

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: 45p

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chairman & Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor, Secretary - Anne Woodford,
Treasurer - Sarah Freakley, Publicity Officer - Steve Jones, Ordinary Member - Alan
Woodford, Novacon 26 Chairman - Carol Morton, Novacon 27 Chairman - Martin Tudor.**HARRY HARRISON**

**creator of interstellar-criminal-turned-law-enforcer,
Slippery Jim DiGriz and BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO;
author of the EDEN trilogy; co-author of the
HAMMER AND THE CROSS trilogy
will address the Group**

**on Friday 15th November 1996,
7.45 for 8.00pm, at the Prince Hotel
(Station Street, Birmingham city centre)**

A prolific novelist, Harry Harrison has in his career explored most of the major themes of SF. Robots appear in his collection WAR WITH THE ROBOTS (1962); matter transmission in the collection ONE STEP FROM EARTH (1970); space opera in STAR SMASHERS OF THE GALAXY RANGERS (1973); generation starships in CAPTIVE UNIVERSE (1969); parallel worlds in A TRANS-ATLANTIC TUNNEL, HURRAH! (1972); over-population in MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! (1966) - which became the Nebula award winning film SOYLENT GREEN (1973). An Honorary President of the Group, Harry is a popular speaker and was Guest of Honour at Novacons 12 and 25.

Admittance: Members: £2.50 (£2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £3.75 (£2.75 Unwaged). (Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.)

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) in the upstairs function room of the Prince Hotel, Station Street in Birmingham city centre (formerly Stephenson's Hotel, between the Electric Cinema and the Bus Station). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are £10.00 per person, or £13.50 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: the Treasurer, Sarah Freakley, c/o 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, B66 4SH. (E-mail should go 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, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX.

Colophon

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All text by Martin Tudor except where stated otherwise. This issue was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. For details of WAVE's competitive prices contact Martin Tudor at the editorial address on the cover.

Many thanks this issue to BERNIE EVANS for producing the address labels, supplying news from the Net and transferring files; TONY BERRY, RICHARD STANDAGE, CAROL MORTON, THE BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL, WHAT'S ON, THE BIRMINGHAM VOICE and STEVE GREEN for the other news in the Jophan Report and the Events listing.

Will "P. Phillips", who joined the Group in May, please send his address to:
Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick,
West Midlands, B66 4SH.

Forthcoming Events

15 NOVEMBER 1996: HARRY HARRISON, one of the Group's Honorary Presidents, creator of the Stainless Steel Rat, etc will address the BSFG, 7.45pm for 8pm, at the Prince Hotel, (on Station St., behind New St. Station, near the Electric Cinema and Bus Station, in the city centre).

16 NOVEMBER 1996: HARRY HARRISON will be signing at Andromeda book shop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT. Call 0121-643-1999 for further details of this and other signings.

23 NOVEMBER 1996: BUZZ ALDRIN will be signing copies of THE TIDES OF TIBER (which he has co-written with John Barnes) from noon at Andromeda book shop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT. (NB: to be confirmed.) Call 0121-643-1999 for further details of this and other signings.

23 NOVEMBER 1996: BUZZ ALDRIN, Apollo astronaut, will be delivering a talk about his book, THE TIDES OF TIBER (which he has co-written with John Barnes) from 6.30pm at the Library Theatre, Central Library, Birmingham. Call 0121-236-5622 for tickets (or 0121-235-3368 for further information).

14-17 FEBRUARY 1997: ATTITUDE: THE CONVENTION at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern. Attending £27.00 (until they close on 31 January 1997). Hotel booking forms are now available - deadline mid-November, so hurry! Contact: First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1DW.

28-31 MARCH 1997: INTERVENTION the 48th UK National SF Convention, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Theme "communication". Guests Brian W Aldiss, David Langford, Jon Berg and Octavia Butler. Attending £30.00, supporting £20.00 until 30 November 1996. (Then £40.00 attending, £30.00 supporting.) Cheques (payable to "Intervention") should be sent to: 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants., PO10 7TS, (e-mail intervention@pompey.demon.co.uk).

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 De Vere Abbey Hotel, Great

Malvern. Guest of Honour Peter F Hamilton. Attending membership £25.00 until 1 April 1997. Supporting £10.50. Progress Report #1 and hotel booking forms now available. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

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 organizers 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.

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.

The Jophan Report #98

Novacon 26 took place over the weekend of the 8-10 November 1996 at the Hotel Ibis in Birmingham. Although the hotel was a bit small for such an event, both the convention attendees and many of the hotel staff and management rose to the occasion and a

pleasant feeling of good humour filled the weekend.

Guest of Honour, David Gemmell, was unfortunately called home part-way through Sunday, but had participated heavily in the programme up to then and had proven a popular guest.

The weekend was most heavily influenced, however, by the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund news which was released immediately before the event - that the previous European TAFF administrator, Abigail Frost, had failed to pass over any funds to this year's winner Martin Tudor. (Full details of this news appears in the European TAFF newsletter TAFFion Tudor #2 and in Dave Langford's Ansible #112.) This had obviously left the European fund severely depleted - this year's trip having been financed by a series of interest free loans from concerned individuals, the United Fan Funds Auctions and the Mexican Hat.

In an amazing display of goodwill towards the fund the 281 attendees at Novacon raised £1,308.90 in TAFF auctions on Saturday and Sunday night. (This figure includes the sale of two items for TAFF in the Art Auction - a piece of stained glass produced by the late Bob Shaw and a full-colour Arthur "ATom" Thomson painting.) In addition to this a further £132.40 was raised by Nic Farey in a secret beer tasting in his hotel bedroom!

The current European TAFF Administrator, Martin Tudor, would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped auction material at Novacon (especially Pam Wells, Tony Berry, Greg Pickersgill, Alison Scott, Bridget Hardcastle and Richard Standage), as well as everyone who donated material and paid silly amounts of money! He would also like to thank the Confabulation committee who donated £500 at the weekend

and Gary Farber who passed over a £200 cheque from previous Administrator, Abigail Frost (this being the first of a series of instalments by which she hopes to repay the money she failed to pass over thus far). Tudor went on to say that if further donations which have been promised come through shortly, not only will all the money European TAFF owes be repaid before Christmas this year, but a "healthy start" will have been made towards covering the European expenses of the next North American winner in March 1997. He added that he hopes to conduct further fund-raising at ATTITUDE: THE CONVENTION in February 1997 and through a postal auction early next year.

TAFF was not the only beneficiary of the generosity of Novacon members: a collection in memory of Bob Shaw raised £69.32 with sales of books fetching a further £97 - this money was passed over to Bob's widow, Nancy Shaw, to be donated to charity in Bob's memory. While Anne Woodford collected £105.25 in the traditional RNIB raffle.

Nancy Shaw was also presented with a Special Nova Award to Bob Shaw for "Best Fan". The other Novas going to D West for Best Fan Artist, Alison Freebairn for Best Fan Writer, Best Fanzine going to joint-editors Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey for WAXEN WINGS AND BANANA SKINS.

The full Nova breakdown follows; the number in brackets indicates the number of points received after totalling first place (5), second place (3) and third place (1) votes on each ballot:

BEST FANZINE:

1. WAXEN WINGS AND BANANA SKINS ed Claire Brialey, Mark Plummer (161).
2. ATTITUDE ed Michael Abbott, Pam Wells, John Dallman (81).

3. PLOKTA ed Steve Davies, Alison Scott (75).
4. POGONOPHOBIA ed Alison Freebairn (67).
5. BOB! ed Ian Sorensen (49).
6. HAVE BAG, WILL TRAVEL ed Martin Tudor (32).
7. EMPTIES ed Martin Tudor (28).
8. GOTTERDAMMERUNG ed Mark McGann, Tommy Ferguson, James McKee (19).
9. ANSIBLE ed Dave Langford (16).
10. THE DISILLUSIONIST ed Anthony J Shepherd (13).
- 11= SNUFKIN'S BUM ed Maureen Speller (11)
ZORN ed Mike Scott (11).
- 13= READING MATTERS ed TIBS (10)
ANORAK REDEMPTION ed Nigel E Richardson (10)
- 15= MALACHITE GREEN ed Mike D Siddall, Alison Freebairn (9)
PLATYPUS ed Simon Ounsley (9)
- 16= EYEBALLS IN THE SKY ed Tony Berry (8)
KELPIE'S POOL ed Alison Freebairn (8)
18. WALLBANGER ed Eve Harvey (7)
- 19= DOG'S BASKET (6)
FTT ed Judith Hanna, Joseph Nicholas (6)
GERALD (6).
22. SIDDHARTHA ed Ian Williams (5).
- 23= BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL ed Pete & Sue Binfield (4)
FERMAT (4)
TUDOR DYNASTY ed Bernie Evans (4)
- 26= FLYING PIG (3)
NEVER QUITE ARRIVING ed Christina Lake (3).
28. FANS ACROSS THE WORLD
NEWSLETTER ed Bridget Wilkinson (2)
- 29= A BALANCED DIET ed Paul Kincaid (1)
PSYCHO DYSEPSIA (1)
SALIROMANIA ed Michael Ashley (1)

BEST FANWRITER:

1. Alison Freebairn (117)
2. Mark Plummer (108)
3. Dave Langford (61)
4. Martin Tudor (51)
5. Claire Brialey (50)

6. Ian Sorensen (46)
7. Helena Bowles (27)
8. Nigel Richardson (17)
9. Alison Scott (15)
10. Mike Siddall (14)
11. Mike Abbott (11)
- 12= Dop (10)
Paul Kincaid (10)
14. Sue Mason (9)
- 15= Maureen Speller (7)
Tommy Ferguson (7)
Simon Ounsley (7)
18. Greg Pickersgill (6)
- 19= Mark McGann (5)
Christina Lake (5)
Steve Jeffery (5)
Mike Scott (5)
John Dallman (5)
24. Juditha Hanna (4)
- 25= Tony Berry (3)
Kari (3)
Jilly Reed (3)
- 28= Jim de Liskard (2)
Dave Hicks (2)
- 30= Pam Wells (1)
Tibs (1)
Steve Davies (1)

BEST FAN ARTIST:

1. D West (93)
2. Dave Mooring (88)
- 3= Dave Hicks (84)
Sue Mason (84)
5. Steve Jeffery (45)
6. Jim Barker (15)
7. Shep Kirkbride (11)
8. Ann Stokes (9)
- 9= Ian Sorensen (5)
SMS (5)
- 11= Teddy (3)
Roo (3)
Dave Hardy (3)
14. Ian Brooks (1)

Book Reviews

FAIRYLAND by Paul J. McAuley,
Vista, £5.99, 416pp
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The time is early next century---older people still remember the 1990s. Technological advances have given us a leisure age but people want novelty. Genetic engineering has provided blue skinned dolls which can be pets, slaves, sex objects. There are new drugs---not chemicals but tailored psychoactive viruses, short lived and addictive, and there are fembots. These are the product of nano-technology, extremely tiny machines which can enhance, addict or change.

Alex Sharkey is a fat man. He manufactures psychoactive viruses on the edge of legality and is part of the underworld. He is commissioned to make a hormone which will enable dolls to breed--at present each one has to be grown afresh. Each doll also had a chip implanted behind one eye which controls its actions. Then he meets Milena, who appears to be a small girl but is also a genius. Alex is suckered into helping her remove the control chip from a doll. So fairies are born

The action moves on in time to mainland Europe. Alex is searching for Milena and fairies have taken up residence in what was Disneyland. Led by the Twins they conspire against humankind. Then there is the Childrens' Crusade marching across Europe

This book is extremely difficult to describe as it dips into various fringe cultures. It has a seediness that comes with the misuse of technology. There are, presumably, reasonably normal people living in Europe but

their lives are scarcely touched by the events portrayed. Any information they have is relayed through news channels. This is good, extrapolative science fiction, complexly-written. To get most enjoyment out of it it helps to have some knowledge of science and the silicon revolution. It is not light reading but is potentially rewarding.

THE LAST LEGENDS OF EARTH

by A A Attanasio

NEL, p/b. £5.99, 556pp.

Star Rating: ***

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

From its general appearance and cover blurbs, one would assume that this is hard science fiction. After all, even NEW SCIENTIST said: "God-like, millennia-spanning galaxy creators", and NEW SCIENTIST wouldn't review fantasy, would it? Notwithstanding, I consider this to be fantasy presented as sf. I tried to check, when I picked up this review copy, that it wasn't part of a trilogy or more, as I hate that. But I missed the Author's Postscript on page 557, in which he explains that this is "the final volume in a series I call the Radix Trend. My intention has been to thematically structure each novel around one of the four cardinal dimensions that define us and our world: height, depth, width, and time... In THE LAST LEGENDS OF EARTH, language and individual character flatten before the inexorable mystery of change that we call time." Wish I'd known that before I started reading!

To me, this is an epic fantasy Quest, but instead of magic we have scientific rationalisations for what occurs. Can you really believe that two billion years after our Solar System exploded, and long after human life has become extinct, alien beings could re-incarnate us from "its fossilised DNA which drifts as debris in the void of deep space"?

Not just recreate human organisms, but actual people from various ages of the Earth, complete with memories and personalities? And why? To populate artificial worlds (which are actually the parts of a vast spacecraft) and feed the evil, spider-like alien Zotl, who feed on the pain in human brains (hasn't that theme been used in STAR TREK, among others?)

However, stripping away all the pretentious stuff, this is a good, solid, galaxy-sweeping interstellar adventure, with interesting characters, worlds, backgrounds and aliens, goodies and baddies, time travel and ultimate triumph of good over evil. Take a look at it - it may be for you. (It's a thick book for the price, too.)

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF MODERN FANTASY BY WOMEN

ed. A.Susan Williams & Richard Glyn Jones. Penguin, pb, 560pp. £8.99.

Star rating ****

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

First a serious complaint. While one might expect a feminist publisher like The Women's Press or Virago to put out an anthology of this kind, for Penguin to do it is ridiculously sexist. When are they going to publish a companion volume of fantasy by men to even things up? And once they've decided to discriminate on a sexual basis, can we expect them to do so on grounds of colour or age or left/right handedness?

That aside, the anthology is of the very highest quality. It has gathered its ingredients widely, including SF and horror stories as well as all that one might think of as fantasy.

Nearly all the writers you would expect to find are here: Le Guin, Carter, Tuttle, Tiptree, Lee,

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Wilhelm. Not just represented, but with terrific stories, sharp and thought-provoking. What a joy, too, to find that the earlier writers are not neglected. Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover" opens the book (it's chronologically arranged), setting a high standard with beautifully observed description and extraordinary subtlety. It's followed by Shirley Jackson's "The Tooth", a little masterpiece of post-war unease. Among later stories are Joyce Carol Oates with a fine historical pastiche on the subject of mediums and Suzy McKee Charnas's "Boobs", much funnier and nastier than most werewolf stories.

Some of the stories are familiar through frequent anthologisation, such as Zenna Henderson's "The Anything Box", though most are less well known. Fortunately, there's no real leaning towards extreme feminist material here, the closest being "Relics" by Zoe Fairbairns. There are a few make-weight stories, original to this volume, by people you won't have heard of. The worst contribution, though, is from P.D. James, who tries to shoehorn a futuristic murder mystery into twenty pages and fails badly.

Generally speaking, it's about the best anthology of the year.

GOLD by Isaac Asimov.
HarperCollins/Voyage, pb, 430pp, £5.99.
Star rating **
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

At the age of thirteen I read Asimov's SF books and enjoyed them. They are ideal for the typical 13-year-old. That is their strength and their weakness, since if you want your SF to be original or subtle or deeply clever, you must look to authors other than Asimov. This, his final collection, contains fifteen stories and almost forty brief articles. I found the stories

disappointing: full of old ideas, limited in their visions of the future, unsophisticated in their character interaction, and generally lacking in ambition and credibility. There's a robot whose owner encourages him to write fiction until the robot gets to do it better than the owner. There's a teenager who solves a planetary life-form problem which his elders have refused to consider. There are several short-shorts written to support puns or morals.

Most of the articles are editorials from Asimov's magazine or from anthologies. While a few are of limited use to anybody wanting to be a writer, almost all are quick bits of journalism, dated and awkwardly out of context, which should never have been reprinted. This volume is not a worthy epitaph, but a cynical exercise in making money out of the dead.

* * * * *

The "Star Ratings" are:

- * = Crap, beyond belief.
- ** = Crap, but readable.
- *** = Not too bad, really.
- **** = Pretty good actually.
- ***** = BUY IT!

Please remember that reviews of books should reach Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, WV13 1HX, within ONE MONTH of your taking the book.

A number of people still owe reviews, please ensure that these, along with reviews of books picked up at the last meeting are passed/mailed to Martin Tudor at/by this month's meeting.

Novacon 27
14th to 16th November 1997,
the De Vere Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern, Guest of
Honour Peter F Hamilton.

Attending membership costs £23.00 at Novacon 26,
£25.00 after the con, rising again in April 1997.

JOI^N
EARLY
Book
you^R
hotel room
early
or else!

DoN't Forget
we know where
you live!

For further details consult your programme
package, speak to Carol Morton on the Novacon
registration desk or write to: Novacon 27, 14 Park
Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.