

Brum Group News

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

DECEMBER 2003 ISSUE 387

Honorary Presidents:

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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

Friday December 5th

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

- Time:** 7.30pm onwards (till approx. 11pm)
Place: The Lighthouse public house, Coombs Road, Halesowen
Cost: £10 per person - **HAVE YOU BOOKED AND PAID?** (see below)
Programme: Meal, 9-pin skittles, prizes, a good time

We will meet at the #9 bus stop in Colmore Row at 6.30pm and travel to Halesowen (about 30mins). At Halesowen we will get a taxi to the venue which should cost under £1.50 each presuming 4 sharing a taxi. The return transport is all included in the price of your ticket.

For all other information see September or October newsletters.

IF YOU WANT TO ATTEND BUT HAVEN'T YET BOOKED YOUR TICKET, PHONE ME (ROG PEYTON) ON 0121 477 6901 THIS WEEKEND - MONDAY WILL BE TOO LATE!

PHONE DURING THE DAYTIME PLEASE - NOT AFTER 7PM.

RGP

January 9th 2004 Meeting - the Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham SF Group. Reports on 2003, Election of new committee, etc.

GREAT QUOTES...

Jo Brand (comedienne) on being asked which books she'd throw off the BEST 100 list... "All Terry Pratchett's novels (there are five on the list). It's a bit unfair of me because I've probably only read the first page of one of his books, but sci-fi is a genre that really makes me want to bang my head against a wall." Her favourite book - NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR by George Orwell! Think someone ought to tell her...?

WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The World Fantasy Awards were presented Sunday afternoon, November 2, at the conclusion of the World Fantasy Convention at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill.

Life Achievement: **Lloyd Alexander and Donald M. Grant**

Novel: **THE FACTS OF LIFE** **Graham Joyce** (Gollancz) tied with
OMBRIA IN SHADOW **Patricia A. McKillip** (Ace)

Novella: "The Library" **Zoran Zivkovic** (Leviathan 3)

Short Story: "Creation" **Jeffrey Ford** (F&SF 5/02)

Anthology: **THE GREEN MAN: TALES FROM THE MYTHIC FOREST**
edited by **Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling** (Viking) tied with
LEVIATHAN 3 edited by **Jeff VanderMeer & Forrest Aguirre** (Ministry of Whimsy Press)

Collection: **THE FANTASY WRITER'S ASSISTANT AND OTHER STORIES**
Jeffrey Ford (Golden Gryphon Press)

Artist: **Tom Kidd**

Special Award: Professional: **Gordon Van Gelder** for The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction

Judges were **Justin Ackroyd, Les Edwards, Laura Anne Gilman, Lawrence Watt-Evans, and Jane Yolen, with awards administrator Peter Dennis Pautz**

BRITISH FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The following are the winners of the 2003 British Fantasy Awards,

Best Novel (The August Derleth Award): **China Miéville, THE SCAR** (Macmillan)

Best Short Fiction: **Mark Chadbourn "The Fairy-Feller's Master Stroke"** (PS Publishing)

Best Anthology: **Stephen Jones (ed.), KEEP OUT THE NIGHT** (PS Publishing)

Best Collection: **Ramsey Campbell, RAMSEY CAMPBELL, PROBABLY: ON HORROR AND SUNDRY FANTASIES** (PS Publishing)

Best Artist: **Les Edwards**

Best Small Press: **PS Publishing**

Special Award (Karl Edward Wagner Award): **Alan Garner**

INTERESTED IN SECOND-HAND BOOKS?

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THEM?

Come to an Adult Education workshop on

BOOK COLLECTING

Sat 6th December 2003 9:30am-12:30pm

**Clock Tower Adult Education Centre
106 High Street, Harborne**

A fast-moving 3-hour session including:

- * How to date books of all ages
- * Identifying first editions
- * Factors influencing book values
- * Buying and selling second-hand books
- * Some categories of collectable books

Lectures, discussions, examples, handouts, and even
the occasional exercise.

Note: This is a repeat of the oversubscribed July 2003 workshop,
conducted by local writer and book-collector CHRIS MORGAN

Fee: £7.50. Telephone the Clock Tower on 427-3213 to book
your place.

THE BIG READ - FINAL 21

The BBC shortlist for its "Big Read" poll has been announced. More than a third of the books remaining are SF/Fantasy. This is the complete list.

BIRDSONG - Sebastian Faulks
CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN - Louis de Bernieres
CATCH 22 - Joseph Heller
GONE WITH THE WIND - Margaret Mitchell
GREAT EXPECTATIONS - Charles Dickens
HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE - J K Rowling
HIS DARK MATERIALS - Philip Pullman
JANE EYRE - Charlotte Brontë
LITTLE WOMEN - Louisa May Alcott
NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR - George Orwell
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE - Jane Austen
REBECCA - Daphne Du Maurier
THE CATCHER IN THE RYE - J D Salinger
THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY - Douglas Adams
THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE - C S Lewis
THE LORD OF THE RINGS - J R R Tolkien
THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS - Kenneth Grahame
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD - Harper Lee
WAR AND PEACE - Leo Tolstoy
WINNIE-THE-POOH - AA Milne
WUTHERING HEIGHTS - Emily Brontë

What an incredibly boring list! Hardly anything published in the past 50 years. Who voted for this load of old tosh? People who have only read books for exams? And remembered something from their childhood? Oh, what the hell...we all know what the winner will be....

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... **Harry Clement Stubbs**, who wrote science fiction as **Hal Clement**, died in his sleep October 29, 2003, at his home in Milton, Massachusetts. Born in 1922, Clement was a high school teacher whose fiction gained a reputation as quintessential hard SF. His most famous novel was **MISSION OF GRAVITY**, set on a heavy, fast-spinning planet where the force of gravity is several times greater at the poles than at the equator. His last novel, **NOISE**, was published earlier this year Writer and publisher **Lloyd Arthur Eshbach** died October 29, 2003, in Myerstown PA at the age of 93. Eshbach published stories beginning in the 1930s

for Amazing, Wonder Stories, and other magazines, and published several novels in the '80s: the 'Gates of Lucifer' sequence for Del Rey, beginning with THE LAND BEYOND THE GATE (1984). He was best known as a publisher, having founded Fantasy Press in 1946 British fan **KIM Campbell**, who was instrumental in winning the 2005 Worldcon bid for Scotland, and who was diagnosed with throat cancer a few years ago, passed away on November 15th after suffering remission and entering a hospice The Nova Awards were announced at Novacon. The award recognizes excellence in British fanzine production and activity. *Best Fanzine*: Zoo Nation, edited by **Pete Young**. *Best Fanwriter*: **Claire Brialey**. *Best Fanartist*: **Sue Mason**. A Special Nova Award went to **Ina Shorrock** for 50 years in fandom **Graham Joyce** has delivered his new novel THE LIMITS OF ENCHANTMENT to Gollancz. Meanwhile his first novel DREAMSIDE (1991) is being made into a TV movie by Fireworks Media for the Sci-Fi Channel The administrators of the Sunburst Award have announced the 2003 winner of the award will be SKIN FOLK by **Nalo Hopkinson**. Ms. Hopkinson will receive a cash prize of \$1,000 and the Sunburst medallion **Andre Norton's** first two 'Solar Queen' adventures - SARGASSO OF SPACE and PLAGUE SHIP - will appear together in a hardcover omnibus from Tor in December LOCUS: THE MAGAZINE OF THE SF & FANTASY FIELD - September issue has interview with **Robert Sheckley** and Forthcoming Books list for next 12 months; October issue has long interview with **Jonathan Carroll** and the new November issue has an interview with Sutton Coldfield author **Ian R MacLeod** and full-colour report on TorCon, the 2003 World SF Convention. All available at £4.99 each from REPLAY BOOKS (replayer@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) **Robert Jordan** has managed to expand the novella published in **Robert Silverberg's** LEGENDS, into a 130,000 word novel! **Amazon.com** recently saw its \$2.1 billion in debt (!!!???) upgraded by a respected ratings service. Moody's Investor Service raised its ratings on the online retailer's convertible notes to Caa1 from Caa2. The rating is three steps below investment grade and is considered junk-bond status MGM is developing HENRY BATES AND THE SORCERER'S BALLS, a film spoof of the 'Harry Potter' and 'Lord of the Rings' franchises, Variety magazine reported. Written by **David Morgasen**, **James R. Stein** and **Timothy Stack** (SON OF THE BEACH), it will be produced by **Ricky Strauss** under his Ricochet Films banner. In the parody, the wizard Gandolfini battles the evil wizard Enron, with the help of Henry Bates, the rightful king of the land of Middlefinger. MGM bought the script days ago and has already engaged the writers for a two-week polish, indicating the studio plans to move quickly

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



(REVIEWERS please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting. RGP

COALESCENT ('Destiny's Children' Book One) by Stephen Baxter
Gollancz/ 473 pages / Hardcover £17.99, Trade paperback £12.99

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Rating: * * * *

I must confess my heart sank a bit when I saw that this was the first part of a new trilogy - yet another enormous story from the hand that has given us several such already. In fact, COALESCENT works perfectly well as a stand-alone novel and there is only a partial sense that it has come to an artificial stop only part-way through but remains an unfinished story. There are however one or two obvious openings for further developments

There are at first two main narrative threads here: the contemporary story of George Poole who discovers after his father's death that he had a twin sister he never knew about and the story of Regina, a young Roman girl (from whom George is in fact distantly descended) struggling to survive in Britain in the fifth century as the Roman Empire collapses around her. She manages to make her way to Rome itself where she lays the foundation of a new kind of society comprised entirely of women and living in a warren of secret tunnels beneath the city - the eponymous Coalescents. George's sister is a member of this society and his reunion with her leads him into conflict with the group. He escapes them at the end, remaining unsure as to whether or not he has glimpsed the future of mankind.

I was drawn irresistibly into comparing this with Frank Herbert's HELLSTROM'S HIVE from 1973, which also tells of a secret organisation of humans living underground and not only evolving a new kind of society but also new kinds of human beings to people it. Baxter's approach is different from Herbert's in many ways, particularly in that he does away with the idea of a single controlling intelligence, thereby probably coming closer to how hive societies of ants, say, or bees actually function. I would love to know how familiar Baxter was with the earlier book and how he worked out his different approach.

If I have a quarrel with this book it is the amount of it devoted to Regina's story. Perhaps it is essential for the reader to understand where she is coming from, but if I wanted to read a historical novel I would go and find one - it's not what I read SF for. For me, the book only came alive about two-thirds of the way through, when the SF ideas took over and one could begin to get a sense of grand concepts unfolding. Apart from the question of what the future will bring for the Coalescents themselves, there are hints of outside influences interfering with the formation of our solar system, and perhaps still around today, and there is a

brief view of humanity colonising the Galaxy twenty thousand years in the future - so plenty of basis for the sequels which are to follow.

As is so often the case, therefore, there can be two judgements of COALESCENT: on its own or as part of a larger whole. On its own it is pretty good but the completed 'Destiny's Children' trilogy may well turn out to be great. Or not. MJ

DIAMOND DOGS, TURQUOISE DAYS by Alastair Reynolds

Gollancz / 231 pages / £5.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating: * * * *

Firstly let's make it clear that this is not a novel, but consists of two novellas, unconnected apart from the fact that both are set in the author's 'Revelation Space' universe, and in each there is at least one character who has been in contact with, and thus been altered by, the Pattern Jugglers. Further, DIAMOND DOGS was published a couple of years ago by Peter Crowther's PS Publishing (I should know, since I did the cover for it, showing the Spire on Golgotha!). However, if you haven't already read that, but preferably have read CHASM CITY, REDEMPTION ARK, etc., this book is well worth buying. I always find it interesting to read stories set in a particular fictional 'universe', as you get a feeling of familiarity, and recognize certain references to events from other books.

The first story deals with a group of what can best be called mercenaries, who are employed to explore a mysterious tower which poses a series of problems, mainly mathematical, to people who try to 'invade' it. If they fail, they are subjected to horrific punishments which are likely to result in them being killed and cast out. The problems also become more difficult the higher they climb inside the tower - and the doorways become smaller, forcing them to remove their spacesuits. . . . There are similarities between this and stories like ROGUE MOON by Algis Budrys (a favourite of mine), and also the movie CUBE, which the author acknowledges within this story.

TURQUOISE DAYS focuses on a woman, Naqi, and her sister Mina, both of whom have experiences with the Pattern Jugglers in the oceans of the planet Turquoise, as a result of which Mina dies, but her brain patterns are absorbed by the Jugglers. Naqi becomes involved in a project to enclose a section of ocean, cutting off a colony of Pattern Jugglers from the main body. Then an Ultra ship approaches Turquoise, asking permission to land. It does, and for a while all seems fine. It becomes clear that their intention is to study the Pattern Jugglers on Turquoise (having done so on other worlds), but not to interfere. But - well, read the book to find out! DAH

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.30pm 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 3398.

Future meetings are:

Nov 13th - Kim Stanley Robinson **ANTARCTICA**

Dec 11th - H G Wells **THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU**

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 OF THE BSFG

December 5th - Christmas Party - Skittles & Social evening.

January - Annual General Meeting

February - astronomer Andy Lound - illustrated talk

March - SF artist Dominic Harman - interviewed by Stan Nicholls (with slides)

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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