

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

NOVEMBER 2004

ISSUE 398

HONORARY PRESIDENTS: BRIAN W ALDISS & HARRY HARRISON

COMMITTEE: VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);
PAT BROWN (TREASURER); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);
TIM STOCK (PUBLICITY); STEVE JONES & WILLIAM MCCABE;
NOVACON 34 CHAIRMAN: MARTIN TUDOR

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Friday November 12th

PETER WESTON

*Author of WITH STARS IN MY EYES:
MY ADVENTURES IN BRITISH FANDOM*

Peter Weston is known to you all - he was the very first Chairman of this Group and over the years has given several talks on various aspects of SF.

WITH STARS IN MY EYES: MY ADVENTURES IN BRITISH FANDOM is the title of Pete's reminiscences of the 60s and 70s - how he discovered science fiction, joined the 60s Birmingham SF Group and entered into British fandom. An amazing trip through those long-ago days covering how he published ZENITH (later SPECULATION), co-founded the current Birmingham SF Group and culminating in him chairing the 1979 British Worldcon in Brighton. It's all here, in glorious detail. Published in September by NESFA Press in an edition of 500 copies, 300 have already sold.

After being delayed two months, this meeting is now finalised. Pete will be talking about the book and his experiences being Fan Guest of Honour at the

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: DECEMBER 3rd MEETING - This is our annual Christmas Social - :
: skittles, food, drink, prizes, etc., for which you MUST have a :
: ticket... Full details inside... GET YOUR TICKET NOW! :
:

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, cross over the road and you'll find Union Passage about 20-30 yards along). It will commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar and be seated in plenty of time.

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Christmas Social will be at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak. We have hired the Skittles room for our own private use from 7pm to 11pm on Friday, December 3rd. **PLEASE NOTE THIS CHANGE OF DATE FROM THE NORMAL SECOND FRIDAY.**

Tickets are £10 each which covers the cost of the skittle alley and the food - but not your drinks. There will be prizes for individual games, a free raffle and Christmas crackers. Tickets will be available from Vernon or myself (see me in the bookroom) at NOVACON or from Vernon or Pat at the November meeting. If you won't be at Novacon or the meeting and want tickets, please send a cheque to me at Christmas Social, 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3QL. Cheques to be made payable to 'Birmingham SF Group'.

When booking your tickets we need to know your first and second choices for the food, from the following options:-

Scampi & chips / Sausage & chips / Chicken & chips /
Veggiburger & chips / Buffet

The buffet has a selection of sandwiches (ham, cheese, tuna), sausage rolls, potato salad, chips, chicken wings, onion rings (v), coleslaw, pizza (v), mixed salad, Indian selection, quiche (v).

To get to the Selly Park Tavern, take the 45 or 47 bus from Corporation Street, just round the corner from the Britannia. The journey takes about 15 minutes in light traffic. You need the stop immediately after the Nature Centre, shortly after passing Edgbaston Cricket Ground. The Selly Park Tavern is on the left. Walk down the side of the Tavern to find the Skittle Alley entrance.

Please remember: **TICKETS ARE NOT AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT - you MUST buy a ticket in advance.**

BRITISH FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

Best Novel: FULL DARK HOUSE by Christopher Fowler

Best Short Fiction: "American Waitress" by Christopher Fowler

Best Anthology: THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF NEW HORROR: VOLUME 14 edited by Stephen Jones

Best Collection: TOLD BY THE DEAD by Ramsey Campbell

Best Artist: Les Edwards

Best Small Press: PS Publishing

Karl Edward Wagner Special Award: Peter Jackson for his film adaptation of THE LORD OF THE RINGS.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

The following amendment to the BSFG Constitution concerning Committee Membership, will be put to the Group to vote on at the Annual General Meeting in January 2005.

In Paragraph Three, sentence two - delete 'and not more than two Ordinary Committee Members' and replace with 'the Website Editor and One Ordinary Committee Member'.

Amendment proposed by Vernon Brown and seconded by Rog Peyton.

NEWS IN BRIEF

... Actor **Christopher Reeve** (b.1952) died of heart failure on October 10. Reeve burst on the scene in 1978 with his portrayal of Superman/Clark Kent in the film SUPERMAN and went on to reprise the role in three additional films. He went on to star in the classic SOMEWHERE IN TIME based on **Richard Matheson's** World Fantasy Award winning novel BID TIME RETURN Actress **Janet Leigh** (b.1927) died on October 3. Leigh is best known for her Oscar-nominated performance as Marion Crane in PSYCHO but I personally will always remember her for her performances in THE BLACK SHIELD OF FALWORTH and THE VIKINGS Paizo Publishing announced the appointment of **Jeff Berkwitz** to the position of Editor-in-Chief, AMAZING STORIES magazine on October 6, 2004. Wow! Berkwitz as editor! Anybody ever heard of him? **China Meville's** scheduled appearance at Waterstones, High Street, Birmingham was cancelled for lack of interest. They had sold 5 advance tickets. Maybe not a lack of interest but a refusal to PAY for a signing session. In addition it should be remembered that publicity for the event only geared up a week before the event itself!!! Books recently sold to publishers include BRIDGE OF THE SEPARATOR by **Harry Turtledove**, a new stand-alone novel in the *Videssos* series; a new *Blackcollar* novel by **Timothy Zahn**; **Ian R MacLeod's** collection PAST MAGIC and a collection of early stories by **Robert Silverberg**, IN THE BEGINNING The

results of the **Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire** have been announced. The awards will be presented during the Utopiales Festival. The winners were - French novel: **TRANSPARENCES** by **Ayerdhal**; Translated novel: **PERDIDO STREET STATION** by **China Miéville**; French short story: "Serpentine" a collection by **Mélanie Fazi**; Translated short story: "Sisyphes et l'Etranger" ("Sisyphus and the Stranger") by **Paul Di Filippo** **Zoëy Deschanel**, co-star of the upcoming SF movie **THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY**, told **SCI FI Wire** that the movie will be faithful to the late **Douglas Adams'** beloved book. "Pretty much everything from the book is included," Deschanel said in an interview. "Most everything that was changed was Douglas Adams' idea to begin with; [the filmmakers] had his hard drive, so any changes that were made were pretty much according to his wishes." Adams, who created the *Hitchhiker* series based on his own original radio serial, drafted the first script for the film before he died unexpectedly in May 2001 of a heart attack 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

MIDNIGHT LAMP by **Gwyneth Jones**

Gollancz / 326pgs / £10.99 / trade paperback

Reviewed by **Pauline Morgan**

Rating: * * * * *

Do you remember when you thought how wonderful it would be if politicians disappeared and anarchy ruled? A world where the rock stars of the day actually ran things? In her trilogy, of which **MIDNIGHT LAMP** is the third volume, Gwyneth Jones, envisages just that. In **BOLD AS LOVE**, Ax Preston finds himself Dictator (in the original, Latin, sense of the word) of England. Sage Pender and Fiorinder Slater are the other members of his triumvirate. During volume two, **CASTLES MADE OF SAND**, Ax is kidnapped and held in Mexico, leaving Sage and Fiorinder to carry on. Soon, Sage leaves to pursue an agenda of his own, an attempt to reach a Zen-self state. They are reunited at the end of the volume but no longer have a taste for being in the forefront of politics.

The start of **MIDNIGHT LAMP** finds them hanging out in obscurity in Mexico, all three of them traumatised by recent events. They are found by Harry Lopez who tells them that he wants to make a film of their exploits. Although the project is real, it is also a ploy to lure them into the USA. It is believed that groups are trying to reach the Zen-self state, not for enlightenment but to create a human bio-weapon. The US government thinks, because of their past experiences, the triumvirate can help them. The events that unfold, although seeming apposite to it

do help initiate the healing. Ax, Sage and Fiorinder need to be able to come to terms with the past.

This is a highly enjoyable book and although the story can stand on its own, I would urge readers to read the previous two volumes first as it will enhance their appreciation of a work that is a mixture of adventure, surrealism and what if... PM

Europa Suite 1: THE AUTUMN CASTLE by Kim Wilkins

Gollancz / 463pgs / £17.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Vicky Cook

Rating: * * * *

This is a fascinating book. It starts off in apparently normal surroundings, despite the occasional chapters devoted to the murmurings of what is obviously a weirdo. A young woman, Christine, has chronic backpain and is haunted by the death of her famous parents several years ago. She lives with a struggling artist in an artists' commune in Berlin. But as the book progresses we learn what has happened to her long-lost friend who vanished years ago as a child, and how they are connected to faeryland. Meanwhile the plot thickens as the psychopath with a thirst for faery bones stalks them...

This was a slow-grower for me. I have a bit of a soft spot for stories concerning fairies, witches and such-like, but to begin with the story seemed a bit sugary-sweet and rather concerned with all these too-beautiful people living in Berlin. I got rather annoyed with Christine's friends and her seemingly perfect boyfriend. But as the book went on, and I persisted, things get decidedly better, as her friend Mayfridh causes upheaval in her life in more ways than one, and suddenly there were more strands to the story than I had first suspected. This definitely added a bit more interest to the book.

So I would say stick with it. It does read at times a bit like women's literature (especially at the start), but in the end this turns out to be a mastery of gothic fairytale mixed in with ordinary everyday life. Kim Wilkins has a good knowledge of North European tales and legends, and this shows throughout this book, which makes it an interesting step above others in the genre. VC

IRON COUNCIL by China Mieville

Pan Macmillan / 471pgs / £12.99 / large paperback (hardback & limited edition also available)

Reviewed by William McCace

Rating: * * *

This is the third of the *New Crobuzon* novels. Although the plot and characters of this novel work well enough without reading the previous stories,

there are some things that are more fully explained elsewhere. As with its predecessors, the setting is a world going through an Industrial revolution where alchemy and magic are as scientifically meaningful as physics and chemistry. There are many sentient species – human, insect, cactus, amphibian and others. There are even more creatures produced by arcane and pseudo scientific means. Criminals are Remade with parts of other creatures or machines.

The city-state of New Crobuzon is at war with Tesh. The war is so distant to its citizens that some believe that it is just an excuse for the state of martial law that exists on the streets of the city. Rebel groups range from the artists and political activists to terrorists and criminals. As a result of a rumour, a small group of activists set out to find the 'Iron Council'. The Council are a renegade group who have become such a powerful mythical symbol that some don't even believe they exist. Here is the story of the Council from their creation as a result of a workers' dispute to their final return to the city. This is also the story of Judah Low, a creator of golems – animated creatures made from anything to hand (and some things that have no substance).

The story is well told with a heavily detailed background. The romantic ideal of a leftist revolt belongs to the characters and not the writer. Maybe this loses something as the third volume in an ongoing series. Some of the things that seemed new and inventive the first time around are starting to become just more of the same.

WAM

😊😊😊😊 **FILM ROUND-UP** 😞😞😞😞 BY VICKY COOK

Just the one film to review this month: *SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW*. Starring modern popular stars Jude Law and Gwyneth Paltrow, it features the aforementioned Sky Captain who saves the 'world of tomorrow' from an evil genius. Paltrow plays the intrepid reporter who always seems to crop up in this sort of thing.

It is important to bear in mind that the film is very tongue-in-cheek, otherwise the film does not appeal, seeming too full of clichés and bad humour and action scenes. Not forgetting the two-dimensional characters in the hero and the interfering ex-lover reporter.

The reason this works is the subtle way it parodies the genre of old films of the '30s. It is visually stunning and shot in a blue-cast colour, and follows the pattern of old-style films where the setting is the future but they still use typewriters and wear 30s-style clothing - 'retro-future'. Even the evil robots look rather cartoon-like. In fact it references certain famous films in it, the most noticeable of these perhaps being the air-borne ship sequence, with Angelina Jolie, which reminds one of *CAPTAIN SCARLET*.

The film doesn't work on all levels - Paltrow is bland and shallow: rather disappointing in the lead female role. Law shines as the hero pilot, with the rather unusual distinction of being a (British-sounding) Englishman, whereas usually this accent goes to the baddie. In terms of storyline it is rather weak, but this may not matter to fans of FLASH GORDON AND THE LIKE! In fact I felt this was done purposely. Even the music is reminiscent of this genre, being very catchy and subtle enough to not interfere with the film too much. -

An acquired taste - visually lovely, and musically good, but it might not appeal to all, with the relationship between the leads seemingly strained, and the humour and tongue-in-cheek flavour subtle and a bit clumpy at times. Silly but stylish. VC

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 - it's far less painful! 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... it could be a book or if you're really lucky it could be a bottle of wine!

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. BRING YOUR GOODIES! Lay them out on one of the tables provided and wait for people to start throwing money at you.

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.

The Stafford Players will be staging Terry Pratchett's CARPE JUGULUM from 10th-13th November 2004. The play will be performed at The Stafford Gatehouse, Eastgate Street, Stafford, and tickets are available from the Stafford Gatehouse Box Office - Tel (01785) 254653. Ticket costs are £7.50 (£6.00 concessions) with a special "3 for 2" offer on the first night. Further info from <http://www.staffordplayers.com>

INTERACTION: THE 2005 WORLDCON will be held in Glasgow next year, 4th to 8th August 2005. Guests of Honour are Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Sheckley, Lars-Olof Strandberg and Jane Yolen. Full details, printable forms, etc., from their website <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/>

Snail mail address: INTERACTION, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ

FANTASYCON 05 has been booked for the 30 September - 2 October 2005, at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, near Birmingham. Further details to follow.

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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FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

December 3rd - Christmas Social - see page 2

2005

January 8th - Annual General Meeting

February 11th - Party Time! It's celebration time. What are we celebrating? First correct answer from a non-committee member wins a prize!

March 12th - Peter F Hamilton

Newsletter 398 copyright 2004 for Birmingham SF 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 the 'opinion'.

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.

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