

BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: FREE

Price: FREE

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 November Meeting will be an informal meeting on the *THIRD* Friday of the month, 21st November 1997, from 7pm in the top floor bar of the Tap & Spile, Gas Street, Birmingham. *Admittance: FREE!*

There will be a raffle - with a wonderful prize, and review copies are available as usual. (Please refrain from smoking until 8.30pm - after which time the bar is opened to the general public.)

**COMING SOON TO TALK TO THE BRUM GROUP:
Friday 13th February 1998 Stephen Baxter;
Friday 13th March 1998 Graham Joyce.**

The BSFG meets (informally) from 7pm in the Top Floor Bar of the Tap & Spile, Gas Street, Birmingham city centre on the second Friday of 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).

**THIS ISSUE: 1998 TAFF Race Announced -
Bell, Hardcastle and Kincaid Speller running!**

Colophon

The contents of this issue are copyright 1997 the BSFG, on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights revert on publication. Personal opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the membership of the BSFG.

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; special thanks to STEVE GREEN for his many contributions this issue; thanks also to SFX, WHAT'S ON, LOCUS, the BBC, the Birmingham EVENING MAIL, DAVE LANGFORD, LOCUS and IRVING RAPPAPORT for the news in the Jophan Report and Events Listing.

Jophan Report #109 by Martin Tudor

I'm very sorry to have to report that just as this newsletter went to press we heard that Margaret Aldiss, the wife of the BSFG's honorary president Brian W Aldiss, died from liver cancer last week.

I'm sure everyone in the Brum Group will join with me in sending their

heartfelt commiseration's to Brian and his family.

The 1998 Europe to North America TAFF Race was launched on 1st November 1997. So for the brief period 1st November to 13th December 1997 *two* TAFF Races will be running concurrently.

Chris Bell, Bridget "Bug" Hardcastle and Maureen Kincaid Speller are vying for the right to represent Europe at the 1998 World SF Convention, Buccaneer, in Baltimore in August 1998. Voting closes on this westward bound race on the 25th April 1997.

Meanwhile, Victor M Gonzalez, Ulrika O'Brien, Vicki Rosenzweig and Tom Sadler, are competing to represent North America at the British National sf convention, Intuition, in Manchester at Easter in 1998. (Voting closes for this eastward bound race on 13th December 1997 - so vote soon!)

Ballots for both races are available from Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1 HX, from Dan Steffan, 3804 South 9th Street, Arlington, Virginia 22204, USA), or from <http://www.dcs.gla.uk/SF-Archives/Taff/> courtesy of Dave Langford (to whom many thanks!).

Forthcoming Events

Until 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, Brindley Place, 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).

Until 31 January 1998: RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET Shakespeare's previously lost rock'n'roll cult classic is playing at the New Vic Theatre, Etruria Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme. Call 01782-717962 for details.

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. (Due to the tragic news above, the previously advertised SF BLUES by Brian W Aldiss will not be staged at Novacon.) Attending membership is £35.00 on the door. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

19-22 November 1997: MASKERADE "by Terry Pratchett" at the Gatehouse Theatre, Eastgate Street, Stafford. Tickets £4.50. Call 01785-54653.

21 November 1997: TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing from noon at Andromeda Bookshop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Call 0121-643-1999 or check their web site on <http://www.andromedasd.co.uk> for details.

21-23 November 1997: ARMADACON IX at the Astor Hotel, Plymouth. GoH

Colin Greenland, Artist GoH David A Hardy. Attendance costs £25.00, contact 4 Gleneagle Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, Devon, PL3 5HL, tel: 01752 267873.

**The BRUM GROUP
CHRISTMAS MEETING**

on Friday 5th December 1997

will be a Beer & Skittles Evening!

The venue will be the popular Samson & Lion in Wordsley. The price just £11.00 per person (only £1.00 more than you paid back in 1994!) which includes travel from and back to Birmingham city centre; a choice of basket meals (Scampi, Chicken Nuggets, Vegetable Lasagne or, for a £3.00 supplement, a Balti); *amazing* prizes; the hire of the skittle alley.

Cheques, made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" should be sent, along with your completed coupon to Tony & Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. Or you can book at the Novacon Registration table at Novacon 27 (on Saturday or Sunday) or at the November Meeting on 21st November. Please ensure you book by Saturday the 22nd November AT THE LATEST!

6 December 1997: ROBERT RANKIN will be signing copies of *BRENTFORD CHAINSTORE MASSACRE* (hb, £16.99) from noon at Andromeda Bookshop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. **STORM CONSTANTINE** will also be signing copies of her latest works. Call 0121-643-1999 or check their web site on <http://www.andromedasd.co.uk> for details.

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

13 February 1998: **STEPHEN BAXTER** will be addressing the Group, from 7pm at the Tap & Spile, Gas Street, Birmingham.

13 March 1998: **GRAHAM JOYCE**, winner of the 1997 British Fantasy Award, for his novel **THE TOOTH FAIRY**, will be addressing the Group, from 7pm at the Tap & Spile, Gas street, Birmingham.

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.)

13-15 November 1998: **Novacon 28**, Guest of Honour **Paul J McAuley**. Attending membership costs just £25.00 at Novacon 27, rising to £28.00 after the con and probably rising again after Easter 1998. Venue to be announced.

27 December 1999 - 2 January 2000: **MILLENNIUM**. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (fl0.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee. 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.

The Roscoe Report by Steve Green

Whilst Claudia Christian's confused exit from the fifth and final season of *Babylon 5* has earned creator J Michael Straczynski the enmity of hardened *Ivanova* fans, his attitude towards the teeming ranks of *B5* web sites is to be warmly applauded.

In sharp contrast to Fox and Viacom, whose heavy-handed "defence" of *The X-Files* and *Star Trek* evidenced little gratitude towards the fans who've filled the studios' coffers, Straczynski told *Sci-Fi Entertainment* (lousy title, good magazine) that he's content with a simple acknowledgement of Warner Brothers' copyright: "If people sit down and do this on their own time to create a website about a show they love, there can really be no higher compliment. And I don't

understand why you should have to penalise these people... Why temper that enthusiasm by suing them?"

[The helpful folks at <http://www.midwinter.com/lurk/> maintain an excellent guide to B5 web sites and resources.]

Talking of Fox, the temptation to release the re-furbished Star Wars trilogy on video proved too great, despite repeated promises to the contrary. Perhaps George Lucas, currently supervising post-production on *The Balance of the Force* (with the ubiquitous Ewan McGregor as the youthful Obi-Wan Kenobi), needed the cash to lure Steven Spielberg into the director's chair for the second sequel (presumably as soon as the latter has lensed Indiana Jones and the Plague of Darkness).

Things must be tight, judging from the "cease and desist" order Lucasfilms recently slapped on the Chicago stage show *Jedi! A Musical Tour de Force*, claiming the production "seriously jeopardises our ability to profit from our licensing programs [sic] and threatens to cause us serious economic harm". Hope no one's told George about the spoof short *Hardware Wars* - and why didn't he use the same muscle to save us from Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs*?

Inkberrow-based video distributor Sovereign Marketing (run by former Encore exec Stephen Haynes) launches its new Satanica label this month, with a brace of horror films directed by Norman [Inseminoid] Warren. *Satan's Slave* [1976] and *Terror* [1978] are both presented in full ratio and excellent value at £12.99.

Those heading down to London over Christmas may care to check out the Museum of the Moving Image, which launches the exhibition "Hammer Horror: A Horribly Hair-Raising Experience" (typical South Bank gibberish) on 3 December. As well as behind-the-scenes photographs and recreations of key images from the studio's heyday, MOMI plans to display a wealth of Hammer artefacts and merchandise. The exhibition runs until 19 May.

The neighbouring National Film Theatre also raised the goosebump stakes on 31 October, with a rare screening of the Spanish-language *Dracula*, shot simultaneously with the famous Bela Lugosi version and utilising the same sets, substituting Carlos Villarias in the lead.

Director Philip Noyce, whose career has slid from the excellent thriller *Dead Calm* to the tedium of *The Saint*, is back on the remake trail with an extraterrestrial update of the classic John Ford western *The Searchers*; the script will be provided by Ebbe Roe Smith [*Falling Down*].

Other projects allegedly in the pipeline include: *Freddy Vs Jason*, the Krueger-Vorhees confrontation tipped in the closing frames of the "final" Friday the 13th gorefest; Tim Burton's remake of the 1960s b-movie *The Man With the X-Ray Eyes*, though this may have to wait until he's directed Nicholas Cage in the long-awaited *Superman Reborn*; a big-screen version of the 1960s sitcom *My Favourite Martian*, possibly starring Jeff Daniels and Christopher Lloyd; Uma Thurman as the comic-strip anti-heroine Modesty Blaise, courtesy of director Luc Besson (who really should know better - but then so

should have Joseph Losey, who directed Monica Vitti in the 1966 incarnation).

Finally, I feel certain you'll want to join me in extending every sympathy to impoverished American author Stephen King, who's been forced to demand an \$17m advance for his new manuscript, in order to ensure "my ass is covered, the mortgage payments are taken care of [and] we've got food in the refrigerator". You've got to feel sorry for someone whose arse is that huge.

Fanzine File by Steve Green

Dark Terrors #14: Top notch tribute to Hammer horrors, including a paean to the Elstree studio on its seventieth birthday and a stroll down Memory Lane to 1957 and the company's genre debut, plus a tantalising glimpse of Richard Matheson's mothballed adaptation of his own I Am Legend. [£4.25 from Mike Murphy, 6 Wesley Place, St Ives, Cornwall, TR26 1SL; note new address.]

Revolutions #1: Well-produced laserdisc reviewzine, co-edited by Darren Jones (ex-Man-Eating Mushrooms) and Steve Langton (ex-From Beyond). As a new format, releases covered range from recent hits (Ed Wood, The Quick and the Dead) to cult classics (Brazil, Baron Blood, Danger: Diabolik); there's also a good overview of Alex Cox's career and a timely report on the potential hazards of DVD technology. [£3.00 from Langton at

PO Box 4089, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 3AW.]

Samhain #64: New releases Darklands and Lost Highway lead off the eleventh-anniversary edition of this veteran fanzine, but the release-related material is increasingly being balanced by essays taking more of an overview of the genre (here, a look at the role of dysfunctional families in horror cinema and the summer's fx-heavy blockbusters). [£2.50 from John Gullidge, 77 Exeter Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon, EX3 0LX.]

She Demons #4: Portuguese-language fnz with a heavy emphasis on scream queens (here represented by Debbie Rochon, who actually doesn't like the term), bondage and sex (the photos are cheesy at best, but some of the fan art is rather striking). [Available for trade or a couple of \$US from Cesar Souza, R.Riachuelo, 1334 sl.108 Porto Alegre, RS, cep 90.010-273, Brazil.]

Shock Cinema #11: Reviewzine dedicated to cult and underground movies, the more obscure the merrier; the subject matter this time ranges from Rosemary's Baby clone All of Them Witches to the low-budget sexploiter Gemini Affair (starring Lost in Space regular Marta Kristen!). [\$8.00 from Steve Pulchalski, PO Box 518, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009, USA.]

Spectrum #10: Tv-oriented fnz heavy on fantasy and supernatural drama (American Gothic, Xena, Dark Skies); specialising in lengthy analysis and episode guides, with

a shedload of photos. [\$6.00 from Win-Mill Productions (Dept.S10), 1912 E.Timberview Lane, Arlington, USA.]

Book Reviews

SIGNS OF LIFE by M John Harrison
Gollancz, 255pp, hb, £16.99

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Star Rating: ****

The first-person narrator, Mick "China" Rose, and a mate start a business dumping illegal medical waste. He meets and falls in love with Isobel and as their relationship flourishes so also does the company, becoming legitimate and successful. Then he loses Isobel to a business client who will help her to realise her childhood dreams of flight. The firm collapses in bankruptcy and Isobel returns but the renewal of their relationship cannot survive the changes in her and the book ends on an uncertain note with the best of China's life now behind him. He has lost Isobel, his mate and his business, but maybe he has found himself.

The story is written in a curious, choppy style, flitting to-and-fro between various past and present narrative threads which sometimes makes it difficult to pin down the precise order of events or even to determine the time frame in which they are set. Despite this it is both an interesting and absorbing read and I could not wait to finish it.

In fact one could almost believe it to echo some of Harrison's previous work by

being set in a different, alternative, world until a familiar icon - the M[^], a BMW, a record by Tom Petty - puts in an appearance to tie the story to present-day England. This leaves the only sf element in SIGNS OF LIFE as the unsuccessful treatment which Isobel received at a clinic in Miami to which she later returns to have it reversed and nothing has been revealed of that until the final chapter which shares the same title as the book. In the final analysis, of course, whether or not a book is a good book should not depend on whether or not it is sf, but this is, after all, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. I thought it was a damn good one, but in spite of the sf element rather than because of it. I shall want - and need - to read it again.

* * * * *

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.

**The BRUM GROUP
CHRISTMAS
MEETING
on Friday 5th
December 1997
will be a
Beer & Skittles
Evening!**

The venue will be the popular Samson & Lion in Wordsley. The price just £11.00 per person (only £1.00 more than you paid back in 1994!) which includes travel from and back to Birmingham city centre; a choice of basket meals (Scampi, Chicken Nuggets, Vegetable Lasagne or, for a £3.00 supplement, a Balti); *amazing* prizes; the hire of the skittle alley.

Cheques, made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" should be sent, along with your completed coupon to Tony & Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. Or you can book at the Novacon Registration table at Novacon 27 (on Saturday or Sunday) or at the November Meeting on 21st November. Please ensure you book by Saturday the 22nd November **AT THE LATEST!**