

BRUM GROUP NEWS

The Free Monthly Newsletter of the
Birmingham Science Fiction Group

November 2007

Issue 434

Honorary Presidents

Brian W Aldiss O.B.E. & Harry Harrison
Committee

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Friday 9th November

Quiz

This month's meeting we have the popular pub-style quiz. There will be teams from both the regular group and the Birmingham University students. Choose your teams, make up you own names, try to understand and answer the questions set by chairman Vernon Brown. There will be prizes for the winning team and maybe others besides.

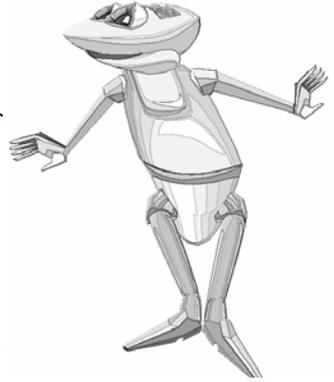
The meeting will take place in the Lichfield room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passage almost opposite the Odeon. At the bottom of the ramp from New Street Station, turn right, crossover the road and you'll find Union Passage about 20-30 yards along). The meeting will commence at 7.45 pm.

Admission £4 (Members £3)

Next Meeting—7th December: Christmas Party at the Selly Park Tavern. Buffet Food, Beer & Skittles.

You should find a flyer and application form for the Christmas Social with this Newsletter - if there isn't one please contact Vernon/Pat via the BSFG email or at the November Meeting. A number have already been sold, more will go at NOVACON so if you intend to join us please get yours now because numbers are limited.

News



Denvention has announced a contest to design the base of the Hugo Award to be presented at Denvention 3 in 2008. The design should reflect the convention's theme of "One Mile Closer to the Stars." The winner will receive a full membership to Denvention 3. Maybe they should just mark the base with a "mile" measuring stick.

The president of the SF Writers of America has issued a statement "It is my firm belief that artistic endeavor can only flourish on the web and elsewhere if the creators control their work." This follows the incident in which the SFWA tried to force a web site to remove certain copyright stories—some of which were displayed with the full permission of the writer.

Someone has found a copy of the original Batman comic in their attic. Some say it could fetch up to ½ million dollars.

Japan and China have sent their own unmanned probes to the moon in the last month. India will send their own next April.

Larry Niven has been working on a series of prequels to "Ringworld" with Edward Lerner. So far there are two books, "Fleet of Worlds" and "Juggler of Worlds" and they even include the odd character from "Ringworld". This hasn't slowed either of the collaborators down. They've both managed another novel each while they wrote these two.

J K Rowling has revealed that the character Albus Dumbledore from the Harry Potter books was gay. Since this doesn't appear in any of the books so far does this mean that the encyclopaedia is coming soon?

Coming soon to a cinema ...

Simon Pegg (Shaun of the dead, Hot Fuzz) as a young Scotty in the next Star Trek film. The Dark is Rising—originally based on Susan Cooper's novel— has managed to keep the Rooks—real live ones not CGI and very little else from the original story.

There will be another Terminator trilogy but Schwarzenegger might not be in it. Director Robert Rodriguez has cast his fiancé Rose McGowan as the star in his remake of Barbarella. Some say that the film studio (Universal) has cut their budget because of it. He's looking for a new film company.

The film version of Philip Pullman's "Northern Lights" will lose the last 3 chapters of the book. Chris Weitz, the director, has decided to move them to the next film in the trilogy.

Halcyon has acquired the film/TV rights to all of Phillip K Dick's works with the full consent of the writer's daughters. Although several films and one TV show have been based on his works, they have rarely been recognisable as such.

Disney/Pixar are turning the John Carter series into a trilogy. The first should come out before 2012.

Awards

The Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic was presented to Mark Frutkin for his novel Fabrizio's Return

The Aurora Awards for Canadian Science Fiction were presented to :-

Best Long-Form Work in English: Children of Chaos, by Dave Duncan

Best Long-Form Work in French: Reine de Memoire 4. La Princesse de Vengeance, by Elisabeth Vonarburg

Best Short-Form Work in English: "Biding Time," by Robert J. Sawyer

Best Short-Form Work in French: "Le regard du trilobite," by Mario Tessier

Best Work in English (Other): Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine, Karl Johanson, editor

Best Work in French (Other): Aux origines des petits hommes verts, by Jean-Louis Trudel

Artistic Achievement: Martin Springett

Lois McMaster Bujold has been named the recipient of the Ohioana Career Award, presented to an author with ties to Ohio. Bujold's father, Dr. Robert McMaster, received an Ohioana Citation in 1971.

The Galactic Spectrum award for gay/lesbian/transgendered SF goes to Hal Duncan for Vellum.

Doris Lessing has won this year's Nobel Prize and her publishers will be re-packaging several of her novel's to follow it including Memoirs of a Survivor.

The Washington State book award goes to Julie Phillips for the biography James Tiptree, Jr: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon

Quiz

1. The answer was 42 but, according to Arthur Dent's scrabble bag, what was the question?
2. The rock band "The Question" acquire a medallion that lets them see ghosts in which TV fantasy?
3. "The Alchemist's Question" was billed as the final appearance of which Moorcock hero?
4. Which Batman villain appeared in a suit decorated with Question marks?

Last month's Quiz Answers

1. 2000 AD,
2. Eagle
3. Warrior
4. Deadline,

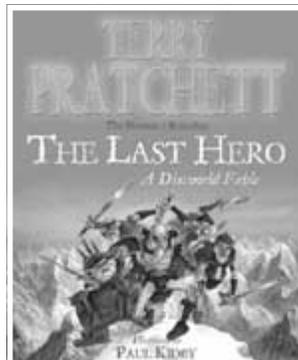
Reviews

THE LAST HERO by Terry Pratchett

Illustrated by Paul Kidby

Gollancz/Orion; 176 pages; £8.99; paperback

Reviewed by Michael Jones



THE LAST HERO first appeared in a large (28 x 23 cm) and handsomely produced hardback edition, followed in due course by a softbound version with several added illustrations. It is now reissued in a smaller (20 x 17 cm) version, still softbound, inclusive of the extra illustrations — actually eight double-page spreads — and about half the price.

The story, briefly, is that Cohen the Barbarian and his equally ancient chums plan to go out in a blaze of glory, heedless of the fact that they may bring about the end of the (disc)world. Clearly they must be stopped, and how better to do it than to send the inept and cowardly Rincewind in a dragon-powered spaceship designed by Leonard of Quirm to intercept them. Cue various comedic high jinks. However, as so often with Discworld books, the actual story is to some extent of only secondary importance. It serves as a vehicle for musings on such serious subjects as religion, worship and the nature of belief, life and death, friendship and loyalty, and the power of story.

Note that this is in no way a graphic novel as such, although some of the illustrations are virtually part of the text — and all serve to enhance it to some degree, so that it would be a lesser book without them.

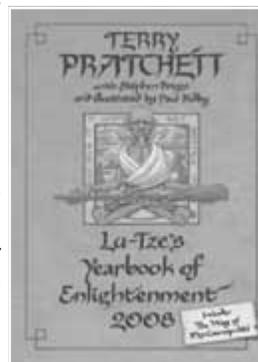
A reader familiar with the Discworld books will know pretty much what to expect, and it would serve as a reasonable introduction to a newcomer.

LU-TZE'S YEARBOOK OF ENLIGHTENMENT by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Briggs

Illustrated by Paul Kidby

Gollancz/Orion; enough pages; £12.99; hardback

Reviewed by Michael Jones



How do you review a diary? —because, despite the grandiose title, that is what this is. Well — it has all the dates for next year, with a space to write something for every day, and a calendar for the year and one for the year after, and somewhere to put your name and address and everything. So far so OK then.

Of course, the “important” part is contained in the first twenty or so pages, where one finds an exposition of the meaning of life according to Lu-Tze, which is found to be based upon the Way of Mrs

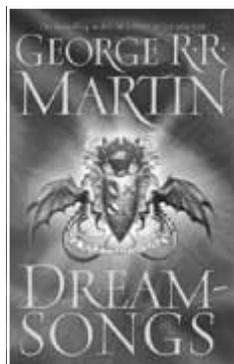
Cosmopolite. This is supplemented by brief references to several other of the Discworld's more recondite characters. In the diary pages important dates are noted such as Soul Cake Day and Hogswatch (to say nothing of the date of the Sto Plains Tiddly-Winks Finals) and most weeks carry a cod philosophy entry from the Way of Mrs Cosmopolite already referred to.

All in all then, it is neither one thing nor the other. It would be a waste to buy it just as a Discworld book, however good that part of it may be — and it is quite amusing. On the other hand, one would hardly want to use it as a diary and then keep it on the bookshelf for ever after with most of it filled with twelve months of out-of-date scribbles.

Either way, some might consider it as expensive for what it is, although it might work as a present to give a dedicated fan — or one for him to give himself. It is up to the individual really.

DREAMSONGS: A RRETROSPECTIVE by George R.R.Martin,
Gollancz ; 1159 pages ; £20 Hardback
Reviewed by Vicki Cook

This is a massive, MASSIVE collection of short stories and novellas, as well as retrospectives, by George R.R.Martin. Over the years he has delved into SF, Fantasy, Horror, thriller, from his humble beginnings trying to make a living in comic books. There are in this 32 short stories, including the Hugo-winning 'A song for Lya' (good admittedly but not my favourite). As well we have television scripts, and Gardner Dozois does the introduction, and at the end is a comprehensive bibliography.



One for the fans perhaps? I'd say no, not at all. I picked this up at a meeting a while back (it's taken me a little while to get through it all!) as I was curious – I'd heard the name but not read anything by him, so I thought I'd give it a go. I have ended up with no small admiration for the author – he can write good fiction in so many different styles without any loss of quality. Of course not all his stories in this tome are memorable but it is notable how many I can remember now, going back over the contents list. His characters are for the most part well drawn and memorable, with real emotions that we can empathise with. He has written stories for all genre fans, SF, Fantasy, horror so there is something for everyone. I was going to pick a few out as examples but it might be best to let the reader make their own mind up as they go through the book.

And then there are the author commentaries which to some may be the highlight of the book. Martin tells his story of how he got into fiction, his origins in comic books, and how he ended up where he is today, with several references to American culture of the time. His humour is dry yet witty and quite humble in its tone, very likeable in fact, and these sections for me were highly enjoyable and put the book a step above others in its class.

DUNE TRILOGY by Frank Herbert
Gollancz ; 912 pages, £14.99 Paperback
Reviewed by Vicki Cook

I read this a while back now, but I found this fascinating and involving. It took me a long time to read, being a complex world (and a huge book!) but I was drawn in and quickly forgot the '80's film which was the first time I came across the Dune world. The plotline is known to many, it features the aristocratic Duke Atrides and his family moving out to the desert planet Arrakis, and the development of his son Paul into a mystical and mythical figure followed by many. Politics and organised religion seem to be the target themes of the author, and these are well handled. The spice which is so much a part of Arrakis is what causes political friction, and leads to many of the major events of the books. The world is well drawn and one of seeming decadence – the richer barons etc become quickly addicted to this substance, and use it to excess, but Paul finds it is a necessary part of the indigenous Fremens' existence, and comes to discover its powers for himself. There are other groups who play a big part in the story – the mysterious Bene Gesserit who appear to hold such power and control.

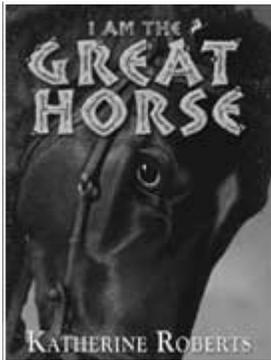


I myself was particularly fascinated by the descriptions of Paul and his mother learning to live with the harsh conditions of the planet, and the worms which live out in the desert wastes. These massive creatures are beautifully brought to life and do not merely seem big 2-dimensional monsters. I did however find some of the bad guys a little two-dimensional such as the baron. You never really see into his character and background sufficiently, nor his henchmen who are out to corrupt and kill the Duke. The main characters Paul and his mother, and the Fremen they run into, are for the most part living, real characters and I could really empathise with them. Some of the descriptions really convey the pain and anger or whatever emotion is prevalent at the time – for instance when Paul has to go through a ritual to determine his worth near the start of the tale.

For anyone who has not yet read the book (and many of my generation will know the tale only from the film made many years ago) it is definitely worth a look. I found it far more absorbing than the film, with better representations of the planet and its inhabitants. I was not too daunted by the sheer size of the tome, though the descriptions did sometimes slow the pace down a bit too much. Loved it, thoroughly recommended.

I AM THE GREAT HORSE by Katherine Roberts
Chicken House Ltd ; 544 pages ; £6.99
Reviewed by Vicki Cook

I have followed Katherine Roberts with interest for some years now. I was



introduced to her books when I booked her for an event at Bath library a few years ago and was interested because she wrote about the Seven Ancient Wonders of the world at the time, one book for each. I read the first one and was struck by how much I enjoyed it as an adult, although they are apparently aimed at young people. Having finished the series, she now turns to weightier tomes, such as this one, *I Am The Great Horse*. It is a far longer and more literary affair, focusing on the life of Alexander The Great's life through the eyes of his equine companion Bucephalus. We see Alexander's life and achievements from the

perspective of this fierce but loyal and courageous horse, as they take over much of the known world from Greece through the Persian sands to the edges of India. At their side is Charm, a stable girl fiercely devoted to Bucephalus and his rider, with secrets of her own.

Now I really did like this book. The horse's viewpoint was an interesting one and it was not very clichéd like you might expect a book written like this to be. As a stallion he tends to think everything is done in order to dominate the others, which explains nicely why Alexander does some of the more outlandish deeds such as certain executions etc. The glory and the excitement of battle and victory are there but also you get a sense of how much power can destroy the victor, and this seems to be a strong message of this book. Katherine Roberts has spent many years as a groom and this showed in her sensitive handling of the equine material and Charm's lifestyle. The fear Charm shows when Bucephalus is sent into battle is very realistic – racing grooms feel much the same when their charges are sent to race.

The book should appeal to various people as it covers several genres, so it is hard to classify it. The supernatural element to put it in the 'Fantasy' camp involve 'ghosts' seen by the horse which make him particularly hard to control, and these seem to get stronger and more obvious the more the book progresses, as his sanity and that of Alexander disintegrate. I liked it particularly from the historical perspective, as from what I have read of Alexander myself, I appreciated how much work has gone into producing this book. It was unique to read about a character from ages past in a more lively context than the usual snippets from a rather uninspiring history book. Go ahead and try this book out, it's well worth reading.

FUTURE EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm 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.

Books to be discussed:- 15th November—The Magicians' Guild—Trudi Canavan

Future dates—13th December, 17th January, 21st February, 13th March

Novacon 37 – the Brum Group's own convention – will again be at the Quality Hotel, Bentley Nr Walsall. It's the weekend of 2-4 November and the Guest of Honour is **Charles Stross**. Registrations are £38. Cheques to "Novacon 37", Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

Email: x15@zoom.co.uk Website www.novacon.org or

www.novacon37.org.uk

Tolkien's Birmingham - 9th - 11th November A weekend event organised by the "Birmingham Tolkien Group" includes a guided tour of all relevant local locations, a welcome reception attended by the Lord Mayor and a party on Saturday night. Prices from £150 per person including accomodation. For Further details see www.shireproductions.co.uk.

Future meetings of the BSFG

7th December 2007: Beer & Skittles at the Selly Tavern

11th January 2008 : A G M & Auction

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Thank you to all the named contributors.

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 Secretary, 5 Greenbank, Barnt Green, Birmingham, B45 8DH