

December 1999

Issue 339

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

BEER & SKITTLES

**At the Samson and Lion on
Friday 10th December 1999. ***

*(*VB: the second Friday of the month.)*

***Forthcoming Meetings:
14 January 2000 – BSFG AGM***

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@hailfarm.sottnet.co.uk).

The Samson and Lion

If anyone hasn't yet booked for the Christmas Skittle Evening at the Samson and Lion please contact me on 01299 400750 as soon as possible.

Notice of AGM

This is to notify members that the Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group will be held at 7.45pm on 14th January 2000 in the Lichfield Lounge, second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union Passageway). This is your chance to discuss the way the Brum Group is run and to elect committee members for the year. Please make a special effort to attend.

BSFG Committee Posts

By Bernie Evans

With the AGM looming on the 14th January 2000, it's time for all you enthusiastic members to send in your nominations for committee posts. You can, of course, nominate from the floor at the meeting if you wish, but if you KNOW you will be standing, send in your written nomination (and platform of no more than 250 words) so it can be printed in the January edition of BRUM GROUP NEWS for everyone to see. Written nominations must reach Yvonne Rowse by the 30th of December 1999 at the editorial address on the cover or by e-mail.

So what positions are there?

CHAIRMAN: Will chair and keep order at all meetings, and will also hold regular committee meetings (at least one committee meeting per quarter). Will contact speakers, arrange accommodation where necessary and ensure they get to the meeting on time.

SECRETARY: Should be able to type, attend all committee meetings and produce Minutes of these to be sent to all Committee Members. Likewise the A.G.M. or other Group meetings. May also be asked to write to prospective speakers, etc.

TREASURER: If you don't know what a treasurer does, don't bother to apply!

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Has to produce the newsletter every month. Access to a computer and desktop publishing software and/or a word

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

processor is an advantage, but not a necessity, a typewriter and a pair of scissors will suffice. The ability to type AND meet a monthly deadline ARE a necessity, as is the ability to drag contributions out of people, ditto artwork. A knowledge of design/layout is also an advantage.

PUBLICITY OFFICER: Will produce A4 posters, A5 flyers, and so on for meetings, and arrange for them to be displayed in local shops, libraries, and as many other outlets as possible. Will also produce general publicity for the Group, and contact radio and tv if necessary. Enthusiasm and the ability to produce new IDEAS are an important factor.

In addition two other ORDINARY MEMBERS may be appointed by the Committee any time during the year at the discretion of the Committee.

Forthcoming Events

10 DECEMBER 1999: BSFG BEER & SKITTLES Christmas Meeting at the Samson and Lion, Wordsley.

14 JANUARY 2000: AGM at the Britannia Hotel at 7.45.

25-26 March 2000: Memorabilia Europe's largest science fiction, film, cult tv, pop and collectors' fair. Hall 9, NEC. Contact Made in Heaven on 01899 221622 or NEC Booking Office 0121 767 4555.

21-24 April: 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>

10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVA CON 30 at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Chris Priest, Special Guest Rog Peyton. Attending membership costs £23.00 until 8th November 1999, then £28.00 until Easter 2000, after which it may rise again. Contact: Steve Lawson, Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

13-16 April 2001: Paragon, Eastercon at the Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lisanne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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.

Jophan Report #126

By Martin Tudor

Novacon 29 took place at the Britannia Hotel in Birmingham over the weekend of 13-15th November. Guest of Honour, Ian Stewart, presented British fandom's annual fanzine achievement awards on the Sunday night with this newsletter's editor, Yvonne Rowse, picking up Novas for Best Fanzine and Best FanWriter (good job she can't draw to save her life!). The Plokta Cabal's regular artist, Sue Mason, was awarded the Nova for Best Artist.

The full Nova Results were as follows:

Best Fanzine:

1. Barmaid – ed. Yvonne Rowse (55 points)
2. Plokta – ed. The Cabal (54 points)
3. Banana Wings – ed. Plummer/Brialey (44 points)
4. Ansible – ed. Dave Langford (19 points)
5. Fables of Irish Fandom – ed. John Berry (16 points)
6. OK Ken – ed. Tony Berry (14 points)
7. Anti-backuouos Vaclash – ed. Baker/Bradshaw/Rosenzweig (13 points)
8. Parakeet – ed. Brialey/Plummer (11 points)
9. International Revolutionary Gardener – ed. Nicholas/Hanna (9 points)
10. Tortoise – ed. Sue Jones (6 points)
11. Fandom Guardian – ed. Hicks (4 points)
12. Bob – ed. Sorensen (3 points)
- 12= Olaf – ed. Cheslin
- 12= Balloons Over Australia/Never Quite Aboriginal – ed. Lake

- 15= Did I Say That Out Loud – ed. Kerr (2 points)
- 15= Mira – ed. Abbott
- 15= Everlasting Lamentables – ed. Elizabeth Billinger
- 18 Guffaw – ed. Davies/Headlong/Kincaid (1 point)

Best Fan Writer:

- 1. Yvonne Rowse (53 points)
- 2= Claire Brialey/Mark Plummer (25 points) (Just can't be separated, can they?)
- 4. Dave Langford (22 points)
- 5. Dave Hicks (17 points)
- 6= Christina Lake/Alison Scott (16 points)
- 8. Maureen Speller (15 points)
- 9= Tony Berry/Sue Jones (8 points)
- 11= Bridget Bradshaw/Joseph Nicholas (6 points)
- 13= Amanda Baker/Jo Walton/D. West (5 points)
- 16= Mike Abbott/Debbi Kerr (4 points)
- 18= Rob Hansen/Tanya Brown/Mike Siddall (3 points)
- 21. Elizabeth Billinger (2 points)
- 22= Tommy Ferguson/Judith Hanna (1 point)

Best Fan Artist:

- 1. Sue Mason (54 points)
- 2. Dave Hicks (50 points)
- 3. Steve Jeffrey (40 points)
- 4. D. West (24 points)
- 5. Sue Mowbray (10 points)
- 6. Ken Cheslin (7 points)
- 7= Dave Mooring/Sue Jones (6 points)
- 9. Anne Stokes (5 points)
- 10. Teddy (3 points)
- 11. Harry Turner (2 points)
- 12. Miki Dennis (1 point)

On 20th October legendary Irish fan Walt Willis died of a heart attack, following his stroke last year. Walt was one of the giants of fandom, publisher of the fanzines Slant and Hyphen, co-author with Bob Shaw of the classic *The Enchanted Duplicator* and an indefatigable loccer until he suffered his stroke. He will be greatly missed.

Joy Hilbert has died from complications of Crohn's disease, at the age of 40. She was involved with fanzines, APAs and convention running. She

leaves her husband Anthony and young child Lee.

The ReConnaissance membership secretary has been killed - reports Bjørn Tore Sund, chairman of next year's Big European Con, Reconnaissance in Bergen: "On October 4 Ingrid Jonsson was killed. Her father shot first her and then her mother, before committing suicide. Everything in their home is now with the district court of Bergen until the division of the estate is over. As Ingrid Jonsson was the Membership and Administrative Secretary of ReConnaissance, this means: Our database of members. All enclosed files pertaining to the membership database. All contributions to our short story contest." As of today we do not know when we can get these papers and the database back. We hope to reach an agreement with the district court of Bergen so that we don't have to wait until the division is over, which could take a year. But we do not know. More information will follow when we have any."

Norman Shorrocks, long time fan and Novacon attender, died recently leaving a widow, Ina. If anyone wants to make a donation to Clatterbridge Cancer Research Trust please contact Carol Morton for details.

Television astronomer Patrick Moore was awarded an honorary degree by Liverpool John Moores University last month. A JMU spokeswoman said "Patrick Moore was awarded an honorary fellowship because of his close involvement in the development of our astrophysics research unit."

Farscape (Monday 6.20pm, BBC2) is a weird and whimsical sf series written and produced by Rockne S O'Bannon (who worked with Spielberg on *SeaQuest DSV* - but no one is perfect). John Crichton, a near-future American astronaut, and his spaceship *Farscape 1* is sucked down a wormhole and reappears in the middle of a space dogfight - inadvertently destroying a ship piloted by the brother of Crais, the nastiest man in the quadrant - and is then captured by some escaping aliens who have hijacked a prison ship.

A bizarre mixture of *Deep Space Nine* (the wormhole), *the Wizard of Oz* (accidentally killing the baddie's sibling), *Blake's 7* (squabbling outlaws take on a tyrannical empire) and, of course, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* - it sounds dire. But with Brian Henson's puppets supplying the aliens it is probably worth a look.

TOY STORY 2 was the big hit over the five-day Thanksgiving weekend in the US. The #1 film at the box office earned nearly \$81-million,

breaking the previous Thanksgiving record held by *A BUG'S LIFE*.

The rest of the top ten was dominated by genre stuff with eight of the top ten, including the top seven, films being either science fiction, fantasy, or horror efforts. In second place was James Bond's latest, *THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH*, which took in \$35-million, down just slightly from its debut the previous weekend. In third was Arnold Schwarzenegger's *END OF DAYS*, which took in \$31-million. And *SLEEPY HOLLOW* took in \$27-million for fourth. The remaining films lagged far behind. In fifth was *POKEMON* with \$9.1-million. In sixth was *THE BONE COLLECTOR* with \$7.3-million. *DOGMA* landed in seventh with \$4.9-million. Rounding out the top ten was *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH*, with took in \$2.9-million.

Principal photography on the SCI FI Channel miniseries Frank Herbert's *Dune* was due to begin on 22nd November in Prague. Academy Award-winner William Hurt will play Duke Leto in the six-hour epic, while Italian screen icon Giancarlo Giannini has been signed to play Emperor Shaddam IV.

Casting is still underway, although it's been announced that newcomer Alec Newman will play the key role of Paul Atreides. Also, Muriel Baumeister will play Princess Irulan, Uwe Ochsenknecht will play Stilgar, Ian McNeice will star as Baron Harkonnen and Barbara Kodetova will take on the role of Chani.

Dune is being produced by New Amsterdam Entertainment Inc. in association with Victor Television Productions. The project is budgeted at more than \$20 million and will appear on SCI FI in the autumn of 2000.

Before his death Stanley Kubrick was working on an SF film called *A.I.*, and it looks like Steven Spielberg is going to continue the project. According to *Variety* columnist Michael Fleming, Spielberg is writing a screenplay based on Kubrick's 80-page treatment for the film.

A.I. would be the first script Spielberg has written since his famous 1977 picture *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. However, the director is only working on the screenplay while there is a lull with his big-budget SF project *Minority Report*, and Fleming says he may hand the project off at any time.

Simon West has always wanted to film a big-screen version of the quirky British TV series *The Prisoner*, and now Universal is going to give him his chance. *Variety* reports that West has agreed a deal with the studio to work on the project, which will be supervised by Universal's Kevin Misher.

"My father turned me on to the series in the late '60s, and I was so obsessed that when I visited my grandmother in Wales, I made her drive me four hours to the set," West said. "I want [the film] to be as radical as that series was back then, with the theme of a man fighting the system after he's fallen down the rabbit hole."

Aardman, Nick Park's company - responsible for the Wallace & Gromit shorts - has signed a four-movie, \$250 million deal with Steven Spielberg's company Dreamworks.

Richard Loncraine will direct the film version of Neil Gaiman's urban fantasy novel *Neverwhere*, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. The movie is currently being produced by Miramax under its Dimension label, though at one point it had been over at Sony with Jesse Dylan attached to direct.

The picture will begin shooting next spring in London with a budget reported to be less than \$30 million. *Neverwhere* was previously adapted as a mini-series for the BBC.

Academy Award winner Robert Duvall has signed a deal to star alongside Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Phoenix Pictures cloning thriller *The Sixth Day*. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, Duvall will play a scientist who is in league with the film's as yet uncast villain.

Meanwhile, Schwarzenegger stars as a man who returns home one day and discovers he's been replaced by a clone. Roger Spottiswoode will direct the \$80 million movie, which begins shooting this December in Vancouver, B.C.

As reported here a few months ago best-selling horror writer Stephen King was involved in a road accident in June and was severely injured. His hip was dislocated, part of his scalp was torn away, a lung was damaged, several ribs were broken and his right leg, knee and hip were completely shattered. But he survived to fight an excruciating battle for recovery: three weeks in hospital, seven operations and nearly five months of torturous physical therapy. Doctors still don't know if he will ever regain full use of a right leg, now held together with a pin and a heavy leg brace.

The damage was not just physical. Several weeks after the accident, when King tried to write again, he couldn't. "At first it was as if I'd never done this in my life. There was one awful minute when I thought: 'I can't do this, I don't know how to do this any more.'"

However, King was at first magnanimous about the accident. He

was loudly thankful that he had not been left a quadriplegic, and, since he was a best-selling author worth millions, he did not intend to sue Bryan Smith, the 41-year-old driver.

It seemed the accident would be dismissed as just that – an accident. Smith had no alcohol in his blood. He had apparently been distracted by the dog, not driving dangerously. There was no one to blame, said the local police. Particularly since they initially said King was walking along the road in the same direction as the traffic, with his back to it, which is illegal in the state (and which King denies).

However, King's fans raised an outcry. The pressure piled onto the Maine police. A more senior officer was brought in. "We've got the world looking ... it is in our best interest to go a little bit further," a spokesman said at the time. and before long, the accident was being treated as a major crime. A grand jury was convened. A jury trial has now been set.

Smith and a growing number of supporters not least of all his girlfriend - say he is being victimised because of King's celebrity. While admitting no blame, Smith has publicly apologised. He was, he said, very, very sorry, but "I was distracted by my dog for all of three to five seconds. There's nothing to investigate. I was in an accident that had no cause".

As he has regained his strength, King's attitude has shifted. He still does not want to sue. But he wants Smith's driving licence revoked forever. King has become incensed because of Smith's prior record, which shows a 20-year history of violations including driving to endanger, operating under the influence and driving with a suspended licence. "There isn't really anything that he's got that I want except his licence," King said. "Unfortunately that's a paper that's very hard to get away from anybody in any state. I think it should be a little bit easier to permanently remove the privilege to drive."

But as mentioned last issue King has done something rather bizarre: he has paid \$1,500 for the Dodge Caravan that hit him, and says he intends to smash it up with a sledgehammer.

The decision to bring charges against Smith has produced an avalanche of accusations of favouritism because of King's celebrity and wealth. Many locals believe the matter would have been dropped had the victim been anyone but King – and some have written to the letters pages of the local newspapers expressing outrage. "This accident wasn't even going to a jury, except that Stephen King's popularity influenced his fans to raise an outcry," wrote one woman. "We all know the pain Stephen King must be in," wrote another. "The Maine State Police should know who was at fault ... probably both parties." Others have compared it to

the case of a similar accident involving an ambulance that was dismissed. Still others have scolded the Portland Press Herald for writing two editorials about King's accident, including one, which suggested there could be no fair trial since the jurors would be influenced by King's popularity.

As reported last issue King has set himself firmly against Smith. His indictment by the grand jury, he said in a statement, "was the right thing, and I am very grateful to them for doing it – not only as the injured party, but as a citizen of the state of Maine. The indictments send a powerful message: when we slide behind the wheel of our vehicles we are responsible for the lives of others and must be held accountable when we fail in that responsibility."

King has just brought out a new book, *Hearts in Atlantis*, which was written before the accident and which focuses on the tumultuous and very angry years during the Vietnam War. His wife says he is slowly resuming his writing, overcoming the writer's block induced by the accident. He, too, says he is recovering, though he spends a lot of time cursing at the physical discomfort he is in.

But if his imagination continues to fail him, he could always turn for inspiration to the scarcely disguised passions that are now emerging in Bangor, Maine – and to his own feelings and reactions: "I think that to still be able to walk and talk and occasionally crawl on my belly like a reptile has made me intensely grateful".

Acclaimed SF and fantasy author Ray Bradbury is expected to "fully recover" from a "mild" stroke he suffered on Saturday 6th November. Bradbury was recently in the news for his work on a new Mel Gibson film adaptation of his famous novel *Fahrenheit 451*.

Tomorrow's World set up a special "Sci Fi day" on 29th November. "Sci-Fi Heaven" featured Rob Grant (co-creator/writer/producer of *Red Dwarf* currently producing new Sky One SF comedy series *The Strangers* to air early 2000); Terry Pratchett (promoting the publication of his latest novel *The Fifth Elephant*); Robert Llewellyn (*Red Dwarf* star and best-selling author - film rights for first novel *The Man on Platform 5* were purchased for a seven figure sum and his latest novel *Punchbag* recently went straight into the best-seller chart); Sci Fi Chat Room - moderated by Duncan McAlpine, producer of Comicana show for Sci Fi Channel and vintage US comic book expert (largest collection in Europe); Paul Darrow (*Blake's 7* star and author of *Blake's 7* novel about his character Avon, soon to star in SKY One's *The Strangerers*); Carrie Dobro (*Babylon 5* guest star currently starring as Thief Dureena Nafeel in B5

spinoff *Crusade*).

You can read the transcript of the above at
<http://www.chat.beeb.com/chat/comingup/>

The Paper Tiger website (www.papertiger.co.uk) has been undergoing a fair amount of review and like most websites, it has a fair amount of space available that is currently not being used. In the latest issue of their newszine Paper Snarl they announce the following:

“Abhorring a vacuum, we naturally wondered if there might be some sensible way to fill (the web site). One very attractive way of doing so might be to construct a new section of the website, to be called something like "Gallery", which artists - whether published by Paper Tiger or not - could use as a showcase for their work. Obviously we'd want editorial control over the nature and quantity of what actually went in there, so people would have to submit work for consideration just as if they were offering it for publication - it wouldn't be a free-for-all - but the principle would be pretty solid: this would be a place where not just established artists but also the less well known, not just mainstream fantasy/sf artists but also some of the more experimental, could display their wares on the internet, or in some instances have an extra web page, for free.

“Of course, we're not unaware that there'd be benefits for us as well. Apart from anything else, it'd be an additional incentive for people to come and look at our website; also we might learn something from the feedback we got from the Gallery section - we might even attach hitometers to the pages, or something like that.

“But essentially it's a free, no-strings offer.

“If - and I stress that if - it's a free offer people would actually want. So what we want to find out - which is exactly what I'm now trying to do in an informal way - is if artists would wish to submit their work and if the rest of us would want to go and look at it. Also, it'd be good to hear people's views on ways in which the Gallery could better display the art, the sort of information they'd like to see accompanying the art, and so on. As with any other subject, if you have opinions you'd like to see more widely aired, our letters column is open to you to offer your contributions to the debate.”

Various bits of news from Del Rey (for further details check their web site at <http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/ext/worksinprogress.html>):

TONI ANZETTI has turned in RIDERS OF LEVIATHAN, the sequel to TYPHON'S CHILDREN. This novel continues the saga of the Typhon colonists as

they face the dangers inherent to the exotic, water-dominated planet on which they are trapped.

TERRY BROOKS is finishing up the first major new Shannara novel in four years, *THE ILSE WITCH, BOOK ONE OF THE VOYAGE OF THE JERLE SHANNARA*. It will be published as a Del Rey hardcover in September 2000.

DAN CRAGG and DAVID SHERMAN have turned in the fifth book in their Starfist series, *STARFIST: TECHNOKILL*. It will be published as a Del Rey paperback in August 2000.

PETER DAVID has turned in the manuscript for the second novel in his Babylon 5 trilogy, *Legions of Fire*. Book two, *ARMIES OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT*, reveals more of the deadly secrets taking place on Centauri Prime, as the spotlight turns to Vir Cotto, and G'Kar returns to the fold.

DAVID GEMMELL has turned in the manuscript for *HERO IN THE SHADOWS*. This heroic fantasy novel features one of his most popular characters, Waylander the Slayer. And it will be a major event for Gemmell. When it is published (March 2000 hardcover), it will be the first Gemmell novel to be published simultaneously in the United States and Great Britain.

HARRY HARRISON has turned in *STARS AND STRIPES IN PERIL*, the sequel to his alternate history novel *STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER*. It will be published as a Del Rey hardcover in October 2000 during the official Alternate History Month.

PHILIP PULLMAN has finished the third and final book in his Dark Materials series, *THE AMBER SPYGLASS*. Knopf is planning on a May 2000 hardcover publication, with the Del Rey paperback to follow a year later.

HARRY TURTLEDOVE has turned in the manuscript for the third book in his Colonization series, slated to be published in hardcover in February 2001. These novels follow the historical setting established in author's WorldWar series, continuing the saga of alien invasion into the tumultuous '60s.

DEAN WESLEY SMITH and KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH have turned in the manuscript for *TENTH PLANET: OBLIVION*, the second novel in the trilogy that began with *THE TENTH PLANET*.

The 1999 World Fantasy Awards were presented Sunday, Nov. 7, at the World

Fantasy Convention in Providence, R.I. The winners and categories include:

Life Achievement

Hugh B. Cave

Best Novel

The Antelope Wife by Louise Erdrich (HarperFlamingo)

Best Novella

"The Summer Isles" by Ian R. MacLeod (Asimov's Oct./Nov. 1998)

Best Short Fiction

"The Specialist's Hat" by Kelly Link (Event Horizon, Nov. 15, 1998)

Best Anthology

Dreaming Down-Under edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb
(HarperCollins/Voyager Australia)

Best Collection

Black Glass by Karen Joy Fowler (Henry Holt)

Best Artist

Charles Vess

Special Award, Professional

Jim Turner (for Golden Gryphon Press)

Special Award, Non-professional

Richard Chizmar (for Cemetery Dance Publications)

The Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, otherwise known as SCIFI Inc., announced that Steve Stiles has won the 1998 Rotsler Memorial Fanzine Artist Award. The award was presented to Stiles at the Loscon 25 convention, at the Burbank Airport Hilton in Burbank, Calif., during the Thanksgiving weekend.

The Rotsler Award was created in 1997 to honour both the lifetime work of outstanding "fanartists" and the memory of esteemed fanartist William Rotsler. Stiles was selected as the first Rotsler recipient "in recognition of his lifelong generosity and the unique talent reflected in his work."

This year's Rotsler judges were Mike Glycer, Richard Lynch and Geri Sullivan. The Rotsler Award includes a \$300 cash prize and a plaque.

Invisible Cities Press are accepting submissions of "high quality fiction with a speculative, mythic, or fabulist leaning", they are interested in both short fiction and novel length work and "are looking for insightful, well-crafted stories that avoid the genre clichés..." - pays a minimum of \$500 for new short fiction and a royalty of 10% of retail for novels for First World English Rights. Further information from: INVISIBLE CITIES PRESS, Michael Grimaldi, Editor, Invisible Cities Press, 50 State Street, Suite #9, Montpelier, VT 05602. Submissions (<http://www.invisiblecitiespress.com>).

The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

STEPHEN KING and PETER STRAUB planning a sequel to *The Talisman* - according to the Associated Press, Straub stated last month: "Our intention is to make the story a little harder and darker than the first book, more horror than fantasy." The two authors have signed a multimillion-dollar deal for the still-untitled novel, which will be published by Random House and is expected to come out in 2001.

The Talisman was published in 1984 and tells the story of 13-year-old Jack Sawyer's quest for a talisman that will save his mother's life. The new book is expected to portray Jack as an adult.

(Many thanks to the following for the above news: BFS news site <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/news.htm>; FTL <http://ftlmagazine.com/>; BFS News <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/index.htm>; PNN <http://www.plokta.com/pnn/>; <http://www.fandom.com/>; LINE ONE <http://www.lineone.net/entertainment/index.html>; BBC News Online; NASA <http://www.nasa.gov/today/index.html>; EXPRESS & STAR <http://www.westmidlands.com/>; BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL; WHAT'S ON; VARIETY <http://www.variety.com/index.asp>; Science Fiction News of the Week <http://www.scifi.com/sfw/current/news.html>; <http://www.scifi.com/>; Tony Berry; Steve Green.)

Book Reviews

THE TRIGGER by Arthur C Clarke & Michael Kube-McDowell;
Voyager, hbk. 550 pages, £17.99 Star Rating ****
Reviewed by Michael Jones

The basic recipe for one kind of SF novel is to introduce one (scientific) change into society and to see what results will arise. Here we have just about exactly that: the discovery in the near future of a field effect which will detonate any conventional explosive at a distance.

It goes almost without saying that the novel is set in the USA and the narrative viewpoint is strictly parochial – international ramifications are virtually ignored. I would have liked more than we actually get about how the effect is actually supposed to work, but it is passed off almost without explanation and the book becomes an account of the political, social and military consequences of the discovery. The US president, a former baseball player, is something of a political maverick, but he rises splendidly to the occasion and under his leadership the majority of the population eagerly embraces the new prospect of a gun-free society although opposition from the supporters of firearms is very strong. The way it all works out leads to some surprises but it is very thoughtfully and

competently done and the interest never flags. However, I felt the ending to be not only irrelevant but also gratuitously dark and unpleasant.

One could be cynical about it and dismiss *THE TRIGGER* as a novel preaching disarmament and opposing the widespread ownership of guns which mars present-day America. Maybe that is not in itself such a bad thing and I certainly would not go so far as to say such a thing has no place in the SF canon. It is an interesting and worthy theme and President Brelund's address to the Senate justifying the use of the new technology to rid America of guns is almost worth the price of the book on its own.

It is difficult to know for sure how collaborations like this are actually carried out. One suspects that Clarke supplies the basic ideas and his (younger) co-author does the donkey-work, but that might be doing both of them an injustice. Whatever, the result is a first-rate book which does both of them credit, even if it is perhaps borderline SF.

OWLFLIGHT by Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon; Millennium;
293pp, £6.99

Star rating *****

Reviewed by Dan Waters

Darian is apprenticed to the Errold's Grove mage, Justyn, against his will when his parents go missing in the Pelagiris Forest. His parents were trappers and, much to the concern of the local village, would go and trap the strange animals that lived in the forest after the mage storms (strange storms caused by magical wars which fractured the way magic could be used). Justyn, who at one point in his life was a fairly powerful mage, is now ridiculed and taken for granted by the townsfolk of Errold's Grove and Darian with him.

When the village is attacked by a barbarian horde Justyn sacrifices himself to allow the villagers to run to safety. Darian, witnessing his master's death and fearful for his own life, runs into the forest but is caught by some barbarians. He is rescued by a HawkBrother called Snowfire, taken back to their camp and is eventually allowed to join the band. They set about rescuing the villagers of Errold's Grove and destroying the barbarian horde at the same time.

This, the first book in the HawkBrothers series from Valdemar follows the band of HawkBrothers as they try to repair the damage to the magic from the mage storms and take on a superior force of barbarians. An excellently written book, I found it difficult to put down and had finished

it in only a couple of days. Larry Dixon's drawings appear throughout the book. They are extremely well drawn and give you a great idea of what the characters look like. The writing takes you smoothly through the plot which was really enjoyable with some humourous points as well as some sad points too.

OWLSIGHT by Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon; Victor Gollancz;

389 pages, £9.99

Star Rating *****

Reviewed by Dan Waters

The second book of the HawkBrother series sees Keisha, a natural born healer who lives in Errold's Grove, desperately trying to juggle the healing of the village with the attempt at learning more about her art. Her sister, Shandi, is chosen to become a herald and is taken off to learn to be a herald at the Collegium. When Darian returns to the village after a long absence he is greeted with a growing village and a healer who is scared of losing her house, the house which once belonged to the Wizard Justyn.

Darian has returned to build a Vale for the HawkBrothers near to Errold's Grove as he had promised and has no plans to steal Keisha's house from her. Instead he befriends her and takes her with him to the new Vale that he has been charged with building. She is tutored in the healing arts by Nightwind and later on by Darian's secret tutor, Firesong.

When a new threat wanders down from the north, another barbarian horde, the villagers and the HawkBrothers fear a repeat of the invasion of a number of years earlier but this invasion is not a war. It bears an illness and, while the healers wrangle how best to get into the barbarian camp, Darian and Keisha attempt to capture one of the barbarians and try to find a cure for the illness they carry.

As with the first story, Larry Dixon's pictures of the characters appear throughout the book, and once more the writing is captivating and kept me turning the pages from the word go. I did enjoy the injection of some very surreal humour and some of the description that appears in the book I found very amusing.

LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE by Robert Silverberg, Harper Collins,

pbk. 506pp. £6.99.

Star Rating: *****

Reviewed by Dan Waters.

For a book that appears to start half way through a sentence, this is a very gripping book to read. Robert Silverberg has created a world which has been at peace for thousands of years. The world is made up of many races from other worlds as well as the indigenous races of Majipoor. The world is thrown into disarray when the rightful Coronel is deposed through trickery and magic. The story follows Valentine, a traveller who is discovered by a horse trader's son, sitting on a rock outside the city of Pidruid. He is befriended firstly by the horse trader's son and later by a troop of jugglers, who take him into their group and train him in their art. Through a series of dreams and nightmares it becomes clear to Valentine and the rest of the troop, that Valentine is the rightful Coronel, only he is not in his real body. That body now belongs to Dominin Barjazid, the son of the King of Dreams, one of the four powers of Majipoor. The story then takes on pilgrimage to the Isle of Sleep and then onwards to the Pontifex's Labyrinth and then even further into the castle of Valentine itself.

This book is captivating almost from the first page and I found that the further I got into the story the more I learned about the history of the world of Majipoor and hints at their technology (the space port is mentioned which I found strange in a world that seems to be medieval). I found all the characters intriguing to read about and the Barjazid family are especially sinister in their roles as usurpers of power in their attempt to hold three out of four power positions and eventually all four of them. The book twists and turns and holds a large number of surprises all the way through, the most surprising being left for the very end of the story. Robert Silverberg weaves a fantastic story that I thoroughly enjoyed reading. The plot kept me turning the pages eager for the final confrontation with the Barjazids.

MOONSEED by Stephen Baxter. Voyager, pbk, 534pp, £6.99.

Star rating ****

Reviewed by Peter J B Day

The novel opens with the sudden destruction of Venus in a spectacular explosion. This being a Stephen Baxter story, after that comparatively modest start events can only get progressively worse – and do. Baxter is an undoubted master of the cutting-edge state-of-the-art hard science story, but he also seems to have a taste for dealing in disaster on a cosmic scale, and this book is no exception.

Thirty years or so after Man's first expedition to the Moon, NASA is stirring again, finally getting round to investigating the remaining moon

rocks not yet examined. The NASA geologist Henry Meacher, now based at Edinburgh University, is assigned to look at one particular one. Unfortunately, it seems that way back during the forming of the Solar System an intruder from outer space collided with the Moon, contaminating its substance and leaving something nasty lurking in the rocks. There is a breach of quarantine at the laboratory which starts a chain reaction in the crust of the Earth and the main story concerns the efforts of Henry, aided by his ex-wife, astronaut Geena Bourne, to save mankind from this disaster.

This is definitely a book designed to appeal to all readers who enjoy seeing poor old Earth get yet another hammering. Written to Stephen Baxter's usual high standard, the relentless progress of events keeps one reading on. For those who like their science accurate, up-to-date, and providing the driving force behind an exciting story.

Danny Yates Must Die by Stephen Walker, Harper Collins, 322 pp, £5.99

Star rating 0

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

The blurb on the rear cover calls this book, frantic, furious, and very very funny, a manic cocktail: two parts Eddie Izzard, one part Spike Milligan and a dash of Salvador Dali for good measure. Obviously my sense of humour died before I was born.

The principle character Danny Yates, is pursued by his boss and landlord 'The Great Osmosis' a failed comedian who has taken to wearing a bucket over his head, who also has demented dreams of conquering the world, which starts with the town of Wheatley. This fact is unknown to Danny who has been evicted from his flat, by The Great Osmosis, because of an accident at the comic/book shop where he worked, when the building collapsed. From this weird beginning Danny gets involved with Teena Rama a beautiful scientist and an ego to match. Lucy Smith his flat mate who has a breast fixation. Along with other assorted characters such as Annette Helstrang who's into witchcraft, the Wheatly Bigfoot and a giant alien ant bent on world conquest with his army of one earwig and one cockroach, both dead of course. Various other odd ball characters are woven into the plot line as it wanders from stupidity to the absolute absurd.

Stephen Walker seems to have put together a kaleidoscopic set of scenes taken from various comics and films to make a somewhat incoherent

whole. If this is his intention to produce a book with an absolutely anarchic sense of humour, or what passes for modern politically correct humour, then Stephen Walker should read some books and not the comics that he seems addicted to. I found the book extremely irritating, so much so that if Danny Yates was a real person I would quite happily shoot him myself as well as nuking the entire world that this and the other characters inhabit. I feel that the title of Stephen Walker's next offering, due summer 2000, duly entitled '*Mr Landen Has No Brain*' says it all.

Thanks but no thanks!!

Antarctica by Kim Stanley Robinson, Voyager/Harper Collins

559 pp, £6.99

Star rating *

Reviewed by Chris Chivers

In Kim Stanley Robinson's latest novel you are transported to the Antarctic wastes in the not too distant future, where one country is stalling over the new International Antarctic Treaty, with the implications to the change in global climate that the exploitation of this continent could have. This white wilderness is described in great detail as the author has had first hand experience of the terrain. Into this white landscape the author has dropped a number of 2-dimensional characters that could be nothing more than black silhouettes against a white backdrop.

The main character 'X' is a G.F.A. (General Field Assistant) who is not too bright jack of all trades who works for a logistics company helping to maintain the research bases dotted over the ice cap. The one bright spark in his life was Valerie Kenning, a beautiful mountaineer who is employed as a tourist guide for an adventure holiday company running the 'Worst Journey in the World' for a bunch of adventure tourists. After an affair in New Zealand with X, Valerie has dumped him on her return to Antarctica. This gets X to re-evaluate his life and whether he wants to stay in Antarctica or not. The arrival of an American Senator's aide on a fact finding mission adds to 'X's misery. Woven into this is a sub plot containing various factions, from ecoteurs to ice pirates as well as the usual bunch of politicians and big business who are using the problems of Antarctica for their own ends. This brings into risk the lives of the people caught out on the ice when the ecoteurs sabotage the main communications system at McMurdo Base. Interspersed with this narrative are flash backs to the early Antarctic explorers, Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and Byrd's expeditions to the region, and the

terrifying ordeal that some of the early ill equipped parties had to face.

The real main character of this novel is Antarctica itself and Kim Stanley Robinson has done plenty of research to add to his own observations during his trip to the continent. However I feel that the characters that are playing against this backdrop could have been brought much more to the fore to give more pace to this tome. The ideas for this book are worthy enough but this is definitely one for the Kim Stanley Robinson fans, and though well crafted definitely lacks the sparkle that would make it into an outstanding read.

ENDER'S SHADOW by Orson Scott Card. Orbit, 379pp, £16.99

Star Rating *****

Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse

I loved this book. I thought it was just wonderful. Of course, I've loved all the Ender books. I was a little surprised that Card was doing the same story again, albeit from a different viewpoint, but he does have a history of being unable to let a story go. Ender's Game started as a short story. Many of you will know the plot already. A group of talented children, led by Ender Wiggin (only Card would choose a name like that for a hero), are trained intensively and used to command the force that attacks the Buggers, aliens that have attacked the Earth.

This is the same story from the viewpoint of Bean, the littlest kid in the team. Knowing the outcome I wondered if Card could keep the story interesting. Well it worked for me. It was fascinating. Of course Card is strong on characters. Ender is one of the characters that have come to life for me and now Bean joins that select group.

If you enjoyed Ender's Game I would recommend this. If you haven't read any of Card I would suggest you start now. Buy Ender's Game and Ender's Shadow as a pair.

Colophon

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