

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2005

ISSUE 406

HONORARY PRESIDENTS: **BRIAN W ALDISS, O.B.E.**
& **HARRY HARRISON**

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FRIDAY 8TH JULY

HARRY HARRISON

It is a pleasure to welcome back one of our Honorary Presidents and one of THE great SF writers. Harry Harrison has been writing SF for over 50 years and before that was writing and illustrating comics including JEFF HAWKE, RICK RANDOM and FLASH GORDON. His SF career includes the *Stainless Steel Rat* and *Deathworld* series plus classic novels such as MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! (filmed as SOYLENT GREEN), REBEL IN TIME, THE TECHNICOLOR TIME MACHINE, etc.

Harry's daughter, Moira, told me recently that "Dad doesn't have any hobbies – he lives and breathes science fiction." He must do – he has written 68 novels, 120 short stories appearing in 8 collections, edited/co-edited 34 anthologies plus he has written/co-written 8 non-fiction books. Now 80 years old, Harry is still writing SF – his latest novel in English is STARS AND STRIPES TRIUMPHANT while in Russia, where he is a bestselling author, his most recent is DEATHWORLD 8 – fifth in a new series written with Ant Skalanis (Nos 4-6) and Michail Akhmanov (Nos 7 & 8). Will these ever get translated/published in English? Well, that's just one question you'll be able to ask Harry on

AUGUST MEETING – we are waiting to see which US authors are staying on after the World SF Convention. WHO WILL IT BE???

Friday. Make sure you don't miss this opportunity to meet a living legend.

And to help celebrate this important event, we'll be providing a free cold buffet. RGP

The meeting will take place in the Lichfield room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passage almost opposite the Odeon. At the bottom of the ramp from New Street Station, turn right, cross over the road and you'll find Union Passage about 20-30 yards along). It will commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar and be seated in plenty of time.

BRIAN ALDISS HONOURED

In the Queen's Birthday Honours List published June 11th, Brian Aldiss was honoured with an O.B.E. – Order of the British Empire – for 'services to literature'. I'm sure that each and every one of our members will congratulate Brian on this tremendous honour. I wrote and congratulated him as soon as I heard, wondering just how many of his books the Queen had read. Brian replied:-

Dear Rog - Thanks so much for your note. Of course I'm chuffed - this is for the whole of SF, "for services to literature"... As for the Queen, I hear she may have got as far as John Wyndham...
All cheer! Brian

ALIENS AND AUTHORS - VERNON BROWN

Not so long ago anyone who spoke of extra-terrestrial intelligences even hypothetically was classed with the 'Little green men in flying saucers' nuts while to admit to reading stories about such things put one firmly beyond the pale! However, 'tempora mutantur' as they say and a couple of items recently popped up to show that there is hope yet for the world beyond fandom.

In my schooldays (and no, my fees were not paid in silver pennies) << groats - ed>> mathematics was very much a matter of facts, figures and formulae but candidates sitting this year's GCE in Advanced Mathematics had to answer questions based on a seven page article outlining techniques of communicating by radio with alien civilisations. This included the logic, symbology and maths necessary, as well as the political, social and military implications of sending such messages without, for example, giving away our level of civilisation while trying to deduce theirs.

Also included in the article were equations for population growth, positive and negative, over various periods of time; another popular SF theme in the post World War II cataclysmic novel era. All in all, a very science fiction orientated

paper. Now, if we could just find out who did well in the exam we could send them an invite to our next Meeting.

The second item is of more general interest. The July issue of **BOOK AND MAGAZINE COLLECTOR** (available at newsagents, price £3.30) magazine carries a twenty-six page article on “The Birth of UK Sci-fi”, being ‘The origins, pioneers and collectables of the best home-grown science-fiction’(sic). I’m not sure why they used the term ‘Sci-fi’ in the title and ‘Science-fiction’ elsewhere but that’s just a quibble, it’s well worth reading.

The article begins with a brief introduction to SF and even here I learned something. I’ve always thought that Hugo Gernsback invented the term ‘Science Fiction’ in 1926/7 but apparently William Wilson coined the phrase ‘Science-Fiction’ in 1851 to describe some types of literature that would nowadays be included under the heading of SF. Tis so, I’ve checked!

H G Wells is the first major author to be discussed, then Arthur C Clarke then via the other major authors, not forgetting our own Hon President Brian Aldiss, to finish with Michael Moorcock.

The whole article is profusely illustrated with colour photographs and concludes with an extensive biography and price guide, so you can browse through your collection and identify any hitherto unknown treasures. For example, if you have a first edition **FRANKENSTEIN** you are looking at more than £50,000 although other authors/books are not, shall we say, worth quite as much, more like a couple of pints.

And for the price of a pint or so this magazine is worth getting, whatever your knowledge of SF. VB

...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

From Honorary President Brian Aldiss, O.B.E.... “Memory certainly enhances various old movies. Interesting about **QUATERMASS**.... The fact was, when it appeared on TV in 1953 we had never seen anything like it before. Somehow, the first movie always seems better than its sequels. There’s inspiration in the first. After that, maybe, purely commercial motivation. The *Alien* franchise is a good example, where the spin-offs get worse and worse. To my mind an exception is **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**. The first one, great! But the latest, with Donald Sutherland, is also a cracking film. The menace, the Commies, are replaced by the U.S.Army... pretty convincing!”

Anything to add? Email your opinions to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk >>

THE JULY QUIZ – Steve Green

1. Who won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards with his 1969 novelette “Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones”?

2. Name the sinister brotherhood in Robert A Heinlein's fantasy **THE UNPLEASANT PROFESSION OF JONATHAN HOAG**.
3. Which Hollywood star persuaded his mother to get him a cameo role in **STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY**?
4. Which Bob Shaw novel was later rewritten as **THE PEACE MACHINE**?
5. In which city did Ian Watson run one of the UK's first academic courses on SF, between 1970 and 1976?
6. What's the link between actors Gary Oldman and Jonathan Harris?
7. Name the Mediterranean setting for many of Christopher Priest's short stories.
8. Under what pseudonym did British author John Beynon Harris's novels appear?
9. What was unique about the shooting schedule for the second big-screen adaptation of George Orwell's **NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR**?
10. Which famous Irish playwright's work includes a 1921 play set in the 320th Century?
11. Name the creator of Red Sonja, Solomon Kane and Kull the Conqueror.
12. What's the name of Spectrum's aerial headquarters in Gerry Anderson's new computer-generated version of **CAPTAIN SCARLET**?

ANSWERS TO JUNE QUIZ IN ISSUE #405 - FINALLY! We got an entry - from Harry Hodson who scored 8 out of 12 Nice one Harry!

1. Murray Leinster.
2. UNKNOWN or UNKNOWN WORLDS.
3. Dan Dare.
4. CUSTARD. It's the latest Tom Holt comic fantasy novel.
5. Harlan Ellison
6. **THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT** by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley (an abridged edition was published as **THE FOREVER MACHINE**).
7. Eight. **THE RAT RACE** (aka **WHO HE?**) (1953), **THE DEMOLISHED MAN** (1953), **THE STARS MY DESTINATION** (aka **TIGER! TIGER!**) (1956), **THE COMPUTER CONNECTION** (aka **EXTRO**) (1975), **GOLEM 100** (1980), **THE DECEIVERS** (1981), plus the posthumously published **TENDER LOVING RAGE** (1991) and **PSYCHOSHOP** (with Roger Zelazny) (1998)
8. 1957 – at the Imperial Hotel, Temple Street (now demolished).
9. **SECONDS** (1966) directed by John Frankenheimer and based on the book of the same name by David Ely (1963).
10. Guy Gavriel Kay – the series consists of **THE SUMMER TREE** (1985), **THE WANDERING FIRE** (1986) and **THE DARKEST ROAD** (1986)
11. J R R Tolkien.
12. **THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION**

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **The Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, Inc.** (SCIFI) has donated \$1,000 to the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) upon receipt of Trip

Reports from **James Bacon** and **Tobes Valois** **Noreascon IV**, the 2004 Worldcon, has announced that it has passed along a total of \$75,333 to the next three worldcons Nominations for the Canadian **2005 Sunburst Awards** have been announced. They are: THE LAST LIGHT OF THE SUN by **Guy Gavriel Kay**, THE MEMORY ARTISTS by **Jeffrey Moore**, AIRBORN by **Kenneth Oppel**, AIR by **Geoff Ryman** and THE LOGOGRYPH by **Thomas Wharton** The **2005 Australian Ditmar Awards**, were presented on June 11 in Hobart, Tasmania, The winners were Best novel: THE CROOKED LETTER by **Sean Williams**; Best collected work: BLACK JUICE by **Margo Lanagan**; Best novella/novelette: "The Last Days of Kali Yuga" by **Paul Haines**; Best short story: "Singing My Sister Down" by **Margo Lanagan** **Wildside Press** has announced plans to purchase WEIRD TALES. For the last several years, Wildside has been a minority owner of the title, but with issue 337, it will take full control of the magazine. Current co-editors **Darrell Schweitzer** and **George H. Scithers** will remain with the magazine and be joined by Wildside President **John Gregory Betancourt**, who helped those two found the current incarnation of the magazine in 1987 Heinlein Centennial, Inc. has announced plans for a convention to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of **Robert A. Heinlein**. The Heinlein Centennial Convention will be a multi-faceted event celebrating Heinlein's life, works and far-reaching influence. The convention will be held July 6-8, 2007 in Kansas City. Memberships will initially be available for \$50 Astronaut **Neil Armstrong**, who was the first human to set foot on the moon, has threatened to sue his former barber after determining that the barber sold clippings of Armstrong's hair on eBay for \$3,000

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.

RGP

***SUNSTORM* by Arthur C Clarke & Stephen Baxter**

Gollancz / 251pgs / Hardcover £12.99; Trade paperback £11.99.

Reviewed by David A. Hardy

Star rating: * * * *

I enjoyed this one more than the previous volume, TIME'S EYE, mainly because although I do usually enjoy 'alternate reality' stories, I'm not a great fan of historical novels, and although I'm sure all the undoubtedly well-researched material about Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great is very interesting, I prefer my hard SF to be about science. Actually, although it is helpful to have read the first novel, it is really quite a separate story, so not essential.

In *TIME'S EYE* people from very different time-periods, including sub-humans and Rudyard Kipling, are suddenly thrown together on a shattered Earth by what appears to be alien intervention, revealed only by the presence of gleaming, spherical 'Eyes'. Of these people, only Bisesa Dutt, formerly working for the United Nations from within the British Army in Afghanistan, manages to return to her 'own' time on 9 June, 2037 – the day after she left, but having aged five years. And on the very day that an immense solar flare causes widespread damage to all types of electrical systems, traffic chaos, communications, and general alarm, injury and death.

The scene moves to the Moon, where a slightly dysfunctional genius called Eugene Mangles is the only person to predict a much *more* catastrophic solar event in April 2042, which will destroy the whole Earth, ejecting as much energy in a day as we normally receive in a year. Naturally, from this point onwards much of the action concerns attempts to convince the powers-that-be that this is a real danger, and deciding what, if anything, can be done about it. Here we meet Siobhan McGorran, the Astronomer Royal, to whom falls the task of co-ordinating this effort.

Two major computer AI systems run virtually all utilities systems, communications, etc. On Earth, it's Aristotle; on the Moon, Thales. Both originated in the 20th century with something like Google. It is decided that the only way to even attempt to save Earth is to build a huge shield far out in space, creating a sort of artificial eclipse which will protect Earth from at least the worst of the radiation. To have any hope of making this work a new AI will be required: Athena. Now, remembering *2001* and Hal, you will probably be expecting these AI's to spring some surprises. Well, maybe; I won't spoil it for you. But certainly they are vital to the story, and the book is exciting and satisfying, with many touches which are recognizably the characteristic work of both authors. A real page-turner.

I have one small gripe. Clarke always capitalized Sun, Earth and Moon. Quite rightly, since they are proper nouns, and all rather important to us! So by what logic does Baxter (who did all of the actual writing) do so with 'Earth' and 'Moon', but not 'sun'? It jars every time I read it. *DAH*

***FORTY SIGNS OF RAIN* by Kim Stanley Robinson**

HarperCollins / 256pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star rating: * * * * *

One of the original reasons why people wrote SF was to provide a vehicle for dire warnings. Then, with fewer books to choose from, they reached more people. The problem today is that the warnings can get buried in the morass of words of the shelves of the bookshops. In *FORTY SIGNS OF RAIN*, Robinson chooses the theme of global warming. The setting is America today.. The principal characters are scientists. Anna Quibler works for the National Science

Foundation which hands out grants to promising research projects, Frank Vanderwal is one of her programme officers. Her husband, Charlie, works from home and looks after the children. He drafts environmental policy for a senator.

There *is* concern about rising sea levels, but it is deliberately being ignored – there are not enough votes in it. Even when freak storms threaten Washington, it seems that the evidence is still going to be swept under the carpet.

Labelled, science fiction, it seems all too possible that this is the real situation. Robinson is not so much providing a cynical view of the situation but exposing the ostrich-like qualities of power. There is a lot of scientific jargon in the book which may put off a lot of readers, but it should be read – by everyone. Then they should go out and lobby their respective governments. *PM*

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.30pm to 7pm monthly, in GP5 on the 5th Floor at the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, B3 3HQ. It's a small friendly group meeting to discuss SF & fantasy books. Contact person is Pam Gaffney on (0121) 303 3398.

Books to be discussed:-

21st July - **Diana Wynne-Jones** - YEAR OF THE GRIFFIN

18th August - **Peter Jurasik** - DIPLOMATIC ACT

15th Sept - **Mark Morris** - SECRET OF ANATOMY

20th Oct - **Tim Powers** - EARTHQUAKE WEATHER

Nov - **Robert J Sawyer** - FRAMESHIFT

Dec - **Sarah Zettel** - A SORCERER'S TREASON

INTERACTION: THE 2005 WORLDCON will be held in Glasgow, 4th to 8th August 2005. Guests of Honour are Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Sheckley, Lars-Olof Strandberg and Jane Yolen. Full details, printable forms, etc., from their website <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/>
Snail mail address: INTERACTION, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ

TOLKIEN 2005: THE RING GOES EVER ON is a 5-day conference celebrating 50 years of THE LORD OF THE RINGS, to be held at Aston University, Birmingham, from the 11th to 15th August 2005. All details on website

<http://www.tolkiensociety.org/2005/>

FANTASYCON 05 has been booked for the 30 September - 2 October 2005, at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, near Birmingham. Guests of Honour: Steven Erikson, Simon Clark and Mark Chadbourn. Registrations are due to go up at the end of June, so get your money in now. For further details please see

www.britishfantasy.org.uk or email fcon@britishfantasy.org.uk

*** * * NOVACON 35 * * ***

- the Brum Group's own convention, will again be held at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall over the weekend of 11th to 13th November. Guest of Honour is Alastair Reynolds. Cheques to 'Novacon 35', Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ Email: x15@zoom.co.uk Website: www.novacon.org

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses.

Any information about forthcoming SF / Fantasy / Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

August 12th - tba - hopefully a US author staying on after Worldcon

September 10th - **Jane Johnson/Jude Fisher/Gabriel King**

October 14th - **Peter Hamilton**

November 4th - **Storm Constantine (PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE)**

December 2nd - **Christmas Social Evening - Skittles, buffet, prizes.**

January 13th 2006 - **Annual General Meeting / Auction of Books**

February 10th - **Ian R MacLeod**

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Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

ABOUT US... The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the second Friday of each month. Membership is £16 per year per person (or £21 for two members living at the same address). This includes the 12 free issues of the Newsletter plus reduced entrance fee at each meeting. Cheques should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to our Secretary, 5 Greenbank, Barnt Green, Birmingham, B45 8DH