best Dramatic Presentation - Short Form:* BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, "Conversations With Dead People" (20th Century Fox TV/Mutant Enemy Inc.;

Directed by Nick Marck; Teleplay by Jane Espenson & Drew Goddard)

**Best Dramatic Presentation - Long Form:** THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS (New Line Cinema; Directed by Peter Jackson; Screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Stephen Sinclair & Peter Jackson; based on the novel by J R R Tolkien)

**Best Professional Editor:** Gardner Dozois

**Best Professional Artist:** Bob Eggleton

**Best Semiprozine:** LOCUS, Charles N Brown, Jennifer A Hall & Kirsten Gong-Wong, eds.

**Best Fanzine:** MIMOSA, Rich & Nicki Lynch

**Best Fan Writer:** Dave Langford

**Best Fan Artist:** Sue Mason

**John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer [Not a Hugo]:** Wen Spencer

## **NEWS IN BRIEF**

.... Arthur C Clarke, who you may remember 'retired' from writing about 15-20 years ago, has yet another new novel out shortly, THE LAST THEOREM, from Ballantine in the States and Gollancz in the UK .... **Kim Stanley Robinson** will be consultant on the making of the SciFi Channel's six-hour mini-series of RED MARS .... the oldest fiction magazine ARGOSY (1888 to 1943) is set to relaunch at Halloween weekend with contributions from **Michael Moorcock** and **Harlan Ellison** as well as several other fantasy/horror writers. Cover art will be by Leo & Diane Dillon. Each quarterly issue will consist of a 200pg paperback and a separately bound novella, together in a slipcase at \$12.00. They are currently looking for fiction. Info: **Lou Anders** (editor), ARGOSY MAGAZINE, PO Box 43099, Birmingham, AL 35243, USA. Website is [www.coppervale.com](http://www.coppervale.com) .... Wincanton in Somerset has been refused it's planned 'twinning' with *Discworld's* 'Ankh Morpork'. The government disallowed this saying the twinned town had to really exist! Shame .... TV series ENTERPRISE returns this fall to US TV with a new name - STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE .... When next on-line, go to these sites - <http://www.noosphere.com/showcase/comet/htm> - a French site where you will find literally thousands of SF pulp magazine and book covers (all the Ace, Ballantine, Berkley, etc.), and also on <http://www.fantascienza.net/femino/> - an Italian site with similar contents .... Movie rights have been sold to **Dan Simmon's** *Hyperion* books, to be made into a trilogy of films .... The Japanese Seiun Awards: best Translated Novel was ILLEGAL ALIEN by **Robert J. Sawyer**, translated by **Masayuki Uchida**. Best Translated Short Story was "Luminous" by **Greg Egan**, translated by **Makoto Yamagishi**. This was the third time Sawyer has won the Seiun award .... **Graham Joyce's** FACTS OF LIFE (Gollancz) is one of the five nominees in the Best Novel category for the World Fantasy Awards. Other nominees are: FITCHER'S BRIDES by **Gregory Frost** (Tor), OMBRIA IN SHADOW by **Patricia A McKillip** (Ace), THE PORTRAIT

OF MRS CHARBUQUE by **Jeffrey Ford** (Morrow) and THE SCAR by **China Mieville** (Macmillan; Del Rey) .... The first **Heinlein Award** will be presented at Torcon2. The Award will be presented periodically but not necessarily annually, to recognize outstanding works in science fiction and non-fiction that inspire the human exploration of space .... title of a forthcoming SF movie, directed by **Kevin Smith**, will be - wait for it - RANGER DANGER AND THE DANGER RANGERS !!!! ....

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 September issue containing forthcoming books in the US and UK for the next 12 months 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 (I have three spare!) and I'll bring it to the meeting.

RGP



## **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

### ***THE LONGEST WAY HOME* by Robert Silverberg**

**Gollancz / 262pgs / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**

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

With such a wealth of material produced by Silverberg over the years, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish reprint novels from new work. While some authors vary in their quality – some improving, some deteriorating – Silverberg has been consistently good. *THE LONGEST WAY HOME* appears to be a new novel but it already has the feel of a classic; i.e. something that will stand the test of time and will be enjoyed by generations.

This is a rite of passage novel; both from child to manhood as well as into enlightenment. A status quo has existed for a thousand years. The history that Joseph was taught said that the planet was colonised by the Folk, even though there was already an indigenous race living there. The Folk had problems and invited the Masters to take over. They did and the Folk have served the Masters ever since.

Joseph is staying at the Great House of a Master family in the Northern continent when he is awoken by sounds of battle. By luck, and the intervention of a Folkish woman, he escapes and discovers that not only have the Folk revolted, but

all the Masters are dead. His problem is not only to survive, but also to make his way back home and to safety, a trek of ten thousand miles. He does find help on his way, although he doesn't always understand why he has been given it, by the indigenous people who have a deeper culture than he suspected. Inevitably, he learns a lot about himself, and a different truth about the history of the planet during the journey.

There are familiar themes here, which is one reason why it already feels like a classic, but it is pleasantly readable. PM

### ***INCOMPETENCE by Rob Grant***

**Gollancz / 293pgs / £12.99 / hardcover**

**Reviewed by Lesley Mazey**

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

It is the near future. The constitution of the United Europe states that you cannot be fired from your job for being incompetent. Quite the opposite. There are employment quotas for all aspects of incompetence. However the psychopathic serial killer that is working his way across the continent is very competent indeed.

Cardew Vascular is on the trail of the murderer. But the killer always seems to be one step ahead leaving a trail of clues for Cardew to follow. However, before Cardew tracks down the killer he must first find a new identity, a hotel room that actually contains a bed and, the most difficult task of all, a pair of shoes.

As he works his way across Europe, Cardew encounters a bizarre array of characters including an octogenarian male Bunny (who, scarily, insists on performing a lap dance for our long-suffering hero), an airline pilot with vertigo and a police Captain with serious anger issues.

Will Cardew discover the identity of the murderer before becoming the next victim? Will he ever make it to a date with his redheaded lovely and will he ever get to keep a good pair of shoes?

I have a confession to make. When this book arrived I was halfway through another novel. I picked INCOMPETENCE up (as the premise sounded so bizarre I had to see what it was about) and within the first chapter the other book had been usurped and I was thoroughly engrossed in the world of Cardew Vascular.

This has to be one of the strangest, funniest books that I have ever read. If you thought that RED DWARF had its surreal moments then you "ain't seen nothing yet". Just as you feel that the concept of INCOMPETENCE has been taken to the extreme you turn a page and the author comes up with an idea that is so out-there you wonder how far it can go.

I have been a fan of Rob Grant for many years. I thought that the RED DWARF books were good but this novel far exceeds them all. I must have driven Steve mad over the day that it took to read this book as I found myself actually laughing out loud and then would dig him in the ribs and read him yet another

paragraph.

This book could not have come to me at a better time. We were right in the middle of the legal bits of moving house. The stress levels were rising and I desperately needed something to take my mind off things and make me relax. INCOMPETENCE did that and more. They say that laughter is the best medicine. Well, after reading this novel I cannot argue with that sentiment.

INCOMPETENCE is very different. Surreal, bizarre and completely addictive. This has to rank as one of the best books I have ever read. As the front cover states: "Bad is the New Good".

*LM*

## **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! And you can bring even more now - we have had a lift installed in the Hotel just for YOU!!!

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

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:-

**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](mailto:x15@zoom.co.uk) **BOOK NOW!**

## ALL CHANGE AGAIN!

**THE BRITISH COSTUME CONVENTION** (SF, Media and Historical) will be held 15-16 Nov . Wardrobe (costuming), now Boundary Hotel, Walsall. £35 reg to 6 Oct, then £40; day £25 Sat, £15 Sun. Cheques to British Costume Convention, 7 Church Close, Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 1SG.

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)*

## THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

**Date:** Friday 5th December 2003  
**Time:** 7.30pm onwards (till approx. 11pm)  
**Place:** The Lighthouse public house, Coombs Road, Halesowen  
**Cost:** £10 per person  
**Programme:** Meal, 9-pin skittles, prizes, a good time

OK, that's our side of things organised. All we need now is YOU, as soon as possible. If you have been to a Group Christmas Social before, you know what to expect. If you haven't, come along and find out.

Getting there - we will all meet at the number 9 bus stop in Colmore Row at 6.30pm. The price is 95p. We will travel to Halesowen (about a 30 minute trip). At Halesowen we will get a taxi to the venue which should be under £1.50 each presuming 4 sharing a taxi.

What do we do when we get there? Essentially we play skittles - the original 9-pin manual game, not the 10-pin automatic type. It's a great fun evening - we play normal, left-handed, backwards, knockout and various other ways to make sure that even a novice can win one of our Prizes. We've yet to try it blindfolded but This Could Be The Year! Between games we chat and generally socialise. There are Prizes galore. About 8.30/8.45pm we have the meal and the whole evening finishes about 11pm. We have our own private room, a well- stocked bar with a choice of guest beers, loos, etc. What more do we need?

Well, we DO have to know how many are coming so that we can order the food and arrange a coach back to the city centre. During the Christmas period, coach companies will be fairly heavily booked so we need to book WELL in advance. So we need to know by November 15th at the VERY latest.

**Meals.** There are basket and balti available. Basket meals are scampi, chicken, vegetable lasagne or beefburger, all with chips and salad, or faggots, mushy peas and chips. The balti are chicken or vegetable with naan bread and salad. Please let us know your first and second choices when you buy your ticket.

When you buy your tickets please also let us know whether you will be making your own arrangements or whether you will need transport back to the city. The return transport is all included in the price of your ticket.

Please send your cheques made out to the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, together with your name and address (AND YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER), whether you want the coach back and your meal choices to Pat Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, B73 5JH. or pay Vernon at the October meeting. PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT ALL INFORMATION SENT.

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

October 10th - to be announced

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

December 5th - Christmas Party - Skittles & Social evening - full details next month.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Newsletter 384** copyright 2003 for the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. Designed by Rog Peyton. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership or, for that matter, the person giving their opinion.

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