

January 1998

Issue 316

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 Annual General Meeting:
7pm for 7.30pm on Friday
9th January 1998 in the
Board Room of Bennetts,
Bennetts Hill, Birmingham
(see map for details, the Board Room is on
the ground floor - on your left as you enter
the bar, the room past the Library).**

COMING SOON TO TALK TO THE BRUM GROUP:

Friday 13th February 1998 Stephen Baxter;

Friday 13th March 1998 Graham Joyce;

A Friday in April 1998 Tom Holt;

Friday 15th May 1998 Robert Holdstock.

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Board Room of Bennetts on Bennetts Hill (off New 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 Harrod 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

The contents of this issue are copyright © 1998 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 WOODWARD for producing the address labels; TONY MORTON for his bit; MICHAEL WOODWARD for his book reviews; thanks also to WHAT'S ON, the BBC and the EXPRESS & STAR for the news in the Topban Report and Events Listing.

Chair's Bit by Tony Morton

It has been a somewhat fraught year. As I explained last issue we have had some problems with last year's Treasurer, Sarah Freakley, and are currently awaiting the outcome of our application for a Small Claims Action in County Court - I hope to have further news of this at the AGM.

Even if all of the funds of the Group had been available we would still have been forced to move to the cheaper (and

smaller) venue at the Tap and Spile. 1996 had convinced both the outgoing and incoming Committees that the Group could no longer afford to pay for a room and cover speaker's expenses every month with an average of only 18 members attending each meeting! (See BRUM GROUP NEWS #304.)

Any doubts about this were dispelled by the appalling turnout at the Princes for the April meeting featuring "Jonathan Wylie" (aka Julia and Mark Smith) - where we again made a loss.

At this point we decided to see how a speaker would work at the Tap & Spile but in June Tom Holt fell down a rabbit hole and we failed to get any speakers for the rest of the year.

A bright point of this year, however, has been the fact that an average of 10-12 people have been turning up at the "informal" meetings - not significantly lower than that of the 1996 formal meetings!

And things seem set to improve even further! Our perseverance in searching for a suitable (and cheap) venue finally paid off late last year when within a week of their opening we managed to book the Board Room at Bennetts on Bennetts Hill for the whole of 1998!

Bennetts is the best venue we have seen: situated in the old National Westminster Bank building on Bennetts Hill, it is a luxuriously furnished Marstons bar with real ale and excellent food. (A menu has been enclosed with this newsletter - at the

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

time we went to press they served up to 7pm, but if you intend to eat please call them to confirm they haven't changed the times! - MT) The Board Room is conveniently located on the Ground Floor (Bennetts itself has disabled access via a ramp down to the bar from the Waterloo Street entrance) with just one small step up to the Board Room. But best of all the Board Room is currently available free of charge!

At this point I would like to thank both my Committee and Tim Stannard and Vernon Brown, our "one-off" ordinary committee members for the year, for attending their respective committee meetings.

Finally, I hope to be able to continue as Chairman next year not only to "see through" the court action but to help return the BSFG to a more secure financial footing. To this end I already have three month's worth of speakers confirmed for 1998, with Tom Holt lined up on a Friday in April. I hope I will have your support.

BSFG: Committee Posts

At the time we went to press the following posts have candidates - we are still looking for volunteers for the two posts of Ordinary Committee Members and the post of Publicity Officer.

Group Chairman - Tony Morton stands for re-election unopposed.

Secretary - Anne Woodford stands for re-election unopposed.

Treasurer - Alan Woodford stands for

re-election unopposed.

Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor stands for re-election unopposed.

Jophan Report #111 by Martin Tudor

Ulrika O'Brien has won the 1997/1998 TAFF race to Europe and will represent North American fandom at the 1998 National British Science Fiction Convention in Manchester, England, 10-13 April 1998.

The results were as follows, the figures are the *totals* from Europe and North America *combined*:

	1st Place Votes	2nd Round	Final Round
Victor Gonzalez:	55	60	77
Ulrika O'Brien:	69	82	105
Vicki Rosenzweig:	46	57	--
Tom Sadler:	42	--	--
Hold Over Funds:	3	--	--
No Preference:	9	--	--
Total Ballots cast:	224		

A full list of European voters will appear in the European TAFF newsletter shortly, along with a complete breakdown of voting figures.

Fans of Iain Banks should tune their radios to Radio 4 from 11pm-11.30pm this Thursday (8th January) and for the next three weeks for Joe Dunlop's four part dramatisation of ESPEDAIR STREET. Paul Gambaccini presents the story behind the spectacular rise and tragic fall of the fictional seventies mega-band Frozen Gold. Featuring music by Iain Banks and Nigel Clark! John Gordon Sinclair (from

GREGORY'S GIRL), a big fan of Banks, plays Daniel "Weird" Weir.

Amongst the New Year's honours this year was Arthur C Clarke who became a Knight Bachelor.



Arthur C Clarke, Knight Bachelor

Forthcoming Events

Until 24 January 1998: **THE SNOWMAN** - Raymond Briggs magical story featured with an extended original score, at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Call 0121-236-4455.

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.

15-17 January 1998: **STAGE 2/DR FAUSTUS**: a cast of 100+ young people enact the struggle of good versus evil and the deadly consequences of overreaching pride bringing Marlowe's text to life at the MAC. Call 0121-440-3838.

11-15 February 1998: **BBC TOMOR-**

ROW'S WORLD LIVE, Halls 6-8, National Exhibition Centre. Call 0181-948-1666.

13 February 1998: **STEPHEN BAXTER** will be addressing the Group, from 7pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

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 in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

13-16 March 1998: **CORFLU UK** US-style, fannish, relaxacon, in the Griffin Hotel, Boar Lane, Leeds. £25.00 attending to Corflu, c/o Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY.

21-22 March 1998: **MEMORABILIA** Europe's largest sf, film, cult tv, pop and comic collector's fair at the NEC. Call Made in Heaven on 01899-221622.

?? April 1998: **TOM HOLT** will be addressing the Group on a date to be confirmed, from 7pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

10-13 April 1998: **INTUITION**, the 49th British National Convention, Jarvis Piccadilly and Britannia hotels, Manchester. GoHs: Ian McDonald, Martin Tudor, Connie Willis. Attending

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

£30.00, supporting £15.00. to: Intuition, 1 Waverley Way, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, SM5 3LQ.

15 May: ROBERT HOLDSTOCK will be addressing the Group, from 7pm in the Board Room at Bennetts, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham city centre (just off New Street).

21-24 August 1998: THE WRAP PARTY to celebrate the conclusion of **BABYLON 5**, the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London. Confirmed guests include: J Michael Straczynski, Harlan Ellison, Dr Jack Cohen, John Ridgeway, Bryan Talbot, Adam "Mojo" Lebowitz, John Matthews. Attending £65.00 (instalment scheme available), to The Wrap Party, PO Box 505, Reading, RG1 7QZ.

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 £28.00, rising after Easter 1998. Venue to be announced. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

2-5 April 1999: RECONVENE, 50th National British Convention, Adelphi

Hotel, Liverpool. GoHs: Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon. Attending £25.00 to Reconvene, 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

27 December 1999 - 2 January 2000: MILLENNIUM. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (f10.00) 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.

Book Reviews

SHADOWS OVER INNSMOUTH
edited by Stephen Jones
Victor Gollancz, 340pp, pb, £9.99,
Star Rating: ****
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

"The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is arguably one of H P Lovecraft's best

stories, although it languished unrecognised for over 10 years before receiving widespread acknowledgement through publication in WEIRD TALES. It is here reprinted, followed by contributions from some 16 British authors - it is ironic that this book first saw print in America, three years before an English publisher saw fit to take it up.

Inspired by Lovecraft's original oeuvre, these stories (some culled from various sources while the remainder were, I presume, written specifically for this collection) pick up where he left off. Together they constitute a series of episodes spanning 60-odd years from the time of the title story to the present day and spreading from the original Massachusetts setting to various other locations - most notably England. The writers are all enthusiastically faithful to the Lovecraftian tradition of the Cthulhu Mythos and while it is inevitable that some of the stories are (a bit) better than others it is also true to say that there is not a bad one amongst them.

I can quite imagine that this kind of thing in general, and the work of H P Lovecraft in particular, might not be to everyone's taste, but it is very much to mine. To readers who are already Lovecraft fans I can recommend it unreservedly. To anyone less familiar with his work I would still recommend it as being a first-rate collection which showcases a number of considerable talents and at the same time provides an introduction to one of the greatest of fantasy genres.

NIGHT LAMP by Jack Vance

HarperCollins/Voyager, 380pp, £9.99, large format p/b.

Star Rating: *****

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Hilyer and Althea Fath are Professors of Aesthetic Philosophy. Their studies bring them to a remote and semi-civilised planet where they chance across a small boy being beaten up by a gang of louts. It is soon apparent that as well as his bodily injuries he has suffered some serious psychological trauma and in the process of physical and mental healing he loses most of his memory, being able only to tell them that his name is Jaro. They adopt him and take him home where they bring him up as their own son, nurturing him through childhood and adolescence until they are killed during another off-world expedition. He is then re-united with his true father: together they recover a hidden fortune and, after various adventures, succeed in avenging the mysterious circumstances of his real mother's death. Complications arise but are satisfactorily resolved before the end.

This is typical Vance. The basic story follows his favourite theme; that of a youngster growing up in a society governed by obscure rituals where at first everything seems to be against him. As he grows older, so he comes increasingly to find himself in conflict with that society, but by exercising his wit and ingenuity he comes out on top. This takes place against a background of one or more meticulously invented worlds which are home to curious flora and fauna. All is described in his unique and unmistakable style blending exotic invented names with a judicious

selection of more commonplace words which derive a new strength from the unfamiliar context.

It would be easy to decry this as just another Jack Vance piece. However, even at its most casual his work is superior to the best that many another writer can accomplish and this novel suggests that even at the age of 80 he has lost none of his powers of invention. It is intriguing, readable and as good a piece of science fiction as I expect to find this year.

* * * * *

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, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (or e-mail martin(a)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 two meetings are mailed to Martin Tudor by this month's meeting. The following list includes the name of the person, the title and author of the book and in brackets the month when the book was picked up for review:

Robert Jones: *TIMESCAPE* by Gregory Benford (2/97).

Steve Jones & Friends: *THE RUINS OF AMBRAI* by Melanie Rawn (3/97); *MAGNIFICAT* by Julian May (3/97); *THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION* by Peter F Hamilton (3/97); *THE SANDMAN BOOK OF DREAMS* ed Neil Gaiman & Ed Kramer (4/97); *MILLENNIUM* ed Douglas E Winter (6/97); *THE DISCWORLD*

COMPANION by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Briggs (6/97); *BABYLON 5 TO DREAM IN THE CITY OF THE SORROWS* by Kathryn M Drennan (7/97); *THE FIFTH SACRED THING* by Starhawk (9/97); *THE PAVILLION OF FROZEN WOMEN* by S P Somtow (9/97); *WALKING TO MERCURY* by Starhawk (10/97); *JOVAH'S ANGEL* by Sharon Shinn (10/97); *3001 THE FINAL ODYSSEY* by Arthur C Clarke (11/97).

William McCabe: *CHRISTOPHER LEE - TALL DARK AND GRUESOME* (11/97).

Adrian Middleton: *ALIEN: RESURRECTION* by A C Crispin (11/97); *SERVANT OF THE BONES* by Anne Rice (11/97).

Pauline/Chris Morgan: *MY HERO* by Tom Holt (1/97); *GIBBON'S DECLINE & FALL* by Sheri S Tepper (1/97).

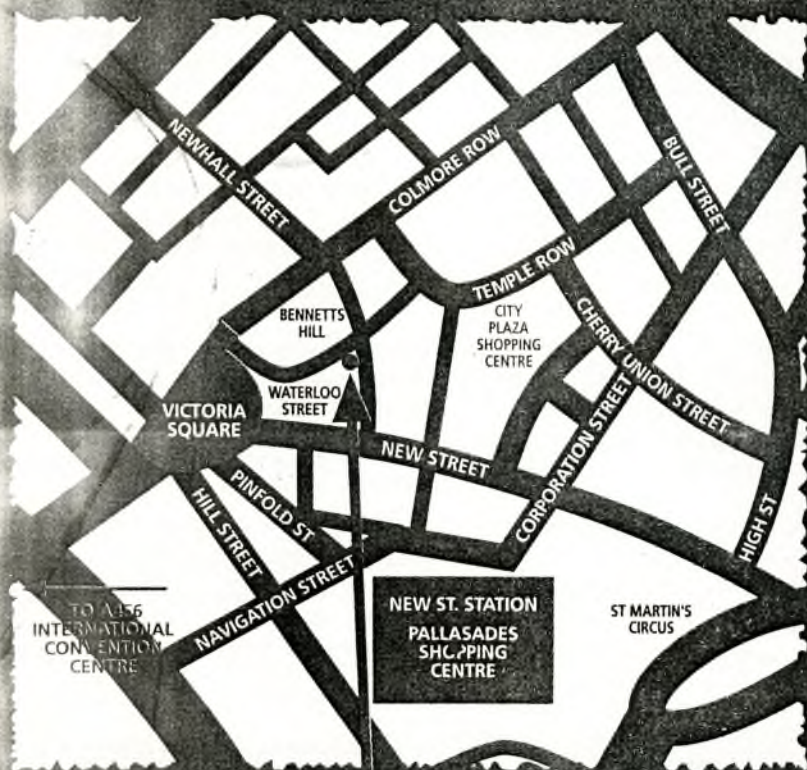
Carol Morton: *SORCERIES* ed. Katherine Kerr (2/97); *RAGE OF A DEMON KING* by Raymond E Feist (3/97); *SORCERERS OF MAJIPOOR* by Robert Silverberg (3/97); *THE SEER KING* by Chris Bunch (10/97); *JACK FAUST* by Michael Swanwick (10/97).

Tony Morton: *STARBORNE* by Robert Silverberg (2/97); *TIMELIKE INFINITY* by Stephen Baxter (8/97); *ORACLE* by Ian Watson (10/97).

Yvonne Rowse: *THE STONE CANAL* by Ken MacLeod (9/97).

Alan Woodford: *THE HOUSE IN THE BORDERLAND* by William Hope Hodgson (1/97); *THE FIFTH ELEMENT* by Terry Bisson (6/97); *THE BIG IDEA: CRISCK, WATSON & DNA* by Paul Strathern (11/97); *THE BIG IDEA: TURING AND THE COMPUTER* by Paul Strathern (11/97); *THE BIG IDEA: HAWKING AND BLACK HOLES* by Paul Strathern (11/97); *THE BIG IDEA: NEWTON AND GRAVITY* by Paul Strathern (11/97); *THE BIG IDEA: PYTHAGORAS AND HIS THEOREM* by Paul Strathern (11/97); *THE BIG IDEA: EINSTEIN AND RELATIVITY* by Paul Strathern (11/97).

W e e f i n d s



B e n n e t t s

Bennetts Hill, Birmingham, B2 5RS
Tel: 0121 643 9293 Fax: 0121 643 2904