

August 1997

Issue 311

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 Novacon 27 & 28 Chairman - Martin Tudor.

**THE AUGUST MEETING WILL BE AN
INFORMAL MEETING ON FRIDAY 8TH
AUGUST 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.)**

**IN THIS ISSUE: Peter Coleborn responds to Steve
Green's Surgical Strike; a new TAFF Race is
launched; Stoke Heath leads the way in the
production of Time Machines - PHOTO INSIDE!**

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. 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 to ALAN & ANNE WOODFORD for producing the address labels; PETER COLEBORN for his letter; WHAT'S ON, the Birmingham EVENING MAIL and STEVE GREEN for the news in the Jophan Report and Events Listing.

**Jophan Report #106
by Martin Tudor**

A shock announcement appeared, hidden, on page 36 of the EVENING MAIL for Thursday 31st July 1997: £1,000 has been raised "towards restoring a Tardis to full working order. £5,000 is still needed."

TARDIS, as you are no doubt aware, stands for "Time and Relative Dimensions in Space" and had previously been thought to be no more than a prop for the BBC tv series DR WHO.

The scientific community has been strangely reticent regarding this startling news; but we can only hope that the Museum of Historic Buildings at Stoke

Heath will raise the £5,000 needed. *(The photo and original story appear on page eight of this newsletter.)*

David Warbeck who featured in films such as THE BEYOND and THE BLACK CAT died of cancer on the 24 July this year.

I'm sorry to announce that neither Dario Argento nor Linda Hayden will be able to appear at the Eighth International Festival of Fantastic Films, due to other commitments. However, Hammer actress Veronica Carlson, film producer Aida Young, Jimmy Sangster, Richard Gordon and Janina Faye (who played the small child in DRACULA) all hope to appear. (For further details contact 33 Barrington Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA14 1HZ.)

Pebble Mill Studios in Birmingham are looking for "bright bubbly people" to appear in forthcoming shows in Birmingham, so if you know anyone.... Call 0121-471-1363.

Novacon 27 is pleased to announce that they will be presenting a *new* version of SF BLUES, featuring Brian Aldiss, on the Saturday night of the convention - don't miss it!

The latest Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) Race has just been launched. Each candidate has posted a bond, promising - barring Acts of God - to travel to Intuition, the 1998 National British Convention, in Manchester, England, 10 -13 April 1998, if elected; and has provided signed nominations and a platform.

The candidates are: Victor Gonzalez, Ulrika O'Brien, Vicki Rosenzweig and Tom Sadler.

Voting in the 1997 race is open to anyone who was active in fandom prior to September 1995, and who contributes at least £1 (or \$2) to the Fund. Larger contributions will be gratefully accepted. Voting is by secret ballot: only one vote per person, and you must sign your ballot. You may change your vote any time prior to the deadline.

Votes in this race must reach the administrators by midnight 13 December 1997. A ballot form has been enclosed with most copies of this newsletter, further copies are available from the European Administrator, Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX, England (or from the North American Administrator, Dan Steffan, 3804 S. 9th Street, Arlington, VA 22204, USA).

Nominations are now opened for the 1998, Europe to North America TAFF Race. The winner will attend Bucconeer, the 56th World SF Convention, in Baltimore 5-9 August 1998. Prospective candidates need to ensure that signed nominations (two from North America and three from Europe) reach the Administrators by midnight on 1st November 1997, along with their 100-word platform and £10 bond.

TAFF gratefully accepts your freely-given money and material for auction; such generosity has sustained the Fund for over 40 years. TAFF is fandom's oldest travel fund, and one of its worthiest causes - give early and often! Please contact your nearest administrator for details.

Forthcoming Events

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

16 AUGUST 1997: STEPHEN BAXTER will be signing copies of **TITAN (£16.99)**, **VOYAGER (£5.99)**, **TIMELIKE INFINITY (£5.99)** and the first volume in his new "Young Adults" series **THE WEB: GULLIVERZONE**, from noon at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Call 0121-643-1999 for further information or e-mail 106016.3321@compuserve.com or check them out on <http://www.andromedaf.co.uk>.

23-27 SEPTEMBER 1997: FROM A JACK TO A KING by Bob Carlton. From the creator of **RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET** another musical assault on the work of Shakespeare. Loosely based on Shakespeare's **OTHER** rock'n'roll masterpiece - **MACBETH!** The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham. Tickets £7.00-£20.50, call 0121 643 1231.

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

10-15 NOVEMBER 1997: Terry Pratchett's WYRD SISTERS adapted for the stage by Stephen Briggs. "This hilarious stage version of the phenomenally successful novel pits the three witches, Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Og

and Magrat Garlick, against the wicked duke and duchess. Any similarity to Shakespeare's *MACBETH* is purely intentional!" The Crescent Theatre, Brindleyplace, Broad Street, Birmingham. Tickets are £5.00 in advance and concessions, or £7.00 on the door. Call 0121-643-5858 (Monday- Friday 11am-4pm).

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. Special features include SF BLUES by Brian W Aldiss and The Comedy Revue by Dave Hicks and Mike D Siddall. 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-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.)

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.

Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick Rd., 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.

THE RESPONSE 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. My own reply ran last issue, along with letters from Chris Murphy and Dave Hardy. Below, Peter Coleborn adds his comments; Tony Morton, the Group Chairman will be responding to all of these articles/letters next issue.]

PETER COLEBORN,
46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green,
Birmingham, B27 6DT. (E-mail
Peter@alchemy.press.demon.co.uk)
16th July 1997.

As one of those BSFG members guilty of not attending many meetings, I

thought I'd have a word or so. It is depressing that the BSFG seems to be declining in popularity; alas, many organisations suffer this (the British Fantasy Society has done so on a number of occasions). It is only because of a few dedicated society members, who care enough, that the organisation survives - and hopefully later flourishes. So to those still on the committee: stick with it.

However, you must think about what you can do to make the BSFG more exciting for new, and ways to attract back lapsed, members. It ain't gonna be easy. And you'll get criticism no matter what you do.

Why don't I attend many BSFG meetings? Well, it took me quite a while to get it into my thick head that you met on every third Friday of the month. Then you changed it to the second Friday - and it changed again.

[The Group met on the third Friday of the month for 25 years, then changed to the second Friday of the month, except when members are notified of a change of day because of the availability of speakers/venues. - MT]

Now: I'm not sure. Also, I wasn't too impressed with some of the venues chosen, but I know that city-centre pubs can be depressing places. Have you considered the MAC or someplace similar?

[Yes, but as the majority of the people who actually attend on a regular basis come from as far afield as Coventry, Leicester, Lye, Oldbury and Willenhall, we need to stick to the city centre or they can't make it. (As this includes four out of five of the Committee it is unlikely to change!) - MT]

Some of the guests haven't impressed me too highly - or rather the fact that they nearly always seem to read a passage from a work-in-progress. Personally, I don't like readings - unless it is delivered by someone with aplomb, with a gift for verbal story-telling. Ramsey Campbell is excellent at reading stories (I know, he's a horror writer).

[As we cannot afford to pay speakers any more than their travelling expenses it is difficult to demand that they spend time (which is money) preparing talks - however many of them do. Chris Priest's excellent talk last year springs to mind, along with that of Professor Krauss. I would've estimated that, at most, only a third of those who spoke to the group read their works - perhaps you've been unlucky in the few meetings you've attended? - MT]

Perhaps you expect too much of your guests: an hour before the break, Q&A after is too demanding. You should start off their bit promptly. Let them talk for 40-45 minutes followed by 15 minutes of Q&A. Or have the guest in discussion with someone - a chat show format. Get a PA system.

[We don't actually specify what the speakers should do - we merely suggest a talk followed by a break and Q&A. We certainly don't specify that they have to talk for an hour!]

[As we cannot afford a function room at the moment a PA would be out of the question - and totally unnecessary for the 16-20 people (at best) who showed up for meetings last year. - MT]

End the formal bit by 9.00 or 9.15pm. That way, guests don't feel pressured into filling over an hour of

stressful time. And people who have to leave early, to catch buses home, etc., can. Or folk can go off for a Chinese meal.

(Also, committee and other long-term BSFG members who sit out the formal talk in the bar sets a shockingly bad example.)

[I used to stay outside because, at the time, I smoked and wished to indulge in that habit without bothering others. I really do not see how some members sitting in the bar can be considered "shocking" or in anyway a bad example. - MT]

Has the BSFG thought about doing something with Dillons or Waterstones? They have large SF sections. They have literary evenings... Every year I miss out on getting the BFS involved with the Readers' and Writers' festival. Has the BSFG looked into this? Have you sought an arts grant? You'd probably only get one for a NEW project, but certainly the BSFG fills the criteria as an arts group.

[We organised the Professor Krauss meeting last year with Waterstones, who mailed out 600+ BSFG flyers with their mailings. Both Waterstones and ourselves were disappointed with the results - the meeting barely broke even and Waterstones had a disappointing signing session.

[We also tried sending mail-shots to every library in Birmingham and the surrounding area. (Although there is SUPPOSED to be a distribution service from Central Library we have discovered it doesn't work!) Hundreds of flyers and posters were despatched to the libraries with covering letters, on three occasions through the year - the result was two enquiries, neither of which, to my

knowledge, resulted in a single attendance [let alone a new member!]

I would not like to see the BSFG become a group of and for the fans only. The BSFG would decline at a faster rate: potential new members can listen to a speech and then start chatting after (they have a ready-made topic); they will likely feel excluded from contributing to a discussion between friends.

Literary (i.e. written) SF and fantasy and horror needs the BSFG, BFS and BSFA and others to promote it to the readership. We have one of the best SF bookshops in the UK in our city. The BSFG should work together with Andromeda to promote the written word. And I don't think the BSFG can do that successfully if it stops being serious (I'm not totally familiar with terms like sercon, so I might be off on the wrong track here; but that seems to be the suggestion of Chris Murphy).

[The Committee are not suggesting that the BSFG stops being serious about literature - we are merely reacting to the fact that the evidence shows, over the last five or more years, people are not willing to turn out in sufficient numbers for speakers who they have heard before.

[As the Group has insufficient funds to subsidise meetings to the tune of £50 or more a month, we have to concentrate on speakers who are either new to the group (and likely to attract attention) or are proven draws (such as Pratchett and Banks). Unfortunately this means far fewer meetings with speakers and more informals - we do not have a choice. We have tried (and failed) for the last two years to attract people on a

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regular basis. Now we are left with little alternative but to withdraw and regroup!]

Yes, SF is ubiquitous. But bugger "sci-fi": much of it is pretty bad anyway. It's superficial. Look at SF on TV, in the cinema, the magazines... Well, you know. Media-SF can manage on its own. Books, on the other hand, need to be cherished and cultured.

That's all...

[Further comments from members are invited and will be run in the September 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 5th September 1997.]

Book Reviews

THE X-FILES #9: E.B.E. by Lee Martin, HarperCollins, 100pp, p/b, £3.99. Star Rating: *

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Having watched every episode of THE X-FILES (well, almost) since it began on terrestrial television, I thought it would be interesting to read a book for a change. As it happened, I remembered this episode quite clearly once I started reading, but if I expected any extra insights into the story I was doomed to disappointment. It was as if Lee Martin had sat in front of his tv to make notes as the episode unwound and had then written up his notes to provide a straight account of what he had just watched.

The story is a simple one: Mulder and Scully investigate an outbreak of UFO

activity and find that it is centred around a mysterious truck. The truck may or may not be carrying an alien from a shot-down flying saucer and other aliens may or may not be attempting a rescue. By the end of the episode the hypothetical alien has disappeared and nothing has been proved one way or the other.

It is just conceivable that a book like this might be of use to somebody who missed that particular episode on broadcast, but I cannot imagine it being of any use to anyone else. It adds absolutely nothing to the screen original, treating the story with no extra depth or background and lacking whatever dramatic content the tv presentation may have possessed. On top of that, the writing is amateurish and shallow and with only 100 pages of large print it is lousy value for money. Aimed, presumably, at those sad people who eat, sleep and breathe X-FILES, it is a blatant merchandising rip-off - don't be caught out.

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 (or e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk), 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 mailed to Martin Tudor by this month's meeting.



■ GOOD TO TALK: Steve Cashmore. Picture: JOHN JAMES

The right number

STEVE Cashmore, from Lickey, near Bromsgrove, earned £1,000 for Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings at Stoke Heath in Worcestershire. A retired BT engineer and voluntary worker on the museum's unique collection of telephone kiosks he was selected as one of the national winners of the BT Community Challenge for work in the community. The £1,000 will go towards restoring a Tardis (above) to full working order. £5,000 is still needed.