

August 1999

Issue 335

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 Chair-Yvonne Rowse, Secretary-Martin Tudor, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer-William McCabe, Ordinary Member-Anne Woodford, Newsletter Editor-Yvonne Rowse, Novacon 29 Chair-Carol Morton, Novacon 30 Chair-Tony Berry

SF QUIZ

with a

CASH PRIZE

Friday 13th August 1999, *

**from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge,
second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street,
(entrance in Union Passageway).**

Food and drink may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine level and taken up to the Lichfield on the second floor. Admittance: Members £1.50 (£1.00 unwaged) , Non-Members £2.00 (£1.50 Unwaged). (*Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.*) (**VB: the second Friday of the month.*)

The BSFG meets from 7pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), 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 £20.00 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 Mids, 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: Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP (or by e-mail to yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.co.uk).

Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999.

11 September, noon: Paul J McAuley signing *SHRINE OF STARS*, the third Book of Confluence (Gollancz hardcover £16.99) and *ANCIENT OF DAYS* (Millennium pbk £6.99).

18 September: Raymond Feist will be signing his books. Other authors attending Fantasycon will also be available for signings. Please phone Andromeda for details and times.

There will also be signings in September by Christopher Priest and in October by Peter F Hamilton. In addition Graham Joyce will be signing his book, *INDIGO* and Warren Palmer his novel *STARWEB* on dates to be confirmed.

Forthcoming Events

13 August: Brum Group meeting, SF Quiz with cash prize from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

13-15 August 1999: WINCON V, Unicon 1999, at King Alfred's College Winchester. GoHs: John Barnes, Diana Wynne Jones, Warren Ellis. Attending £28 in advance (£35 on the door) to Wincon V, 53 Havant Rd, North End, Portsmouth, Hants, PO2 7HH.

3-5 September 99: Festival of Fantastic Films. Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. Attending £55, details from 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester, M7 3QP.

10 September: Brum Group Meeting from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway). Guest to be announced.

10 - 12 September 99: Masque 7. Costume Con. University of Wolverhampton. Reg £35. Contact 130, Hampstead Hall Road, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, B20 1JB.

17-19 September 1999: FantasyCon XXIII, at The Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham GoHs: Raymond Feist, Robert Rankin, Louise Cooper, Graham Masterton, Mike Tucker + others TBA; Art Show; Dealer Room; talks; signings; launches; Banquet; numerous attending professional writers, editors, publishers, artists etc. Attending £45 (BFS Members) or £55 (Non Members); Daily Rate £25 (BFS Members) or £30

(Non Members); Supporting £20 (BFS Members) or £25 (Non Members); plus £25 for members or non-members who want the banquet. Contact: SAE to: FantasyCon XXIII, 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT or check out the web site <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/6859/fconxx3.htm>

5-7 NOVEMBER 1999: NOVACON 29, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Ian Stewart. Attending membership costs £32 in advance (or £35 on the door). Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS, or check out the web site which features not only the first two Progress Reports, hotel booking and membership forms, but also the Nova Rules - <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n29/n29.html>

13-14 NOVEMBER 1999: MEMORABILIA Europe's largest sf, film, cult tv, pop and comic collectors' fair. Hall 17, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Box Office on 0121 767 4555 for further details.

21-24 April 2000: 2Kon, Eastercon at the Central Hotel, Glasgow with guests Guy Gavriel Kay, Deborah Turner Harris and Katherine Kutz. Reg £25, £20 unwaged; supp. £15. Contact 2Kon, 30 Wodburn Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 8BA. E-mail: 2kon@dcs.st-and.ac.uk <http://www.theory.cs.st-and.ac.uk/2Kon>

13-16 April 2001: Paragon, Eastercon at the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool with guests Michaëls Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lianne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership currently £25 Attending, £15 Supporting, £12.50 Junior and £5 Child. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk

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 yvonne@hallsfarm.softnet.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 Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Jophan Report #124
By Martin Tudor

Daventry based fan Chuch Harris died on Wednesday 6 July, sitting in his favourite chair. His widow, Sue, told Avedon Carol that he died quickly. Avedon then posted the news on rec.arts.sf.fandom. Chuch, a leading British fanzine fan from the 1950s, will be much-missed.

On 21 July the Plokta News Network reported that they had heard of the deaths of both Australian fan Andrew Brown and Hugo-winning American fan George "Lan" Laskowski.

Andrew Brown died on Thursday 15 July. The cause of death is currently unknown. Andrew was a former editor of the Melbourne newsletter Thyme that has been nominated for a Hugo this year, among his other fannish activities.

George "Lan" Laskowski, editor of the Hugh-winning fanzine Lan's Lantern died of cancer on Monday 19 July.

Both were comparatively young, and will be greatly missed.

Chris Boyce, author of the novels Catchworld and Brainfix and long-time SF fan collapsed and died at work on Wednesday 30 June. He was 55.

ADHOC the Cambridge based monthly magazine is requesting short stories of original fiction - 500 words *only*. Pays £200. E-mail submissions to 500w@adhoc-guides.com or by post to: Colin Greenland, Fiction Editor, Adhoc magazine, 35 Parkside, Cambridge, CB1 1JE.

The Tolkien Society and some local conservation groups will be presenting plans for a Tolkien Country Park to Birmingham city council this month. The idea is to set Moseley Bog, The Dell, Sarehole Mill and countryside along the river Cole within a memorial park for the South Africa-born author who was brought up in the area.

FTL is something new in publishing – a totally web-based venture, with all the features of the sort of magazine you might buy at a newsagents or supermarket. Magazine Editor is Wendy Graham, who has been a journalist for many years but who knew nothing about computers until just before Christmas. Webmaster is Ian Jeffery, who knew lots about computers, but nothing about publishing or creating websites until about April really. Mid-April is when the two got together and decided 'Wouldn't it be fun if...?' Since then they have been building up the magazine to where it is today, check it out at <http://ftlmagazine.com/> or

contact if you still have questions please contact the editor at
editor@ftlmagazine.com.

The Bram Stoker Award Winners for 1999 (awarded by the Horror Writers of America) were as follows:

Novel: Bag of Bones - Stephen King

First Novel: Dawn Song - Michael Marano

Long Fiction: "Mr. Clubb and Mr. Cuff" - Peter Straub

Short Fiction: "The Dead Boy at Your Window" - Bruce Holland Rogers

Fiction Collection: BLACK BUTTERFLIES - John Shirley

Anthology: HORRORS! 365 SCARY STORIES - edited by Stephan

Dziemianowicz, Martin Greenberg, and Robert Weinberg

Non-fiction: DARKECHO NEWSLETTER - Paula Guran

Small Press Award -- Barry Hoffman, Gauntlet Press.

Screenplay: (TIE) GODS AND MONSTERS - Bill Condon --- DARK CITY

Work for Young Readers: "Bigger than Death" - Nancy Etchemendy

The Planetary Society is the world's largest public space science and exploration group, with 125,000 members worldwide. Funding space research, SETI, education and many other projects, its work enables ordinary people to contribute to planetary exploration. Each year, The Society presents a FREE series of public lectures – in Birmingham. The 1999 'Worlds to Discover' programme takes a look at the worlds beyond our own and reveals how humanity is pushing back the boundaries of our knowledge by exploring the 'final frontier': 5 September "Uranus & Neptune - Worlds of Mystery"; 3 October "Saturn, the Ring World"; 7 November "Jupiter - the Giant World"; 13 November "Sagan Day" at Birmingham & Midland Institute, Margaret Street; 5 December "Mars Polar Lander" (venue may alter – please check). Unless otherwise indicated, Lectures are by Andrew Lound of the Planetary Society and take place at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, from 2pm. Lectures are preceded by a round up of current and future missions in 'Planetary News'.

In addition Observing Sessions take place in partnership with CENTRAL Sidewalk ASTRONOMERS, 9pm-11pm (2pm-5pm for Sun Observing) at Barr Beacon Lodge, Barr Beacon, off Beacon Road, Great Barr, Birmingham. Parking extremely limited at Barr Beacon Lodge – please book Observing in advance.

For further details of Lectures and The Planetary Society: Contact Andrew Lound, Regional Co-ordinator (Great Britain) on 0121 356 5446 or email Stuart Williams, Assistant Regional Co-ordinator (Great Britain)

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on: swilliams@planetary.ndo.co.uk. Or check out the British Web Site at <http://members.xoom.com/soyuz/tps/index.html>.

Do you fancy attending a nice small UK SF con? If so why not pop along to WINCON V at King Alfred's College, Winchester over the weekend 13-15 August 1999? Guests of Honours are listed as John Barnes, Warren Ellis, Diana Wynne Jones, Kara Dalkey (author of *Bhagavati*, *Steel Rose* and *The Homeward Path*) and Special Guest Michael Sheard (Admiral Ozzel in *The Empire Strikes Back*) - rumour has it that at least two of these can't make it after all, although replacements are being organised. E-mail wincon@pompey.demon.co.uk to check the latest line-up. Attending membership costs £28 in advance or £35 on the door. Contact: Wincon V, 53 Havant Road, North End, Portsmouth, Hants, PO2 7HH, or <http://www.pompey.demon.co.uk/wincon.htm>.

The UK Chapter of the Horror Writers Association is being organised by Nicki Robson, this newly formed Chapter is intended to bring together UK based horror writers. On offer is a monthly newsletter detailing members news, markets, reviews etc. In addition there will be an opportunity to meet informally and also to participate in public readings. The first meeting will be at 9pm on Saturday 18 September at FantasyCon XXIII where you will have the chance of winning a signed copy of a James Herbert novel. For further information email delph@rms-ltd.demon.co.uk or take a look at the website <http://www.rms-ltd.demon.co.uk/delph.htm>.

From 1996 onwards, the British Fantasy Society has obtained a list of nominations from its members for the final ballot forms for the annual British Fantasy Awards. These lists effectively form a 'recommended reading' list of titles for each year, the BFS Award Nominations 1999 (for books published in 1998) are as follows:

NOVEL: *A Clash Of Kings*. George RR Martin (HarperCollins); *Bag Of Bones*. Stephen King (Hodder & Stoughton); *Chasm*. Stephen Laws (Hodder & Stoughton); *Corrupting Dr Nice*. John Kessel (Gollancz); *Dark Lord Of Derkholm*. Diana Wynne Jones (Gollancz); *Ella*. Uri Geller (Hodder Headline); *The Fall*. Simon Clark (Hodder & Stoughton); *Galilee*. Clive Barker (HarperCollins); *Gate Of Ivory*. Robert Holdstock (Voyager); *Harry Potter & The Philosopher's Stone*. JK Rowling (Bloomsbury); *Head Injuries*. Conrad Williams (Do-Not Press); *House Of Doors: Second Visit*. Brian Lumley (Hodder & Stoughton); *Judgement Of Tears*. Kim Newman (Carroll & Graf); *The King And Queen Of Swords*. Tom Arden (Gollancz); *Kissing The Beehive*.

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Jonathan Carroll (Gollancz); *The Last Voice They Hear*. Ramsey Campbell (Forge); *Mason And Dixon*. Thomas Pynchon (Vintage); *Maze Of Worlds*. Brian Lumley (Tor); *One Of Us*. Michael Marshall Smith (HarperCollins); *Santa Steps Out*. Robert Devereaux (Dark Highway); *Silk*. Caitlin Kiernan (Roc); *Someplace To Be Flying*. Charles de Lint (Macmillan); *The Stormwatcher*. Graham Joyce (Penguin); *Tower Of The King's Daughter*. Chaz Brenchley (Orbit); *Vampyrhic*. Simon Clark (Hodder & Stoughton); *Where The Children Cry*. Jenny Jones (Gollancz).

ANTHOLOGY: *Avram Davidson Treasury*. Ed: Robert Silverberg & Grania Davis (Tor); *Best New Horror 9*. Ed Stephen Jones (Robinson); *The Cleft And Other Odd Tales*. Ed: Gahan Wilson (Tor); *Dark Terrors 4*. Ed: Stephen Jones & David Sutton (Gollancz); *Granta Book Of The American Long Story*. Ed: Richard Ford (Granta); *Legends*. Ed: Robert Silverberg (Voyager); *Leviathan 2*. Ed: Jeff Vandermeer & Rose Secrest (Ministry Of Whimsey); *Scaremongers 2: Redbrick Eden*. Ed: Steve Saville (Tanjen).

COLLECTION: *A Coven Of Vampires*. Brian Lumley (Fedogan & Bremer/Headline); *Are You Loathsome Tonight?* Poppy Z Brite (Gauntlet); *Driving Blind*. Ray Bradbury (Earthlight); *Extremities*. Kathe Koja (Four Walls Eight Windows); *Faith In The Flesh*. Tim Lebbon (Razorblade); *Ghosts And Grisly Things*. Ramsey Campbell (Pumpkin); *Going Home Again*. Howard Waldrop (St Martins); *Manitou Man*. Masterton, Clark, Williams (BFS); *Nightmare Jack*. John Metcalfe (Ash-Tree); *One Day Closer To Death*. Bradley Denton (St Martin's); *The Paladin Mandates*. Mike Chinn (Alchemy Press); *Personal Demons*. Christopher Fowler (Serpent's Tail); *The Savage Tales Of Solomon Kane*. Robert E Howard & Gary Gianni (Wandering Star); *Shadows Of Light And Dark*. Jo Fletcher (Airgedlamh Publications/Alchemy Press).

Entries are invited to the Summer 1999 National Poetry and Short Story Writing Competition. Category A is for a poem up to 50 lines and Category B is for a short story of up to 1,500 words. Poems and short stories can be on any theme. First prize in each category is £1,500 plus a weekend for two in Dublin, second prize in each is £500, third in each gets £100. For an entry form send an SAE to: National Writing Competition, Forward Magazines, PO Box 1009, Storrington, Pulborough, RH20 3YT, or telephone 01903 746224 for more information. The competition closing date is 31 August 1999.

US fan Bill Bowers is auctioning his collection of fannish memorabilia. Bowers has now been unemployed for over 14 months, and cumulative health conditions have made it extremely unlikely he'll ever again be able

to maintain full-time employment. He has (belatedly) applied for U.S. Social Security Disability benefits but, even assuming it is approved, the process will take several months. In the meantime, to survive financially, he is auctioning off an eclectic mix of fannish memorabilia from his 40+ years in fandom. For the time being, this will be conducted only via e-mail, and anyone interested in taking a look should e-mail him at eWorlds@iname.com. Bill adds (in his announcement dated 8 July) that despite all this, "there will be an Outworlds 71 published fairly soon. It has been "angeled" (unsolicited) by two very generous fans. Fandom is truly a wonderful place to be".

For nearly two years, a Russian director has dreamed of sending actors into space to film the tale of a cosmonaut's stubborn refusal to follow orders to abandon the Mir space station. Now, with Russia actually planning to abandon Mir, Yuri Kara said Friday he will finally get his chance.

Russian space officials have decided to leave the Mir unmanned after the current crew returns in August, then lower the station's orbit and let the Mir burn in the atmosphere early next year. But they might send another crew up for a few days early next year to prepare the station for lowering.

Kara told a news conference Friday that if a new crew does go up, his actor will be among them, the Interfax news agency reported.

Russian Space Agency spokesman Sergei Gorbunov said two other crew members - actual cosmonauts - would act as cameramen, while Kara would direct the filming from the mission control centre on the ground.

In Kara's film, the Russians are also abandoning the Mir. But a renegade cosmonaut refuses to leave, saying he would orbit the Earth for the rest of his days. Ground controllers decide to send up a woman to lure him back. Only one actor would go to Mir. Space scenes involving other actors would be shot on the ground or aboard a transport aeroplane in a free-fall, to imitate weightlessness, Kara said.

Kara first announced plans to make a film aboard the Mir nearly two years ago, but the project appeared to grind to a halt when Russian officials decided recently to abandon their beloved station because of the lack of money for its maintenance. Now, the film project seems on again, and the timing of the shooting scheduled for February makes the plot almost merge with reality.

Kara refused to specify the costs of the project, but said they will be comparable with those of the \$200 million "Titanic" - the most expensive movie ever made. Earlier, Kara mentioned much lower figures.

The announcement comes at a time when the Russian Space

Agency is desperately looking for the up to \$250 million a year needed to keep the Mir operating.

Kara's film project is one of the fund-raising schemes that space officials have been considering. Kara didn't say what share of the film's budget would go to the space agency. Vladimir Steklov, an actor cast to play the renegade cosmonaut, is under going 900 hours of training at Russia's cosmonaut training centre outside Moscow, Kara said.

A fund-raising effort to save Russia's Mir space station from being abandoned early next year began slowly with the first donations yielding the humble equivalent of \$80. Cosmonaut Vitaly Sevastyanov, president of the Mir Preservation Fund, said the equivalent of \$50 million is needed to keep Mir in orbit for one more year. Official estimates put the figure between \$200 million and \$250 million.

The cash-strapped government said it would only pay for Mir to operate through the summer, and space officials decided earlier this month that Mir's last crew would depart in August. If February or March finds no new money, ground controllers will send the 130-ton station to burn up in the atmosphere.

The fund's organisers hope their effort will persuade the government to reconsider its decision. They also said they would continue trying to lure foreign investors, although all previous attempts have failed.

Cosmonaut Valery Ryumin - now deputy head of the RKK Energia company, which built and has been running the 13-year old Mir - blamed the United States for scaring foreign investors away. "We had one prospective investor last year, but they pounced on him so hard that he had to drop the idea," Ryumin said at a news conference Tuesday. "It's Americans' dearest dream to get rid of the Mir."

NASA has long been urging Russia to abandon the Mir and concentrate its meagre resources on the new international space station. Because of Russia's failure to build its key segment on time, the first permanent crew isn't expected to move into the international station until next March, almost two years behind schedule.

Many Russian space officials defend Mir as the last symbol of their country's space glory. They also express fears that without a space station of its own, Russia will be left playing a secondary role in the new project.

"You don't throw old shoes out until you buy a new pair," Ryumin said. "It's pointless to talk about discarding the Mir until the new station becomes operational."

The Mir Preservation Fund was set up more than two months ago, but subsequent paperwork slowed the operation, and it wasn't until June that the first donors handed over the equivalent of \$40. The next donor

burst in during a news conference. "I've just got my monthly wage of 1,500 rubles, and I would like to double your collections," said Vladimir Malyshev, a professor at the Moscow Aviation Institute, handing cash to the fund's leaders.

A prominent cosmonaut has suggested a new tactic for preserving the Mir orbiting station. Cosmonaut Vitaly Sevastyanov, who is in charge of the fund-raising efforts, has suggested selling a share of the Mir to a foreign country or organisation to earn money for the station's upkeep. "Selling off a package of Mir shares to other countries or to foreign companies could become a source of financing for further operation of the Russian orbiting station," Sevastyanov told the Echo of Moscow radio station.

He didn't elaborate and it wasn't clear how the proposal could be implemented, since no Mir stock has ever been issued. Sevastyanov mentioned China, India and Pakistan as potential customers, saying a purchase of some Mir stock would allow them to send astronauts and carry out research missions on the orbiting station. The government, however, is unlikely to part with a controlling stake in one of the bulwarks of Russia's space industry.

Sevastyanov said \$50 million would cover the costs of running the Mir for a year. Space officials earlier estimated the costs at between \$200 million and \$250 million, but recently indicated that the figure had decreased significantly since the ruble has lost much of its value in an economic crisis.

Previous attempts to raise cash for Mir have included: a "Band Aid" broadcast from space - with Bob Geldof on Mir co-ordinating concerts around the world (financed by Pepsi or CocaCola); John Denver considered paying \$12 million for a ride; while British businessman Peter Llewelyn was reported to be willing to pay \$100 million.

However, the Russian Space Agency Director, Boris Ostrumov, admitted on in June that it was impractical to keep Mir flying in the face of the Russian space programme's chronic under-financing. He said Russia would instead place priority on shared projects like the upcoming International Space Station (ISS). This will have come as a great relief to Nasa who has long wanted the Russians to focus their resources on the ISS.

Ostorumov said that Mir will most likely stay in space until February of next year, six months after the money runs out. It will be unmanned from August, when the last cosmonauts return to Earth.

Mir has orbited the Earth for 13 years, despite originally being designed for five years' flying. Ostorumov said the station, which carries 10 tonnes of scientific equipment, was a "treasure" that would be

"inexpedient" to discard. But it is likely that eventually Mir's orbit will be forced to decay, and the station will burn up in the Earth's atmosphere. Any parts that survive will drop into the ocean.

The Plokta crew have announced their intention to run a convention in England from 26-29 July 2000: "After several years of nagging by friends and enemies, the Plokta cabal has finally decided it's time to run another convention. Plokta.con will be a small, friendly sf convention, and will held over the Spring Bank Holiday 2000."

The cabal hive mind comprises six grown-ups (Steven Cain, Steve Davies, Giulia de Cesare, Sue Mason, Alison Scott and Mike Scott), one rampaging toddler (Marianne Cain) and one foul-tempered black cat (George), and rather a lot of computers. They collectively formed the committee for the 1991 filk con and the 1995 Eastercon, and have individually run many other cons. They have published 16 issues of the fanzine, Plokta, and edited a wide variety of official and unofficial con newsletters.

A key element of Plokta.con will be a small but perfectly formed programme, which will feature Guest of Honour, Ken MacLeod.

Plokta.con is unlikely to have more than 150 members and the cabal are currently talking to small, characterful hotels in the South East of England, on train lines from London. Because they haven't got a definite site, they aren't taking memberships yet, but hope to soon, and expect that they will cost £20, at least until the end of Novacon.

FANTASYCON XXIII takes place at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham over the weekend 17th-19th September 1999. Guests of Honour for the weekend include: Raymond E Feist will be speaking about his work and taking part in a mass signing on the Saturday afternoon; top UK authors Robert Rankin, Louise Cooper, Graham Masterton; BBC Visual Effects Designer and author Mike Tucker (Red Dwarf, Doctor Who etc). Unfortunately, at the end of July, the concessionary rates ended and so if you want to register, the following are the rates that now apply: Attending £45 (BFS Members) or £55 (Non Members); Daily Rate £25 (BFS Members) or £30 (Non Members); Supporting £20 (BFS Members) or £25 (Non Members); plus £25 for members or non-members who want the banquet. Please make cheques payable to FANTASYCON and send to 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 6DT.

*(Many thanks to the following for the above news: FTL; BFS News
http: www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/index.htm; PNN*

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http: www.plokta.com/pnn ; BBC News Online; NASA; BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL; WHAT'S ON; VARIETY; Steve Green.)

Roscoe Report August 99

By Steve Green

After being swamped by very nearly one letter demanding the Roscoe Report return to these pages, it's time to dust off the keyboard and brush up on the latest media news. Fasten your seatbelts...

Honorary BSFG co-president Brian Aldiss offered a fascinating perspective on the working methods of director Stanley Kubrick in the July 16 *Guardian*. Although Kubrick eventually chose an Aldiss short story, "Super Toys Last All Summer Long" as the basis of his sf project, Brian revealed he attempted as early as 1976 to persuade Kubrick to adapt Phil Dick's novel *Martian Timeslip*.

The final contract - signed in November 1992 - is so labyrinthine Brian confesses it promised either a royalty of around \$2m or zero, depending on the final writing credit. The partnership survived until 1990, though Brian suspects it began to decay as early as 1993, at which point *Super Toys* became *AI*. Kubrick called in first Ian Watson, then the late Bob Shaw, all of whose work presumably now sits in box files in St Albans, along with Chris "Fangorn" Baker's designs, whilst Kubrick's executors ponder whether to re-release *A Clockwork Orange* at long last.

Meet Joe Black (the critically unclaimed remake of *Death Takes A Holiday*), *Phantasm IV: Oblivion* ("The Sequel With Balls") and the Kurt Russell vehicle *Soldier* (just dissimilar enough from the Harlan Ellison *Outer Limits* episode of the same title to avoid a lawsuit, it appears) are among this month's video releases, with *Babylon 5: A Call to Arms* (the latest movie-length spin-off) slipping onto the sell-through racks. Next month's include *Mighty Joe Young* (revisiting the *King Kong* semi-sequel) and the fantasy *Pleasantville* (very much in the spirit of the original *Twilight Zone*, but with a 90s spin).

Soldier is simultaneously released on DVD, but there are no details yet on whether the UK version will include any of the extras which come as standard on North American disks. For instance, the US release of *Starship Troopers* features trailers, missing scenes and on-set interviews; the UK disk is roughly equivalent in price and includes none of these. Anyone else feeling royally ripped off?

Not all of Lance Henriksen's performance as the android Bishop in *Aliens* was make-believe, he revealed in July's *Sci-Fi Entertainment* (lousy title, good magazine).

In the climatic scene where Bishop is harpooned by the Queen and disgorges a murky white liquid, Henriksen was supplied with a mix of milk and yogurt. Unfortunately, it was left out all day during shooting and mutated somewhat.

"I just had to keep working, no matter how sick I felt," he recalls. "I was spewing that stuff 10 feet and the fact that it tasted absolutely horrible helped get it out, and with my 'death throes' expression."

Despite the box office success of the latest *Star Trek* movie, a full reunion of the *Next Generation* cast looks increasingly unlikely. Following reports that Brent Spiner urged the studio to make *Insurrection* Data's final mission, Michael Dorn has warned he'll only don the silver sash again if Worf has a substantial role to get his pointy teeth into. Of course, that may change now the cheques from *Deep Space Nine* are no longer rolling in.

Meanwhile, the long-awaited follow-up to the Oscar-winning *Silence of the Lambs* looks as distant a prospect as ever. The infamous Dino DeLaurentiis, whose company adapted Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* as *Manhunter* but passed on the sequel, has exercised his option on the instant bestseller *Hannibal* whilst opining that both Sir Anthony Hopkins and Jodie Foster will be too expensive to return to their roles as Lecter and Starling.

Not that he may have the choice: both have reportedly expressed concern over the level of violence in Harris' new work, and may join director Jonathan Demme and screenwriter Ted Tally in boycotting the project. Ridley Scott and playwright David Mamet are already rumoured to be taking up those vacancies, so maybe it's time for Brian Cox to see if he can pick the psycho psychiatrist's bloody scalpel again?

Those who thought, nay prayed, that the decapitation of Michael Myers in *Halloween: H20* meant the series could end on a relative high note have probably forgotten just how greedy and devoid of fresh ideas Hollywood is: barely had Myers' bonce stopped bouncing than the rumours of the franchise's rebirth began. Let's just hope Jamie Lee Curtis takes her recent elevation to the English aristocracy as a hint that this is all beneath her now.

Talking of diminishing returns, *Scream 3* will allegedly catch up with Neve Campbell and crew after her character's graduation. Judging by the death toll in the previous entries, she'll be able to host college reunions in a photo booth.

Fledgling film-makers seeking a global audience are being invited to submit short works (sf, horror, non-genre, documentary) for potential screening on Netbroadcaster.com, the new internet site scheduled for launch this autumn by Alchemy Communications. E-mail films@alchemy.net for further details.

Alternatively, the Method Fest Independent Film Festival focuses on the role of the actor over the week of August 20-26 in Pasadena, California. Check out www.methodfest.com for info.

Closer to home, the tenth Festival of Fantastic Films sees it take up a new venue, Manchester's Britannia Hotel, following the decision of the nearby Sacha's (venue of the previous six) to crank up its tariffs somewhat.

To mark the occasion, all surviving guests were invited back (sadly, both Andrew Keir and Lord Sutch no longer qualify); those aiming to make it over the weekend of 3-5 September include writer Brian Clemens and director Robert Fuest (who plan an Avengers workshop), veteran stuntman Eddie Powell (the surprise star of 1998's event) and Hammer mainstay Jimmy Sangster. Former starlet Hazel Court will be attending for the first time.

As usual, director Norman J Warren and I will be judging the Delta Film Award on the Saturday (and then spend the rest of the weekend in the bar, recuperating). Full results in a future column.

For details of this gathering - easily one of the best events on the UK fannish calendar - either e-mail Harry Nadler on FFF@hnad.globalnet.co.uk or phone Tony Edwards on 0161-707-3747; full membership remains £55.00 until the end of this month.

Finally, in a curious re-run of the way *Battlestar: Galactica* emerged in the wake of *Star Wars* (and with sufficient similarities that 20th Century Fox threatened to sue Universal Television until certain changes were made), the release of *The Phantom Menace* (damn, I almost managed to avoid a single mention of George Lucas' paean to computer graphics) comes as plans mount for the 12 tribes of man to continue their odyssey. Curiouser still, there are at least two separate resurrections in progress.

It's enough to give the Supreme Cylon a king-sized headache for his king-sized head.

The first and longest-established revival plan is *Battlestar Galactica: Second Coming*, fronted by Richard Hatch (Captain Apollo in the original show and author of several spin-off novels since), who claims to have spent three years pressing the flesh at US mediacons and conducting market research: "I have given countless interviews and made a vast number of personal appearances worldwide in order to spur interest in a new movie or TV show. The response has been nothing short of amazing. The feedback was such that it has led us to take the next logical step by developing a script that builds a bridge between the past, present, and future. We have eliminated *Galactica 1980* altogether and moved the original story and characters twenty years into the future, following a similar plot line to my *BG* books.

"To this end we have written a script, raised \$60 million, and created a trailer with new scenes and special effects to showcase our intentions to Universal. Top notch companies, artists, craftsmen, and even fans have all given freely of their time and energy out of their belief in our project, in order to bring back the show they cherished growing up. I even maxxed out my credit cards and mortgaged my house! But I did it because I and many others believe that if this show goes back to its roots and reestablishes the camaraderie, heart, and spirit of the original show with its heroic quest to survive against all odds, we will create the successful franchise *BG* was capable of being twenty years ago."

In the other corner, we have Glen Larson, series creator, and Todd Moyer, previously responsible for the movie version of the game *Wing Commander*. Larson is an intriguing figure, given that virtually every project he's ever "created" bear a remarkable resemblance to an existing movie hit, but more so on this occasion since he allegedly sold any remaining rights he had in *Battlestar: Galactica* to Universal years ago. Hatch <pictured> also claims Moyer approached him first last December: "I naively told him of my plans and strategies for bringing back / ... / what generations of fans all over the world are adamantly requesting: continuation of the premise, story lines and characters from the original show. I told him how fans definitely did not want to see another show like *Galactica 1980*, which they felt destroyed the story and any potential *BG* franchise. Mr Moyer promised to call me the next week to discuss how he could be of help to us, but that was the last I heard from him until I saw the paid advertisement in the trades, stating that he and Glen Larson were developing a *BG* film to be shot in Luxembourg and scripted by the same writer as *Wing Commander*."

Given that the mercifully short-lived *Galactica 1980* unceremoniously buried Apollo in its opening backstory, it's no surprise that Hatch's plot scrupulously ignores Larson's first attempt to jump-start the franchise. Weirder still, Larson and Moyer are reportedly building their movie plans around an entirely different ship, the Pegasus, which is rather as though Gene Roddenberry had relaunched *Star Trek* with the crew of the USS Intrepid.

Personally, even though I rank most of the original show on the same level as *Lost in Space* and *Teletubbies*, I swing towards Hatch, who at least demonstrates a real enthusiasm and a desire to involve the fan base. No doubt, time will tell.

Book Reviews

BLOOM by Wil McCarthy, Millennium, 310 pp, £16.99, hbk

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating **

A century hence, the Earth has been all but destroyed by man-made self replicating microscopic artificial organisms – mycora – which consume everything with which they come into contact, whether animal, vegetable or mineral. A remnant of humanity escaped in a desperate exodus and some have settled in the asteroid belt while others, barely a million in number are living on (or rather in) the moons of Jupiter. Meanwhile, the mycosystem has taken over all the inner planets and may be expanding outwards. From the Jupiter colony an expedition is mounted to the inner solar system to discover whether it will ever be possible to consider returning to the Earth and discovers against all expectation that the mycosystem contains within it the potential of a transcendent future for such of the human race as wish to avail themselves of it.

At first glance this appears a grand concept but the basic idea has already been used elsewhere to equally good, if not better, effect. Furthermore, this effort somehow fails to do it justice. It is competently written and the general background is full of well-constructed detail, but the story trundles along in a pedestrian sort of way lacking real drama or excitement. To be sure, the climax was somewhat unexpected, but I came to the end of the book feeling that I hadn't really got anywhere and wondering what it had all been for.

EXILE'S RETURN: First Book of Elita by Kate Jacoby, Millennium, £6.99, pbk

Reviewed by Dan Waters

Score: 4.5/5

The book starts with the return of Robert Douglas, Earl of Dunlorn, returning to Lusara from a self-imposed exile of 3 years after once swearing he would never return to his homeland. On returning he finds that no matter how hard he tries to remain outside the politics and keep out of trouble with the Guilds (an organisation that controls all learning in the country run by an evil and selfish little man called Vaughn) his hand is inevitably forced to help his brother from grave danger. On the way back to Dunlorn, his home, where he plans to keep out of the way of the king and the Guilds, he and his brother, Finnlay, rescue a girl from the Guilds, who are chasing her as a horse-thief. Robert and Finnlay decide to help her as events take place that put Finnlay and Robert in more danger. The girl, Jennifer, turns out to have powers that she did not know of and Robert recognises this, himself being a sorcerer. They take her to the Enclave to teach her to use the powers where, it is discovered, Jennifer has a house mark. She is the daughter of a lord who for some reason hates Robert.

The story, from almost the word go, leads you through the twistings of the court of Lusara. The further you read the more you learn about Robert, the King and their relationship, why Robert left the country and why the Sorcerers are hiding themselves away in the Enclave. Robert, most annoyingly in some cases, will not give in to his honour, fails to see a neat little loophole left in a promise to the king, at least not until it is a little too late. Even so, the book was extremely difficult to put down. I am not sure when the next book is due out. I for one will be waiting to buy (or review) it!

THE WEB 2027 by Stephen Baxter, Stephen Bowcott, Eric Brown, Maggie Furey, Peter F Hamilton & Graham Joyce. Millennium, 568pp, £5.99, pbk.

Reviewed by Michael Jones

This substantial volume is actually an omnibus of six independent short novels, one each by each of the writers listed. Although each is complete in itself, some characters crop up more than once and there is also a common narrative thread running through the whole sequence -

moreover, this thread ends in an obvious hook on which to hang more sequels.

The underlying story is based on an advanced development of the World Wide Web through which everyone with access to a computer can participate in a world of virtual reality by using a full-body suit which allows them to participate in the illusion. The Web has supplanted schools as the medium for education, but it also provides a means of both entertainment and social interaction which is how these stories show it being used. In each separate story a group of youngsters, concealing their real selves behind virtual personae, encounters an adventure of some kind. These adventures are episodes in the continuing story which is that an older person is working to subvert the Web to her own ends, creating dangerous situations from which the young heroes and heroines must escape if they can...

This collection is in fact aimed at the teenage market, making it very difficult to review fairly. My teenage years are long past, but it would be unfair to judge the writing solely from my own adult standpoint which would lead me to describe it as a quick, easy and mildly entertaining read which makes few demands on the intellect. Ultimately, however, it is found to be somewhat unsatisfying, with little or nothing original to say. On the other hand, I would guess that the writing and the level of invention are probably pitched about right for the readership at which it is aimed. Only one or two stars therefore if you are considering it for yourself, but three or four if you intend to offer it to a young relative in the hope that it will serve as an introduction, via the likes of William Gibson, Neal Stephenson et al to the great world (or universe) of SF.

THE GUARDIANS: BERSERKER (The Guardians book 2)

by J M H Lovegrove, Millennium, pbk, £5.99

Reviewed by Dan Waters

Score 5/5

William MacGowan has nightmares about the Gulf War. Whilst he was there, in the SAS, he and his team were subjected to a cruel test, a top-secret bio-weapon which turns four out of the five man team into warped psychotic monsters. MacGowan is the only survivor. A few months later however, after he has quit the SAS and lost his wife due to his drinking and nightmares, he is recruited into the guardians, a secret group of people from all over the world who, in association with an extra

dimensional race, are involved in a secret war. Basically, the Guardians control the flow of technology into our world from the other dimension. When Rattray, the oldest and most powerful of the Guardians, is contacted by their intelligence operative, Kawai Kim, for help with a hacker who is causing her some trouble, the plot splits in two. One half of the plot deals with the eventual capture of Rattray. The other half deals with a suppression operation that MacGowan has organised that goes horribly wrong. The team are all murdered except for MacGowan who is exposed to a more refined dose of the Bioweapon, causing him to go on a rampage across London and towards the Guardian HQ.

I found from the very start this book was extremely compelling. The more you read the more you learn about the Guardian's organisation, Rattray's and, of course, MacGowan's lives. The book contains the right amount of tension, the plot isn't rushed to a climax and Lovegrove takes the time to explain even the smallest details that are relevant to the story which is a fantastic way to keep you turning the pages.

I will certainly be looking for more books by this author if only to continue reading the Guardians series!

BLINDFOLD by Kevin J Anderson, Voyager, 377 pp, £5.99

Star rating **

Reviewed by Dan Waters

Atlas, a colony of Earth, settled 231 years ago has a unique justice system. Final justice, guilt or innocence, is decided by one person, a Truthsayer. This person, after taking a drug called Veritas, can read into the mind of a suspected criminal and see guilt or innocence. Fantastic, except the Truthsayers' powers are fading. Firstly with Kalliana, a young Truthsayer, who misjudges a young man named Troy Boren. This comes as a surprise to various people who know that Troy is innocent. Troy, however, is sentenced to life in the orbital lab where the Veritas drug is made, where he makes some discoveries about the reasons for the Truthsayers' fading abilities.

Kalliana, after realising that she has made a mistake in judging Troy, attempts, with the help of the Guild Master, to rescue him. Unfortunately, nothing goes to plan and the two are believed dead.

The story seems to revolve around the plans and machinations of one man, Franz Dokken, who, as the only surviving captain of the original colony ship, is secretly planning to take over the world.

Unfortunately this story takes such a long time to actually go anywhere that if I had bought it I would have given up before I got to page 100. In fact it isn't until about page 200 that anything even mildly interesting happens. The plot then rushes for the next 170-odd pages setting up the downfall of this megalomaniacal landowner Franz Dokken. Everything seems to fall rather too neatly into place. Apart from a few 'shocks' in the storyline, the major problem was, I found, I spent a lot of time wondering just how certain conclusions had been arrived at by certain characters. Evidence turned up just at the right time with the minimum of investigation.

I found this book fairly interesting to read, well at least for the last 177 pages or so. The first 200 pages, however, are a totally different story as it were. They plodded on, and I found very little in the story to motivate me to carry on, apart from the fact that I was reviewing it. All-in-all a disappointing story with a slow beginning, a fairly unpredictable twist towards the end but, unfortunately, a very predictable ending.

Colophon

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