

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chairman - Tony Morton, Secretary - Anne Woodford, Treasurer - Alan Woodford,
Publicity Officer - Steve Jones, Newsletter Editor and Nоваcan 27 & 28 Chairman - Martin Tudor.

The July Meeting will be
an informal meeting on
Friday 11th July 1997
from 7pm in the
TOP FLOOR bar of
the Tap & Spile, Gas Street,
(off Broad Street) Birmingham
Admittance: FREE

There will be a raffle and review copies are available as usual. (Please refrain from smoking until 8.30pm when the bar will be opened to the general public.)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: David A Hardy, Chris Murphy and Martin Tudor respond to Steve Green's Surgical Strike; while US Administrator Dan Steffan tells a TAFF fairy tale.

The BSGF meets (informally) from 7pm in the Top Floor Bar of the Tap & Spile, Gas Street, Birmingham city centre on the second Friday off each month (unless otherwise notified). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15.00 per person, or £18.00 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, the Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Midlands, B65 0RL. (e-mail enquiries via: bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, Newsletter Editor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail to martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

Colophon

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Text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise.

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Many thanks to ALAN & ANNE WOODFORD for producing the address labels; STEVE GREEN for permission to use his article on the BSFG last issue and DAVE HARDY and CHRIS MURPHY for taking the time to reply.

**A Word from the Editor
by Martin Tudor**

As those of you who turned up last month will be aware Tom Holt was unable to join us having fallen down a rabbit hole shortly before the meeting! (No, honestly, he damaged his ankle down a rabbit hole!)

But given the fact that only a dozen people turned up this was probably just as well. This poor turn out has served to confirm your committee's decision to concentrate on acquiring speakers who haven't spoken to the Group before. This will obviously mean much fewer formal meetings so:

Please note that as from this month the Brum Group meets INFORMALLY from 7pm in the Top Floor Bar of the Tap & Spile, Gas Street, Birmingham city centre on the second Friday off each month unless otherwise notified.

The committee will continue to search for guest speakers but we will be aiming for speakers of proven popularity or guests who have never spoken to the group before. When such speakers can be arranged we will book appropriate venues and notify members as early as possible.

TAFF LIVES! by Dan Steffan

Once upon a time, in a fandom far, far away there lived a happy little fan fund. Every day the wee fan fund would wake to the friendly sound of friendly fanzines thunking into its friendly little mailbox. With a blissful grin the li'l fan fund would hop from its li'l bed in the bottom drawer of a very big file cabinet that was filled to the tippy top with other fanzines that had also thunked into the li'l mailbox, and begin the happy work of bringing all of fandom together. It was a tough job, but the tiny fan fund did it happily, knowing that the hard work facing it was good and nice and, well, made fandom a better place to be.

But then one day, when the happy little fan fund had turned its back for just a moment to water the beautiful rows of Lichtmans and Langfords and Hansens and Hughes that flourished in its happy li'l garden (the Peter Roberts had finally bloomed after many dormant years), a

Wicked Ol' Witch came to town and, as Wicked Ol' Witches are want to do, cast an evil spell over fandom. Everywhere the Evil Crone went she left behind a cloud of darkness. Before long, fandom became confused and disoriented and seemed to lose its way in the darkness. No one knew why the sky had grown dark. Even though they noticed the horrible witch sitting off in the corner of the bar, smoking evil ciggies and drinking nasty gin, it never occurred to them that she might be to blame. After all, she was one of us.

Soon, while fandom was busy arguing about the cause of the dark cloud (and who had the biggest Hugo award), the witch's hideous curse reached the home of the happy little fan fund and before you could say, "Mr. Burbee, I am not a ...", the tiny, defenceless fan fund fell into a deep sleep, a sleep so deep that not even the sound of a copy of HABBAK-KUK thinking into the mailbox could wake it from its slumber.

But then, one fine morning, fandom noticed that the dark cloud had begun to disappear and before long the mist had lifted enough for fandom to wonder what had happened to their happy little fan fund. Was it dead? Was it obsolete? They tried phoning the fund, but because of the witch's spell the fund slept right through the calls, no matter how persistent the ringing. Finally, the darkness began to lift for good and fandom found out the truth.

Outside the sleeping fan fund's hovel they had found a clue -- a trail of nasty old cigarette butts and empty gin bottles -- that led them directly to the whiny old witch's cave deep in the heart of Wilmot Woods. Fandom then sent a hairy little troll into the cave to confront the old witch and to

get her to lift the spell she had cast on the poor sleeping fan fund and to return fandom to the happy place it used to be before the dark cloud had plunged all fandom into blandness.

Soon the sleeping fan fund awoke and once again began to tend its garden and make fandom the happiest place on earth. The troll who had confronted the witch became a hero and was granted a wonderful reward for his good deed. And the fan fund returned to the great task it had been born to carry out.

Unfortunately for the happy little fan fund and for fandom-at-large, the witch's spell had left a lot of yucky crapola behind that made Business As Usual a lot more tedious and difficult than it had ever been before. Ciggie butts and empty bottles littered the fund's beautiful garden and choked its growth. And then there was the matter of the missing pot o' gold that the evil witch had taken right out from under the fund's sleeping little nose. Sure, she had promised the hairy troll that she would return the pot to the happy, but overworked fan fund Real Soon Now, but when she did it was empty.

"Oh well," said the fund, "at least now I'll have something to piss in." Which, as we all know, is better than not having something to piss in. Soon the little fan fund was hard at work. He rolled up his sleeves and put his shoulder to the wheel and his nose to the grindstone and his pants around his knees and, with the help of a lot of friends and a lot of bheer, filled the once-empty pot to the tippy top with beautiful gold once again.

Soon the zippy li'l fan fund had restored the garden and sat back to admire

his good works. Everything was right with the world. The fund announced a new TAFF race and everybody lived happily ever after.

Except, of course, for the evil, nasty, horrid, stinky, poo-poo panties wearing old witch, who spent the rest of her life on an island where every man she met instantly turned into a woman. The End.

MEANWHILE...

The TRANS-ATLANTIC FAN FUND is happy to announce the beginning of a brand spanking new TAFF race for the year 1998. We are also happy to announce that the British branch of the fund has, through generous donations and ardent fund-raising, lifted itself from the monetary hole it was in and is now solvent and secure in the hands of UK administrator, Martin Tudor.

The American branch of the fund is also doing well, with a current bank account of \$3233.29 and counting. Even a nasty attack by the Virginia Department of Taxation against administrator Dan Steffan hasn't stopped us. However, it did necessitate that some of your TAFF checks had to be held until the attack was over. This meant, unfortunately, that some of your checks have remained uncashed at this time and have therefore exceeded their six-month window of usefulness. This has meant a long, arduous process of replacing those checks, which is being done at this writing. In the meantime, however, all monies due TAFF have been covered by administrator Steffan to protect the fund's account. This means that all money due TAFF is secure while awaiting the replacement checks. If you are one of those folks whose check has gone

uncashed, you will receive a letter of notification. If you haven't already gotten one, please be patient. Everyone will be notified by July 15, 1997.

Meanwhile, we are happy to announce the commencement of a new race to send some lucky American fan to attend the UK convention known as INTUITION, which will be held April 10 through 13, 1998.

The deadline for nominations (3 American nominators and 2 UK nominators, plus a \$20 bond) is Friday, August 1, 1997, which will begin a race that will last until Saturday, December 13, 1997, the deadline for voting. We invite everyone to consider running for TAFF and having the kind of fun that Martin and I have had on our TAFF trips.

A full-fledged TAFF fanzine is on the verge of publication (awaiting only some material from Mr. Tudor) and will be sent to everyone on the APPARATCHIK mailing list, and then some, and should come thumping into your mailbox within two weeks of this publication. For more information or to enter the race, please contact: Dan Steffan, 3804 South 9th Street, Arlington, VA 22204, (703) 685-7320. Or Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX, UK.

**Jophan Report #105
by Martin Tudor**

I'm sad to report that July has already seen the death of two great film stars Robert Mitchum and James Stewart.

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Robert Mitchum, stars of the classic NIGHT OF THE HUNTER, died on 1 July. James Stewart, star of such genre classics as IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, HARVEY and BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE, died of heart failure at his Beverly Hills home on 2 July. He was 89.

CON 22, the convention of the British Fantasy Society. At the Albany Hotel, Birmingham, Guest of Honour Freda Warrington, with more guests to be announced. Contact: c/o BFS, 2 Harwood Street, Stockport, SK4 1JJ. (This is a temporary contact address pending the organiser's house move.)

Forthcoming Events

11 JULY 1997: Informal meeting of the BSFG at the Tap & Spile Gas Street, Birmingham, from 7pm in the Top Floor Bar.

JULY 1997: DIANE DUANE will be signing at Andromeda Book Shop in Birmingham. Date to be confirmed. Call Andromeda on 0121-643-1999.

3-5 SEPTEMBER 1997: LONESTARCON 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas, USA. Contact: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA.

14-16 NOVEMBER 1997: NOVACON 27, the annual sf convention of the Brum Group, will be held at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Guest of Honour Peter F Hamilton. Attending membership £30.00 until 30 September when the price will rise. Supporting £10.50. Progress Report #2 and hotel booking forms now available. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, W. Midlands, DY9 8SS.

11-13 SEPTEMBER 1998: FANTASY-

27 DECEMBER 1999 - 2 JANUARY 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (£10.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee (to be announced before 1997). Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise readers to contact organisers prior to travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.

If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor (e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them about) please feel free to write a report or review and send it to the editorial address.

MEMBERS RESPOND TO STEVE GREEN'S SURGICAL STRIKE

[In the June newsletter I reprinted an article by Steve Green from his fanzine RAILINGS, inviting members to respond.

First comes my own reply - this is my personal opinion and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the BSFG committee:]

Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, W. Midlands, WV13 1HX. (E-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk) 5th July 1997.

"Whilst working on RAILINGS, my membership reminder arrived in the post. It even includes a space for explaining why I'm not renewing. I think I'll send them a copy of this instead."

But you didn't did you Steve? The only member of the BSFG committee to receive a copy of RAILINGS was me - and as we've been partners on WAVE for ten years it would've been strange if you hadn't sent me a copy... I obviously didn't get RAILINGS because I was involved in the BSFG I got it *despite* being a committee member.

If I hadn't brought "Surgical Strike" to the attention of the BSFG committee (and later, with your permission, to the whole membership by reprinting the piece in the newsletter) no one else involved in the running of the BSFG would have read your criticisms - so what was the point of them? Why weren't your criticisms made through the obvious forum of the Birmingham SF Group's newsletter in the first place?

Obviously because the point of the article was for you to get in a few smart alec shots at the BSFG while minimising the risk of too many people shooting back! Why else send the fanzine only to those no longer actively involved in the BSFG?

But why bother? Who, other than BSFG members, cares a fig for the BSFG

let alone about how many people attend the monthly meetings? You certainly don't and neither does the illustrious Mr Weston to whom you refer throughout the article. Neither of you can honestly be described as regular attendees over the last three or four years. In fact, the number of times either of you have attended meetings in the last two or more years can be counted on the fingers of one hand! Now, of course, you have both let your memberships lapse.

It seems bizarre to read such virulent (and apparently heart-felt) criticism from two such uninvolved members. Is this all a case of "We're not interested anymore - so no one else should be either"? You two have lost interest so we're all supposed to fold the BSFG and give up? It's your ball and you're taking it home, eh?

Yes, yes, I know both you and Pete have done your bits in the past, but since when does that give you the right to be so disparaging of the likes of Carol and Tony Morton, Steve Jones, Anne and Alan Woodford who are doing *their* bits now (in, I might add, far more difficult times). How did you describe them? Ah yes, "degenerative crew-members", "the anti-fannish hardcore" - no wonder you didn't send copies of RANTINGS (sorry) RAILINGS to them! "Anti-fannish" eh? Strange, I could've sworn that all five were longtime con attendees and had clocked up around a dozen convention committees between them.... No, not fannish at all.

I'm sorry Steve, but I feel that even "degenerative crew-members" and "the anti-fannish hardcore" deserve a say in a group to which they belong and pay their subs - especially when *they* even attend

the meetings. But don't let us hold *you* back - you go out there and cut a swathe through the "fannish core".

Of course there is an element of truth in all your verbiage and posturing. Yes, attendances at the monthly meetings have dropped off in the last few years and yes, membership of the group has fallen as well - but with 52 paid up members (as of 5th July) - three of them being new members, the BSFG is hardly dead! (In fact, I would venture to suggest that it is still one of the largest local sf groups in the country.)

The difficulties the BSFG face at the moment, difficulties which have recently forced us to change our format from predominately formal to predominately informal meetings, are more to do with the problem of finding a suitably priced venue in Birmingham. We can afford *either* a speaker or a private room - not both, the Tap & Spile is the best compromise we can get. And the fact that we are getting at least a dozen people turning up each month for a drink and a chat and that over 50 people think it worth their while to renew their memberships would seem to prove there is life in the old group yet.

I should point out that the attendances we were getting last year were not dramatically less than we had been getting before - but previously we had been paying £10 rather £50 for the rooms we used! The increased price of the room meant that we needed almost half again as many people to attend - this wasn't happening because most of the BSFG had heard the guests we were getting speak on three or four previous occasions. Hence our recent change of format - in future we

will have speakers only when they will be new to the majority of the membership, or are popular enough to draw in non-members.

I've been a member of the BSFG for around 17 years and the membership and monthly attendance has risen and fallen dramatically throughout those years - but the BSFG has continued. As long as people continue to pay their memberships the newsletter will continue and as long as some members want to get together each month the meetings will continue - quite simple really. When the BSFG has neither money nor members it will be dead - until then, no matter what outsiders and ex-members may say the BSFG will continue!

Dave Hardy, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0AB.
(e-mail Dave@hardyart.demon.co.uk)
4th June 1997.

Now to Steve's piece on the Brum Group. I shan't be at this week's meeting, but only because I'm going to see Jean Michel Jarre at the NEC (didn't think it would clash. . .) But I suggest that, in the best democratic manner, we hold a postal referendum: "Should the Brum Group be wound up?" (If nobody replies, that's a good enough answer.)

Personally, sad though it would make me, I think it probably should, if we continue to have no permanent venue or even date. Members have shown that they don't turn up for 'informal meetings', and we can't afford authors, especially if only a handful turn up. Catch 22.

The fact that 'everyone' knew that the Brum Group met on the third Friday

of every month, at the Imperial, or the Ivy Bush, or the Penguin (?) was one of its strong points in its heyday. Of course, Novacon is a complication, but this could presumably continue as a separate entity?

Its all a great pity, but all good things. . . as somebody said. Or, to trot out another cliché, it's no use flogging a dead horse?

[As you can see from my piece above I don't believe the Group is dead - but if members feel differently all they have to do is leave.... - Martin Tudor.]

**Chris Murphy, 126 McKean Road,
Oldbury, Warley, B69 4BA. (E-mail
106175.2014@compuserve.com)
5th June 1997.**

I saw Steve Green's "Surgical Strike" in RAILINGS and sent him a LoC. Quoted below is a shortened version of what I said in that letter, which you can reproduce in the Brum Group News. I've thought for a while that if nothing changes the Group will simply fade away. If it wasn't for your efforts it would already have done so.

"When it comes to the BSFG, I have mixed feelings. As a former secretary and chairman, it saddens me to see how it has declined. On the other hand, I didn't find being chairman a pleasant experience. Every holder of the post in recent years has been confronted with a depressing mixture of apathy and whinging criticism.

I have to confess that for about six months before I moved too far away to attend meetings, [*Chris has just moved BACK from Manchester - no excuse now!*] I was sitting them out in the bar. So were

a number of other members. That meant we could chat freely, which the formal structure of meetings otherwise limited to the beer break and the very end. Why didn't the regular presence of guest speakers have enough appeal to overcome this factor? Because, as Steve says, news and views about SF are much easier to come by than they were 20 years ago. Of course there's no substitute for the company of fellow fans, but then it's also true that the Group itself is not particularly fannish.

So, can the BSFG survive? I think it can, but only if it shifts from its sercon stance and becomes more socially orientated. The focus should be on conversation, not presentation. Guests could still be invited, though perhaps not every month. They would surely prefer talking informally with a dozen people to making a speech in front of such a small audience.

I'd like to add that none of the above is intended to reflect on the past or present committees. If anyone thinks that they can do better than Martin and the others, except by making the kind of change I've suggested, let them try. Somehow I can't imagine them succeeding."

[Further comments from members are invited and will be run in the August newsletter. Letters should reach me, Martin Tudor, at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX or e-mail to martin@empties.demon.co.uk by the 1st August 1997.]

The Book Reviews have been held over to next issue due to lack of space.