

Brum Group News

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

JULY 2003 ISSUE 382

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NOVACON 33 Chairman: Martin Tudor

July Meeting (Friday 11th at 7.45pm)

Cult author

JASPER FFORDE

Jasper Fforde worked in the film industry for 19 years where his varied career included the role of "focus puller" on films such as GOLDENEYE, THE MASK OF ZORRO and ENTRAPMENT. He had been writing purely for his own amusement for several years, but always harboured a dream of trading in his film career to become a full time writer.

After receiving 76 rejection letters from publishers, Jasper's first novel THE EYRE AFFAIR was taken on by Hodder & Stoughton and published in July 2001. Set in 1985 in a world that is similar to our own, but with a few crucial – and bizarre – differences (Wales is a socialist republic, the Crimean War is still ongoing and the most popular pets are home-cloned dodos), THE EYRE AFFAIR introduces a remarkable heroine, a literary detective named 'Thursday Next'. Thursday's job includes spotting forgeries of Shakespeare's lost plays, mending holes in narrative plotlines, and rescuing characters who have been kidnapped from literary masterpieces.

August Meeting - many of you will be on holiday in August so we won't be having a guest speaker. Watch this page for a surprise item...

The publication of THE EYRE AFFAIR started a 'book phenomenon', in which readers were catapulted in and out of truth and imagination. The novel garnered dozens of effusive reviews, and received high praise from the press, from booksellers and readers throughout the UK. The number of reprints have now reached double figures, and first editions are traded on ebay for hundreds of pounds. In the US THE EYRE AFFAIR was also an instant hit, entering the New York Times Bestseller List in its first week of publication. In addition to achieving impressive sales figures in the US, Jasper was also recently named in Entertainment Weekly (the bible for all media news in the US) as one of the members of its 'It' list for 2002 - alongside the likes of Philip Pullman, Anna Patchett, Stephen Carter, Ian McEwan and Eminem...

Jasper's second novel LOST IN A GOOD BOOK was published in July 2002 and it has built on the amazing success of THE EYRE AFFAIR. THE SUNDAY TIMES described him as "this year's grown up J K Rowling" and both books just keep on selling - their combined sales have now topped 200,000 copies. Jasper's eagerly awaited third novel in the Thursday Next series is called THE WELL OF LOST PLOTS and is to be published on July 1, 2003. Jasper lives and writes in Wales and has a passion for aviation.

< <above is official biography courtesy of Hodder and Stoughton - 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 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

NOT SO SERIOUS SCIENCE

by Vernon Brown

Antigravity and unlimited energy have traditionally been the province of SF. But no longer! Someone has managed, in theory at least, to reconcile quantum probability theory with Einsteinian physics to accomplish both.

When a cat is dropped it always lands on its feet - probability 100%. If toast is dropped it always lands butter-side down - probability 100%. So if a piece of buttered toast is attached to the back of a cat which is then dropped, the two probabilities will conflict and cause the ca/toast combination to hover, spinning madly, just above ground level. Attach a vehicle and you have antigravity; attach an electrical generator and you have a source of unlimited energy.

VB

(Adapted from EDUCATION IN SCIENCE June 2003)

SIDewise AWARDS 2003 NOMINATIONS

Finalists for this year's Sidewise Awards for Alternate History have been announced:

- THE PESHAWAR LANCERS, S M Stirling (Roc)
- RULED BRITANNIA, Harry Turtledove (Roc)
- THE SEPARATION, Christopher Priest (UK: Scribner)
- THE SEVERED WING, Martin J Gidron (Livingston Press)
- THE YEAR OF THE HANGMAN, Gary L Blackwood (Dutton)

SHORT FORM

- "Empire", William Sanders (Alternate Generals II Harry Turtledove, ed.; Baen, Jul 2002)
- "The Invisible Empire", John Kessel (Conjunctions #39)
- "The Last Ride of German Freddie", Walter Jon Williams (Worlds That Weren't, Roc, Jul 2002)
- "We Come Not to Praise Washington", Charles Coleman Finlay (F&SF Aug 2002)
- "With Caesar in the Underworld", Robert Silverberg (Asimov's Oct 2002)

The Sidewise Awards, founded in 1995 to recognize excellence in alternate history, are named for Murray Leinster's 1934 short story "Sidewise in Time". Winners will be presented at this year's World Science Fiction Convention, Torcon 3 <<http://www.torcon3.on.ca/>>, in Toronto, August 28 to September 1, 2003.

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... World Fantasy Award winning author **Ken Grimwood** died Thursday, June 6 in Santa Barbara, California, at the age of 59. He was of course, the author of the classic REPLAY (used as the basis for the movie GROUNDHOG DAY), but also wrote 4 other excellent novels - BREAKTHROUGH, ELISE, THE VOICE OUTSIDE and INTO THE DEEP. His first novel, BREAKTHROUGH, was an occult thriller but all of the others are science fiction Special effects master, **Ray Harryhausen**, was honoured with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Tuesday, June 12. At the ceremony near Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Harryhausen said, "It all started at Grauman's Chinese Theatre when I was a kid and saw the movie KING KONG" he said. "Seventy years have gone by and I have a star near where it all started." He was joined at the ceremony by longtime friends **Ray Bradbury** and **Forrest J Ackerman**. Bradbury threatened to dig up his star late some night and move it next to Harryhausen's! THE NIGHT CLASS by **Tom Piccirilli** (Leisure Books) won the Bram Stoker Award for Best Novel Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame announced the 2003 inductees - **Wilson Tucker** and **Kate Wilhelm**. Posthumous inductees will be **Damon Knight** and **Edgar Rice Burroughs** The 2003 International Horror Guild Awards recognizing

outstanding achievements in the field of horror and dark fantasy from the year 2002 were announced May 23, 2003. **Charles L Grant** was announced as this year's IHG Living Legend. Best Novel was A WINTER HAUNTING by **Dan Simmons** **Anne McCaffrey & Todd McCaffrey** have completed the latest Pern novel DRAGON'S KIN for Del Rey US **Jack Williamson** has celebrated his 95th birthday! HarperCollins UK are to separate their fantasy titles from SF, by publishing them as general fiction Baen are to issue the first world hardcovers of **Robert Heinlein's** EXPANDED UNIVERSE (NEVER published in the UK!), **Marion Zimmer Bradley's** THE FALL OF ATLANTIS (omnibus of WEB OF DARKNESS and WEB OF LIGHT) and **Elizabeth Moon's** THE DEED OF PAKSENARRION (omnibus of SHEEPFARMER'S DAUGHTER, DIVIDED ALLEGIANCE and OATH OF GOLD). Watch for them in October

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

GALACTIC GEOGRAPHIC ANNUAL 3003

by Karl Kofoed

Paper Tiger / 128 pages / £14.99 / pbk

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating: * * *

At first glance, this looks (as it is meant to) like a magazine. It's a bit thicker than most magazines, but not a lot. My initial reaction was "This has all been done before"; and I was right, as I found upon reading the back page.

OK: I wanna tell you a story (not now, Max!). Back in 1978 I did a book with Bob Shaw called GALACTIC TOURS, the idea (which I believed to be original, or as original as anything is) being to produce a sort of interstellar travelogue, with my paintings instead of photographs. The publisher folded, but before that STARLOG magazine published a two-page excerpt from it, with several of my illos. Not long afterwards, books began to appear with titles like TOUR OF THE UNIVERSE (Holdstock and Edwards); SPACESHIPS 2000 TO 2100 AD; THE ALIEN WORLD; SPACE WARS, WORLDS AND WEAPONS; BARLOWE'S GUIDE TO EXTRATERRESTRIALS - I could go on, but I won't. The point being that by the time GALACTIC TOURS came out in 1981, it looked like one more book jumping onto the bandwagon, instead of the first, as it should have been.

Or so I thought, then. But according to the blurb on this book, Karl Kofoed started to write and illustrate GALACTIC GEOGRAPHIC in 1978, in

HEAVY METAL magazine. No-one has ever mentioned that to me, so we live and learn. But here we have a 'magazine of the future', with articles on 'the most bizarre life forms and most puzzling mysteries of the Milky Way'. Karl Kofoed is a good artist, and it's refreshing to see painted artwork, rather than the hyper-realistic digital work that pervades nowadays. I don't really like it that much; it has an almost 'primitive' quality at times, and seems to have been done with watercolour and crayons. But he does have some quite original ideas, and the text goes into great detail about these alien worlds, cultures, vehicles, technologies and so on. Clearly a lot of work has gone into it. But the feeling remains: *it has* all been done before, and will anyone really want to wade through all this fictitious information? Well maybe there is a whole new generation to whom this is fresh and original, in which case it should do well. . . . DAH

***WHITE CROW* by Mary Gentle**

Gollancz / 847pgs /pbk /£9.99

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating: * * * *

This is good value for money. Between the covers are three short stories and three novels. The connection is the world in which they are set. Though the publisher has labelled the book fantasy, Gentle herself claims they are science fiction but that it is the science that is different from ours. In the 17th century there was a belief in Hermetic science which said that the world worked on magical patterns and resonances, but predictably, scientifically.

Valentine White Crow is a Scholar-Soldier and a member of the Invisible College. She first appears in "Beggars in Satin", when the Miracle Garden being constructed by Lord Architect Casaubon keeps becoming corrupted – the patterns it is based on are twisted and discordant. Casaubon is a gross figure – immensely fat and slovenly but likeable and accompanies Valentine in the other parts of this volume. In "The Knot Garden" the pattern opens a way into another dimension from which emerge gods on Earth, setting the scene for RATS AND GARGOYLES. The third of the stories, "Black Motley", introduces the other element for RATS AND GARGOYLES, the man-sized intelligent rats that actually run the country. The balance between humans, rats and gods is being upset by one of the gods intent on undoing the world.

LEFT TO HIS OWN DEVICES brings the scientific system into the near future. Hermetic science is still extant but has been overtaken by computer technology. Valentine's magic is in writing software and Casaubon constructs hypermedia architecture – modern equivalents of their old roles. Set in a closed London – too many asylum seekers so no-one can come in – and with civil war in Germany, the system they have created together is certain to upset the balance. It is interesting here, to look for the equivalents in term of characters between this and RATS AND GARGOYLES but here all the rats are human.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE is back in the London of Cromwell's Commonwealth, except that the queen, Carola, and General Olivia exist together in disharmony. Olivia wants to build a temple but it keeps falling down and expects Casaubon to solve the problem.

To try and put the complicated contexts underlying these novels and stories into a few words is impossible. Instead, read them for yourself. They are clever, brilliantly characterised but need the reader to concentrate and think about what is going on. This volume is not a holiday read for the beach. It deserves better than that and to get the best out of it, it really needs to be read twice. Be prepared to spend time and there is great satisfaction to be had. PM

***THE VELOCITY GOSPEL* by Steve Aylett**

Gollancz / 131pgs / pbk / £6.99

Reviewed by William McCabe

Rating: * *

So this isn't such a great book. Steve Aylett had been writing a sort of comic SF but for this series he's decided to do fantasy. Instead of exotic post-cyberpunk devices and genetically-modified creatures, you get demons and bizarre religious sects – the sort that finish a funeral by firing the deceased from a cannon. The big problem is the plot. The whole thing reads like an episode of some twisted soap opera – and not one of the early ones that introduces the characters. There are a few stories going on here – guy changes girlfriends, friend loses job, other friend gets proclaimed messiah, local elections, deciding what to call an anthology of poetry, demon plots revenge on the guy that stole his lunch ... that sort of thing. There's nothing much resolved here, implying that the series has a lot more to it yet (the next volume is now out in hardcover). The language isn't that clear either. Aylett has been compared to P G Wodehouse and Damon Runyon for inventing his own dialect and it takes re-reading to get close to seeing through the style.

That said, this isn't truly awful either. There are not many writing comic fantasy that aren't Pratchett clones. This sort of thing needs someone to take risks to keep it interesting. The comedy is good - most of the time - although it's often sick humour with grotesque characters in surreal situations. WAM

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 July issue will be available just about in time for the meeting. Price will depend on the amount of postage I'm charged (and I won't know that until the first issue arrives!). Should be around the £5.00 mark.

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

Brum Group member, Stan Nicholls has his new fantasy novel, QUICKSILVER RISING, published by HarperCollins in trade paperback on 4th August 2003.

Tuesday 5th August (7pm) Stan will be a guest speaker at Wednesbury Library.

Saturday 9th August (2pm) he'll be at Andromeda Bookshop for an hour signing session. (1 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1LT)

Also on 9th August, Stan will be signing between 4.30 and 5.30pm at Ottakar's bookshop, 63 Park Street, Walsall WS1 1LY. Tel 01922 610922. At 5.30pm the shop will close and from 6.30 till 8pm there will be a launch party. Brum Group members are invited to attend the launch party - all are welcome.

More about Quicksilver Rising: www.stannicholls.com

Details of Ottakar's Walsall branch, including a map, can be found at:

<http://www.ottakers.co.uk/Internet/shopfinder/shopdetails.jsp?ShopID=OTT033>:

Stan Nicholls can be contacted at: stanjnicholls@tiscali.co.uk

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:-

July 10th - THE TOOTH FAIRY - Graham Joyce

August 14th - LUMINOUS - Greg Egan

September 4th - ENGINES OF GOD - Jack McDevitt

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 Courtenay Grimwood, author of REDROBE, 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

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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.bsfq.freesevers.com

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

Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

IF YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS, PLEASE SEND IT TO ME AT

rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

IF WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESSES ON FILE AND WE HAVE IMPORTANT OR URGENT NEWS, WE CAN EMAIL YOU IMMEDIATELY.

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