

Brum Group News

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

JANUARY 2002 ISSUE 364

Honorary Presidents:

BRIAN W ALDISS

HARRY HARRISON

Committee:

Vernon Brown (Chairman)

Vicky Cook (Secretary)

Alan Woodford (Treasurer)

Rog Peyton (Newsletter Editor)

+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 31 Chairman: Tony Berry

Friday 11th January

Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

It's THAT time of the year again! The time that the current committee stands down after reporting on the year's activities and YOU get the chance to air your views and possibly stand for election to the new committee.

The evening will be chaired by our Legal Officer, Tim Stannard.

The meeting will take place in the Lichfield room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passageway opposite the Odeon). It will commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar

and be seated in plenty of time. Non-members are welcome but may not vote or voice opinions during the AGM.

Committee posts that you can stand for are:-

Chairman - needs to be a strong personality to keep the committee meetings in order; has to introduce guest speakers at each meeting, so should be articulate; has to make sure that other members of the committee do the jobs asked of them and if they fail to do so, ask (with the rest of the committee's approval), for their

FEBRUARY 8TH MEETING - SF artist **Fred Gambino** will be talking to the Group and showing slides of his award-winning work. This is a rare chance to see his fabulous artwork and listen to the anecdotes surrounding them.

resignation and appoint a new person to that post.

Secretary - needs to be able to take the minutes of all committee meetings and type up in a presentable manner, sending copies to all other committee members; write to guest speakers as required.

Treasurer - needs to be good with figures; be at every meeting to take entrance fees; keep check on all members whose membership lapses and write to them asking to renew; organise the monthly raffles and produce the annual accounts.

Newsletter Editor - has to produce a newsletter every month (without fail!). Ideally should have access to a computer, be able to spell (or know how and when to use a Spell Checker); be able to find and correlate any pieces of news; distribute review books and obtain reviews of those books for insertion in the newsletter.

Ordinary Committee Members - two required. These members have no specific duties but are there to help out when necessary. One of the members will be responsible for the Group's website so needs to have Internet access and a working knowledge of either HTML, a site design / management program, or both. Some skill with computer graphics and a reference to details of future guests would be an advantage.

Novacon Chairman - this final committee post is NOT one elected at the AGM. This post is approved by the 'current' committee each year for the following year's Novacon. This year Martin Tudor has volunteered to chair

NOVACON 32 to be held in November 2002. The committee have already approved this post.

(**Note:** Anyone wishing to chair NOVACON 33 in two year's time should approach the committee before September 2002).

In addition - all committee members undertake to do the jobs they've volunteered for; be able to attend committee meetings throughout the year; to assist in ideas for programme and be willing to ensure that the Group runs smoothly and profitably throughout the year.

This may be only a hobby without any remuneration but by volunteering YOU are responsible to the whole membership. Failure to do the job you've volunteered for is letting down every single member of the Group. So unless you're committed to doing the job properly, please don't stand for election.

Anyone wishing to stand for election to any of the above posts should get a Group member to propose them and another member to second that proposal. This may be done at the AGM itself.

It's Auction Time....

The formal part of the AGM will be followed (time allowing) by an AUCTION. So bring along any old books, magazines videos, etc., that you no longer require. SF/fantasy/horror items are preferred but if you've got any other items that you think we can have fun with, raise a few smiles (and, lawdy, we all need a few more of

those!) and more importantly, raise some money for the Group funds.

If every member brings at least one additional surprise item we can have FUN!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

February 9 - REMENISCON FIFTY at the Hanover Hotel, Schooner Way, Cardiff.

Celebrating Lionel Fanthorpe's 50 years in print [*I think they mean since his first book was published. They certainly haven't remained in print!* - RGP]. 10am to 9.30pm followed by optional dinner. Membership is £15 regular, £35 with dinner or £60 including lunch, tea, etc. Info from:- Fanthorpe Management Consultancy, 48 Claude Road, Roath, Cardiff, CF24 3QA, UK.

E-mail TheBigBullfrog@aol.com

[Looks like he's organising this one himself!!! If anyone from the Group attends this event, will you please send a write-up to the Brum Group Newsletter. Thanks -RGP]

February 15-17 - BOSKONE 39 at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel, Framingham, MA, USA. Guests include Neil Gaiman, Stephen Hickman, Marv Wolfman and Tom Holt. Info: Boskone 39, Box 809, Framingham MA 01701, USA. Fax (617) 776 3243 email: boskone@nesfa.org website: www.nesfa.org/boskone

March 8-10 2002 MeCon V, Queen's University of Belfast. £10 reg. Contact: MeCoN V, c/o 30 Bendigo Street, Belfast BT6 8GD Website is www.mecon.org

March 29 - April 1 2002 HELICON 2: Hotel De France, St.Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands. £35 reg. Guests: Harry Turtledove, Brian Stableford, Peter Weston. Contact: Helicon 2, 33 Meyrick Drive, Wash Common, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 6SY. Website is www.helicon.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, tell me about it in the shop or phone me at the shop on 0121 643 1999.

2000 WORLD FANTASY AWARDS

Life Achievement

Philip Jose Farmer
Frank Frazetta

Best Novel (tie)

DECLARE - Tim Powers
GALVESTON - Sean Stewart

Best Novella

"The Man on the Ceiling"
Steve Rasnic Tem & Melanie Tem

Best Short Fiction

"The Pottawatomie Giant"
Andy Duncan

Best Anthology

DARK MATTER: A CENTURY OF
SPECULATIVE FICTION FROM
THE AFRICAN DIASPORA
edited by Sheree R Thomas

Best Collection
BELUTHAHATCHIE AND OTHER
STORIES - Andy Duncan

Best Artist
Shaun Tan

Special Award (Professional)
Tom Shippey
for J R R TOLKIEN: AUTHOR OF
THE CENTURY

Special Award (Non-professional)
Bill Sheehan
for AT THE FOOT OF THE STORY
TREE - AN INQUIRY INTO THE
FICTION OF PETER STRAUB

2001 BRITISH FANTASY AWARDS

August Derleth Award for Best Novel
PERDIDO STREET STATION
China Mieville

Best Anthology
HIDEOUS PROGENY
edited by Brian Willis

Best Collection
WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED
Kim Newman

Best Short Fiction
NAMING OF PARTS
Tim Lebbon

Best Artist
Jim Burns

Best Small Press
PS Publishing

Karl Edward Wagner Award
Peter Haining

NEWS IN BRIEF....

....a new *Miles Vorkosigan* novel by
Lois McMaster Bujold - DIPLO-

MATIC IMMUNITY - has been delivered to Baen. Hardcover should be out in mid-summer....all you **John Varley** fans will be glad to hear that his new book - RED THUNDER - is finished and delivered to Ace books....Tor books are launching a new series for younger readers called 'Starscape' - initial releases are **Robert Jordan's** EYE OF THE WORLD split into two volumes (guaranteed to confuse the unwary) - FROM THE TWO RIVERS (with a brand-new chapter!) and TO THE BLIGHT (with updated glossary); **Orson Scott Card's** ENDER'S GAME and **Stephen Gould's** vastly underrated SF novel JUMPER. Books from **Jane Yolen** and **Patricia Wrede** will follow. Nowhere in their advertising does it mention whether or not any editing has been done to make it easier for youngster's to read....*Harry Potter* author - **J K Rowling** - earned \$36.2 million in the year ending October 1, 2001, beating out **Queen Elizabeth II** who only earned \$22.2 million. Both were beaten by **Madonna** with \$43.8 million....**Jack Haldeman** (brother of Award-winning **Joe**) has been diagnosed with cancer and recent news is that he is being moved into a hospice and is sadly losing his battle. Cards and letters (but no flowers) may be sent to his wife **Barbara Haldeman**, 205 SE 16th Avenue Apt. 7B, Gainesville Florida 32601, USA....**Douglas Adams's** final *Hitch-Hiker* story, the 40pg "A Salmon of Doubt" will appear from Crown in the USA in May, supplemented with articles and essays and the screenplay for the original HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY. A UK

edition will presumably appear from Pan/Macmillan but I've seen no listing or news on this yet....Gollancz are paying out 6-figure sums - the lucky recipients are **Simon R Green** (for two new *Deathstalker* novels), **Stephen Baxter** (for four new books including a *Xeelee* book), **Alastair Reynolds** (for three new books, at least one of which will be set in the same universe as REVELATION SPACE) and **Robert Rankin** (for his next three books including a novel titled THE HOLLOW CHOCOLATE BUNNIES OF THE APOCALYPSE)...Virtually unlimited choice - 4 novellas (by **Peter Hamilton**, **Stephen Baxter**, **Paul McAuley** and **Ian McDonald**) were published in limited edition hardcovers and limited edition paperbacks by PS Publishing here in the UK. If they were too expensive for you, then you could wait for the UK trade hardcover with all four stories. Don't like hardcovers? The next stage is the UK paperbacks (coming soon) in two back-to-back 'double' editions. Don't like doubles? That's OK because in the states, all four appear in a single standard-size paperback titled FUTURES....Baen books seem to be reprinting extremely popular books that have passed over by other publishers as 'dated', 'too old', 'not popular enough', 'High Street stores will never have heard of them'. Following their success with old **Robert Heinlein** titles, they have, over the past couple of years or so, reissued 5 volumes by **James H Schmitz**, the first three of which have gone into second printing. Next month they're doing a novel by **Christopher Anvil** and now comes the news that they're putting together a collection of

shorts by the late **Tom Godwin** featuring the classic award-winning short story "The Cold Equations".... Reports on the new movie THE LORD OF THE RINGS Part 1 have been very favourable. I haven't seen it yet but intend to despite not liking the book much. I tend to like fantasy in films but not in books - and it's the other way round with SF. Strange!...I did manage to see the first episode of the adventures of Superboy - SMALLVILLE (though I missed the pilot) on TV this week. What are they thinking of? The words boring, stilted, wooden, come to mind. So poor after the excellent 90s series THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN starring Dean Cain and Teri Hatcher. Books are planned - 4 adult titles and six children's with the ten authors to be named soon....more interesting news on the media front is that **Harlan Ellison's** "Along the Scenic Route" is being made into a feature film by Paramount - title of the movie will be DRIVE....the new version of **H G Wells's** THE TIME MACHINE has been postponed to rework the ending to remove scenes of the moon falling on New York City [*don't remember that bit in the book!!!* - RGP]...and production of the other **H G Wells** remake, WAR OF THE WORLDS will be put back a year while the script is rewritten because of the World Trade Center disaster....and finally - many of you will have noticed the 'To Let' sign outside ANDROMEDA. Sadly, it is true. We have to be out of our present premises by Easter. We're busy looking for new premises and will let you know the new location shortly after we've found somewhere. BUT we need to get rid of

a lot of stock before the move. We'll be selling off lots of stuff at discount prices so come to the shop and see what we're offering. We'll consider offers on any of our second-hand books (providing the offer isn't derisory!)....



BOOK REVIEWS



(**REVIEWERS** please note:- in future all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) Deadline for each issue is the 1st of the month.

Rating system:-

- 5 star - excellent. A must to read.
- 4 star - very good.
- 3 star - good but flawed.
- 2 star - very average.
- 1 star - read only if there's nowt on telly.
- 0 stars - Turkey! Turkey! Turkey!

SMOKING POPPY

by Graham Joyce

Gollancz / 227pgs / £12.99 /hardcover

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating * * * * *

This is most definitely not a science fiction book. It isn't even a fantasy novel. Why, then, am I reviewing it? you may ask. I'm reviewing it because at the last meeting Rog said: "You ought to review this - you've got a daughter, and it's all about the relationship between a father and daughter." Well, Meraylah did once smoke, though she gave it up long ago (thank goodness!), but as far as I know she has never smoked opium. However,

in a way that is really what this book is all about: how well *does* a father know his daughter (and his son in this case, as it turns out)?

Danny Innes is 40-something, his wife has left him, his son Phil has 'found God' in a big way, and his daughter Charlie has gone missing after a fraught phone-call from London asking for money. So Danny joins the local pub's quiz team, whose other members he doesn't even like very much, and his life becomes a pretty humdrum routine. He cannot understand how his son, a scientist, can possibly accept the Bible completely, as a Christian Fundamentalist must. He could never understand how his daughter could bring home such weird and unsuitable boyfriends. But even so it comes as a considerable shock when his wife telephones to tell him that Charlie is in prison in Chiang Mai, facing a possible death sentence for smuggling drugs. Danny gets all the books he can find about opium (including poetry by Keats and Coleridge) from his local library, and arranges to go out to Thailand to try to rescue his daughter. To his surprise - and horror - his quiz-team companion Mick Williams insists upon accompanying him to *Thighland*, as he calls it, in the mistaken belief that they are best friends, as does his son Phil, clutching his pocket bible.

This is probably the most mainstream novel that Joyce has written, or that has appeared in the pages of this newsletter for some time. But all the characters turn out to be accompanied by their own demons, and the strange and often horrific events while they live with a tribe deep in the jungles of

Thailand can be interpreted as having a basis in magic or voodoo, or to be 'all in the mind', according to the reader's preference. Ghosts from the past are disinterred, and sometimes exorcised, and the spirit of the opium poppy hangs heavy over the proceedings, especially in the latter part of the story. Graham has done his research well (I imagine he must have visited the area - must ask him about that), and, perhaps surprisingly, given the subject, his writing is often very funny. Not Pratchett or Rankin funny, but more perhaps as Bob Shaw's writing was often subtly but not overtly humorous. Overall, a damn good read, and highly recommended. *DH*

[Yes, I just knew Dave would enjoy this novel. It's certainly in the top 3 books of 2001, SF or not-SF, depending on your outlook. But, yes, I agree with Dave, a superb read! - RGP]

FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID

by Philip K. Dick

Gollancz / 204pgs / £6.99 /paperback

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating * * *

This is one of Gollancz's 'SF Masterworks' series, and turns out to be one of those books I missed when it was first published, back in 1974. Which is probably a pity, because I can imagine that it must have had quite an impact back then. But it covers a period from 1988 to 2047, in what was then a 'future world', very different from the world we now know in 2001.

Jason Taverner is a famous and popular TV presenter and singer, with his own prime-time show. He is also a 'six', one of only a few very bright and physically enhanced individuals who resulted from a government experiment forty years earlier. When an ex-girlfriend with a grievance attacks him (with a Callisto cuddle sponge, which plunges its feeding tubes into his chest), he is taken to hospital - and wakes up in a seedy hotel room. From that point he discovers that his identity has been taken from him. No-one remembers him, or knows of his TV show, not even his agent or friends; gone are his records and all the identity cards that citizens are required to carry in order to avoid being sent to a forced-labour camp. He does, however, have a large roll of bank notes, which enables him to purchase forged ID cards from a girl called Kathy, with whom he goes on to have a relationship of sorts. Despite the excellent forgeries, he is picked up at a police checkpoint, and from this moment, first Inspector McNulty and then a more senior police officer, Felix Buckman, start to take an interest in this person who apparently does not exist, because all of his records have been 'wiped' from their files. Eventually he is charged with the murder of Buckman's sister, Alys, who has given Taverner a drug - possibly mescaline (or was it?)

On this level it is all quite promising. But much of the book seems to be taken up with long, philosophical discussions between Taverner and (usually) various women whom he meets, discussing the nature of relationships and love and grief and such. Despite the fact that we have this

'futuristic' world where cars fly and there is obviously space travel (remember the Callisto cuddle sponge?), where being a student is virtually a crime and America is a police state, there are still record players with a stylus, and big LP's. (Well OK, there still are in 2001, but they're not exactly the norm, are they?) Much hinges upon the question: did all this really happen, or was it all a drug-induced illusion? And of course that's for the reader to decide. Finally, it is all rounded off in a rather hasty three-and-a-half-page Eplilog(ue).

A note about the cover, by Chris Moore. We know, from his visit to the Brum Group, that this is a favourite of his, and certainly it is a very nice painting, especially of the girl in the foreground. But overall I feel that the whole mood is too bright and sunny, with its blue sky and fluffy white clouds. Dick's world is much more smoggy and squalid.

DH

FUTURE MEETINGS

February 8 - SF artist **Fred Gambino** will be talking about SF art and showing slides of the many wonderful covers he has done.

March - sorry but we've now been told that **Kim Stanley Robinson** has had to cut short his trip to the UK and he will not be able to talk to the Group after all. This is VERY disappointing as his publisher (and Stan himself!) had been very positive in earlier correspondence. His signings take priority.

April onwards - watch this space.

Newsletter 364 copyright 2002 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. Some people like being controversial and may actually believe the opposite to what they say - I think I've been accused of that at various times in the past.

Thanks to Steve Green for news and to Dave Hardy for reviews.

The **BRUM GROUP Website** address is www.bsfq.freesevers.com/ Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the second Friday of each month at the Britannia Hotel, New Street. 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, Alan Woodford, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN (e-mail enquiries bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk)