

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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

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FRIDAY 7TH APRIL (NOT 14TH!)

LES EDWARDS & EDWARD MILLER

Not one – but two artists this month! Both artists have a considerable reputation for SF, Fantasy and Horror illustrations. Les Edwards has been called ‘Master of the Macabre’ – if Mr Miller has a nickname I don’t know it! Les Edwards has been illustrating books and magazines for nearly 30 years winning many awards along the way. His work can be viewed at www.lesedwards.com .

Edward Miller’s work can be viewed at www.edwardmiller.com and if you wish to see his stunning paintings for the new definitive edition of Ray Bradbury’s THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES (a mere \$325 a copy!), you should look at <http://www.hillhousepublishers.com/rb-mc-toc01.htm> . This month’s meeting promises a visual feast of wonderful slides whether you like SF, fantasy, horror – or all three! Oh, and by the way, Les Edwards and Edward Miller are the same person... *RGP*

May 12th STORM CONSTANTINE will be our guest speaker. Author of the popular Wraeththu series, Storm will be talking about her publishing company Immanion Press and her recent writing.

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.

SPLIT INFINITIES

the Fantasy & SF artwork of Les Edwards/Edward Miller

(Monday 20 March to Saturday 29 April. (Monday to Friday 10am - 5pm; Saturday 10am - 4pm)

As part of the Redbridge Book & Media Festival, this exhibition is a unique chance to see the creative artwork of Les Edwards (also known as 'Edward Miller'). Les, who lives in Ilford, is best known for his illustration of a huge number of book jackets in the Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror genres. He has worked on movie posters, fantasy games and graphic novels and has won the British Fantasy Award for Best Artist. Redbridge Museum, 1st Floor Exhibition Area, Central Library, Clements Road, Ilford IG1 1EA (020 8708 2317). Free.

MYTHS AND VISIONS: THE ART OF RAY HARRYHAUSEN

'Fantasy is the very basis of my career, and movies allowed me to make reality of my dreams...'

The National Museum of Photography Film & Television in Bradford presents the most comprehensive exhibition for almost 20 years of the work - and the inspiration behind it - of the acknowledged godfather of movie creature effects, Ray Harryhausen. The renowned creator of special effects for films such as *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* and *JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS*, Ray is widely admired by filmmakers and audiences alike for his imaginative, groundbreaking animation work.

This new free exhibition (19th May to 24th September) looks at the imagination and research that went into conceiving the fantastic creatures which populate Harryhausen's films, and the sources of his inspiration, ranging from Willis O'Brien - the creator of *KING KONG* - to the prehistoric animal paintings of Charles R Knight and the work of 18th and 19th century artists such as Gandy and Doré, whose subjects were drawn from the Bible and the Classical world.

The majority of Harryhausen's films came into being with him drawing key scenes and characters in order to interest a studio in backing the project. Only then would the scripts be written and Harryhausen begin to design, sculpt and make the animated models. Throughout this process, Harryhausen would develop his ideas by making technical drawings of his models and producing storyboards that showed shot-by-shot how scenes in the film would look on screen.

The exhibition presents Harryhausen's drawings, tracing his career from his early fairytale films, through the 'monster' movies of the 1950s and 1960s to his large-scale features based on the Arabian Nights and Greek and Roman myths. It includes many key models, such as the Kraken and Medusa (from CLASH OF THE TITANS) Gwangi (from VALLEY OF GWANGI) and the Minotaur (from SINBAD AND THE EYE OF THE TIGER) as well as Harryhausen's bronze sculptures based on his original animated models.

Harryhausen's work is shown in the context of the work of those who inspired and influenced him - the drawings of Hollywood art directors of the 1930s and 1940s, such as Byron Crabbe and Mario Larrinaga, his mentor, animator Willis O'Brien, the natural history painter Charles R Knight and 18th and 19th century artists such as Michael Joseph Gandy, John Martin and Gustav Doré. His work can thus be appreciated as part of a wider cultural tradition.

The exhibition opens at the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford on 19 May 2006 and will tour to selected venues in the UK in 2006/7. Box Office 0870 70 10 200. Web: www.nmpft.org.uk

SF AND THE THEATRE

If you are interested in amateur theatre as well as SF you will probably enjoy RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET, which is being presented by Sutton Coldfield Musical Theatre Company Ltd at the Garrick Theatre in Lichfield 4th to 8th April, although you won't be able to make the Friday performance because that's Group Meeting night.

If you have not seen it before it's a musical take off of the film FORBIDDEN PLANET, chock full of 50s and 60s songs. This may not sound fannish/SF-ish but it's good - it ran for 1516 performances and won the Lawrence Olivier Award for best stage musical in its original professional incarnation and has done the rounds at least twice since then to my knowledge. It's fun but take your earplugs, I will. BOX OFFICE 01543 412121 VB

CLARKE AWARD NOMINEES

Winner to be announced and presented at the Apollo Cinema, Lower Regent Street, London on Wednesday 26th April. Nominees for the best novel published in the UK in 2005 are...

NEVER LET ME GO – Kazuo Ishiguro (Faber)
LEARNING THE WORLD – Ken MacLeod (Orbit)
PUSHING ICE – Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz)
AIR – Geoff Ryman (Gollancz)
ACCELERANDO – Charles Stross (Orbit)
BANNER OF SOULS – Liz Williams (Tor UK)

BSFA AWARDS NOMINEES

Winners to be announced at Concussion, the 57th Annual British National SF Convention in Glasgow on Saturday 15th April

Best Novel

9 TAIL FOX – Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Gollancz)
LEARNING THE WORLD – Ken MacLeod (Orbit)
LIVING NEXT DOOR TO THE GOD OF LOVE – Justina Robson (Macmillan)
AIR - Geoff Ryman (Gollancz)
ACCELERANDO – Charles Stross (Orbit)

Best Short Fiction

“Bird Songs at Eventide” – Nina Allan (*Interzone* 7-8/05)
“Two Dreams on Trains” – Elizabeth Bear (*Strange Horizons* 3/1/05)
“Bears Discover Smut” – Michael Bishop (*Sci Fiction* 26/10/05)
“I, Robot” – Cory Doctorow (*Infinite Matrix* 15/2/05)
“Magic For Beginners” – Kelly Link (*F&SF* 9/05)
“Soft Apocalypse” – Will McIntosh (*Interzone* 9-10/05)
“Imagine” – Edward Morris (*Interzone* 9-10/05)
“Guadalupe and Hieronymus Bosch” – Rudy Rucker (*Interzone* 9-10 05)

Best Artwork

“Megara” by Max Bertolini (cover of *F&SF* 1/05)
“Weapon Shop” by Kenn Brown (cover of *Interzone* #198)
Cover of *Interzone* #200 by Pawel Lewandowski
Cover of ELANTRIS by Stephan Martiniere
“Run!” by Frank Quitely (from *We3*)
Cover of BRASS MAN by Steven Rawlings

HUGO NOMINEES

Winners to be announced at LA CON IV, the 64th World SF Convention, August 23rd to 27th, 2006 in Orange County, California.

Best Novel

LEARNING THE WORLD - Ken MacLeod (Orbit; Tor)
A FEAST OF CROWS - George R.R. Martin (Voyager; Bantam Spectra)
OLD MAN’S WAR - John Scalzi (Tor)

ACCELERANDO - Charles Stross (Ace; Orbit)

SPIN - Robert Charles Wilson (Tor)

Best Novella

BURN - James Patrick Kelly (Tachyon)

“Magic for Beginners”, Kelly Link (Magic for Beginners, Small Beer Press; F&SF, September 2005)

“The Little Goddess”, Ian McDonald (Asimov’s, June 2005)

“Identity Theft”, Robert J. Sawyer (Down These Dark Spaceways, SFBC)

“Inside Job”, Connie Willis (Asimov’s, January 2005)

Best Novelette

“The Calorie Man”, Paolo Bacigalupi (F&SF, October/November 2005)

“Two Hearts”, Peter S. Beagle (F&SF, October/November 2005)

“TelePresence”, Michael A. Burstein (Analog, July/August 2005)

“I, Robot”, Cory Doctorow (The Infinite Matrix, February 15, 2005)

“The King of Where-I-Go”, Howard Waldrop (SCI FICTION, December 7, 2005)

Best Short Story

“Seventy-Five Years”, Michael A. Burstein (Analog, January/February 2005)

“The Clockwork Atom Bomb”, Dominic Green (Interzone, May/June 2005)

“Singing My Sister Down”, Margo Lanagan (Black Juice, Allen & Unwin; Eos)

“Tk’tk’tk”, David D. Levine (Asimov’s, March 2005)

“Down Memory Lane”, Mike Resnick (Asimov’s, April/May 2005)

Best Related Book

Transformations: The Story of the Science Fiction Magazines from 1950 to 1970, Mike Ashley (Liverpool)

The SEX Column and Other Misprints, David Langford (Cosmos)

Science Fiction Quotations, edited by Gary Westfahl (Yale)

Storyteller: Writing Lessons and More from 27 Years of the Clarion Writers’ Workshop, Kate Wilhelm (Small Beer Press)

Soundings: Reviews 1992-1996, Gary K. Wolfe (Becon)

Best Professional Editor

Ellen Datlow (SCI FICTION and anthologies)

David G. Hartwell (Tor Books; Year’s Best SF)

Stanley Schmidt (Analog)

Gordon Van Gelder (F&SF)

Sheila Williams (Asimov’s)

Best Professional Artist

Jim Burns

Bob Eggleton

Donato Giancola

Stephan Martiniere

John Picacio

Michael Whelan

Best Semiprozine

Ansible edited by Dave Langford

Emerald City edited by Cheryl Morgan

Interzone edited by Andy Cox

Locus edited by Charles N. Brown, Kirsten Gong-Wong, & Liza Groen Trombi

The New York Review of Science Fiction edited by Kathryn Cramer, David G.

Hartwell & Kevin J. Maroney

Best Fanzine

Banana Wings edited by Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer

Challenger edited by Guy H. Lillian III

Chunga edited by Andy Hooper, Randy Byers & Carl Juarez

File 770 edited by Mike Glyer

Plokta edited by Alison Scott, Steve Davies & Mike Scott

Best Fan Writer

Claire Brialey

John Hertz

Dave Langford

Cheryl Morgan

Steven H Silver

Best Fan Artist

Brad Foster

Teddy Harvia

Sue Mason

Steve Stiles

Frank Wu

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of 2004 or 2005

[Not a Hugo. Sponsored by Dell Magazines.]

K.J. Bishop (2nd year of eligibility)

Sarah Monette (2nd year of eligibility)

Chris Roberson (2nd year of eligibility)

Brandon Sanderson (1st year of eligibility)

John Scalzi (1st year of eligibility)

Steph Swainston (2nd year of eligibility)

Congratulations to everyone who's up for an award but especially Ken MacLeod and Charles Stross – it's great to see them up for all three major awards!

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

Brian Stableford "Cheerfully Pessimistic"

by Dave Corby

Welcome to the first article in a revival of an old Newsletter feature giving every member of the Brum SF Group details, and hopefully some flavour,

of the monthly meetings. This feature will (with luck) continue each month, contributed by members of the group who, between them, hope to cover all meetings.

The March meeting saw the return of Brian Stableford. Being a newer member of the group I had never before met Brian, but of course his name was known to me. However, Brian is obviously popular with the group, the March turnout being quite spectacular. As the crowd gathered I thought I felt the room had a definite anticipation of the talk to come.

Brian is (despite his protestations to the contrary) quite a prolific author, with many works to his credit. However, Brian started in amusing fashion by pointing out how most of his recent work has never seen print in Britain! Nonetheless, Brian is about to publish his 100th book, and appropriately enough it is to be the magnificent sounding SCIENCE FACT IN FICTION ENCYCLOPEDIA. This impressive work of reference runs to approximately 460,000 words and will surely make a fitting volume to be Brian's landmark text. He soon illuminated us with details of his current publisher, Black Coat, and from here moved on to his current passion, that being the history of narrative fiction. Brian's enthusiasm for the topic is obvious and the bulk of his talk revolved around a considered and as-detailed-as-possible overview of the subject. Starting with the earliest forms of stories and the creation of 'mythic histories', Brian took us through the invention of writing, the creation of (supposedly) objective history and the invention of creative writing and the 'Mythic Future' (noting how most such dating from ancient times concentrates on apocalyptic futures). Brian went on to follow the subject through the Renaissance, and the start of belief in progress, both technological and sociological, especially in relation to the later French philosophers. In time this leads to the creation of Science Fiction (in France in 1870s).

At this point Brian examined the evolution of Science Fiction in greater detail, noting how the mode of SF can always be related to what people understand at the time of writing, and so we get SF about the conquest and colonisation of space arising in America in the 1940s and 1950s, which, Brian argues, naturally springs from America's immediate mythic past (the Westerns) and then-current belief that the expansion to space would continue in similar manner.

Therefore Brian pointed to us the similarities between mythic pasts and SF, the ultimate 'Mythic Future'? Finally, Brian concluded his remarks rather philosophically by stating that there is no such thing as truly factual writing, due at least in part to the bias of the writer, and that therefore all writing is lying...!

A number of questions were raised by the audience, not least being Mike Nolan's comment on far Eastern historical writings, particularly with respect to their lack of fictional content, although Brian simply posited that this is merely a more sophisticated form of lying.

Chris asked for further details of Brian's 100th book; Brian kindly went into greater depth and informed us that the book is an in-depth attempt to

examine the relationship between science and SF, having many, many entries and covering the topic as widely as possible. However, Brian did mention that the book is expected to sell only to libraries and is therefore likely to cost £120.

Somehow I think he, or his publishers perhaps, underestimate the appeal of the book to the public. I know that, even at the price mentioned above, I would certainly consider buying my own copy! DC

PHONE ME UP, SCOTTY...

(From the METRO 2nd February (spotted by Martin Tudor)

Mobiles are about to go where no phones have gone before. The STAR TREK handsets, based on the communicators used in the sci-fi TV series, are to go on sale soon. They will be launched to mark the cult show's 40th birthday, and will mimic the communicator's famous bleeps and chirps.

Flip-up chrome and black communicators were used by Captain Kirk and fellow crew members to keep in touch with the starship *USS Enterprise*. Demand for the phone has been so big that manufacturers Sona Mobile has had to delay the launch from last year. The phone will also allow Trekkers to watch video clips from the show, play online STAR TREK games and surf the Web.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Where which we plan to bring you news of interesting websites that you otherwise may miss. Not the obvious ones, of which there are hundreds (thousands?), but ones that take a bit of searching for....

You MUST look at these websites –

<http://drzeus.best.vwh.net/wotw/> - is a look at scores of illustrations connected with H G Wells's THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, from the original illustrations in *Pearson's* magazine right through to the present with book covers, comics, artwork from the world over. Wonderful! I've only perused this site slightly but intend to spend several hours browsing these fabulous images. There are covers I well remember but Victorian/Edwardian covers I've never seen, not to mention covers from Russia, etc. And if you want to see the original *Pearson's*, albeit cut and pasted rather than a straight scan go to

<http://www.angelfire.com/nb/classillus/images/war/worlds.html>

RGP

The other site is brand new – created just last week (mid-March) by Greg Pickersgill. It's devoted to the UK SF Book Club. Yes, the SFBC is something no-one rates highly, many later editions being of such poor production that dealers can't give them away. Yet the earlier issues with the attractive two-colour/two-tone distinctive covers are becoming very scarce. The second series of cover designs which Greg describes as 'tree trunk sections' are slowly drifting the same

way. Some titles like ELLISON WONDERLAND are actually first hardcover editions for which collectors are paying £25+.

<http://www.gostak.org.uk/sfbc/sfbcindex.htm> has a list of the books, the covers and info on their newsletter, SF NEWS. This is Greg being totally obsessive (fortunately for the SF community) but that's what it takes to preserve science fiction information that everyone else is ignoring, or even destroying. If you have any SFBC editions, especially with SF NEWS inserted, or can help with info in any way please contact Greg through the website, or talk to me and I'll pass on the information. RGP

If you feel like visiting Mars, albeit only vicariously, you can now do so via your PC screen. Click onto <http://www.google.com/mars/> to explore the Martian surface to a resolution down to the size of a football field and, if you wish, take a flight through Valles Marineris, a canyon 2500 miles long and 4 miles deep. VB

...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS'

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk >>

THE APRIL QUIZ by Steve Green

- 01 How do the Martians in Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels refer to their home planet?
- 02 Which BBC sitcom features the starship *HMS Camden Lock*?
- 03 What honour links authors Brian Aldiss, Bob Shaw and Harry Harrison?
- 04 Who was the real author of AN ACCOUNT OF A MEETING WITH DENIZENS OF ANOTHER WORLD by "William Robert Loosley" (1979)?
- 05 Which author of heroic fantasy was portrayed by Vincent D'Onofrio in THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD (1996)?
- 06 Name the pioneering SF artist who provided the cover for *Amazing Stories* #1 (1926) and more than 150 other of Hugo Gernsback's magazines.
- 07 Which TV series has provided the inspiration for novels by James Blish, Greg Bear, Mack Reynolds, Joe Haldeman and Vonda McIntyre?
- 08 What was unusual about the 1995 remake of VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED and the 1998 remake of PSYCHO?
- 09 Which bizarre family lived at 1313 Mockingbird Lane?
- 10 It actually takes its name from a 1983 short story by Bruce Bethke, but which SF sub-genre is more closely associated with a trilogy of 1980s novels by William Gibson?

- 11 Which famous telefantasy character links the actors Paul McGann, Michael Jayston, Sylvester McCoy and Richard E Grant?
- 12 Name the award-winning magazine founded as a fanzine by Charles N Brown in 1968.

There was no quiz last month so Harry didn't win!!!

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... A VERY bad month, I'm afraid Author and fan, **Nancy A Dibble** (b. 1942) passed away March 7th. In the 1970s and '80s, Nan wrote a number of SF novels as **Ansen Dibell** Author **Ronald Anthony Cross** (b.1937) died of a stroke last week (reported on March 14th). Cross began publishing science fiction in the 1973 with *THE STORY OF THREE CITIES* and was currently publishing the *Eternal Guardians* series, the last volume of which is forthcoming Author **David Feintuch** (b.1944) died on March 16th of an heart attack. Feintuch published the *Seafort Saga* series and two fantasy novels. In 1996, he received the John W. Campbell Award for best new author Author **John Morressy** (b.1930) died on March 20th of a massive coronary. Morressy was best known for his *Kedrigern* series of short stories and novels, one of which is scheduled to appear in the June 2006 issue of F&SF Film director **Richard Fleischer** died Saturday, March 25th, in Woodland Hills, California, at the age of 89. He directed almost 50 films, including genre titles *20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA* (1954), *FANTASTIC VOYAGE* (1966), *DOCTOR DOLITTLE* (1967), *SOYLENT GREEN* (1973), *AMITYVILLE 3-D* (1983), *CONAN THE DESTROYER* (1984), and *RED SONJA* (1985) Polish author **Stanislaw Lem** died March 27th aged 84, after suffering from heart disease. Reportedly the biggest-selling SF author in the world, he sold more than 27 million copies of his works, translated into about 40 languages. His most famous novel was *SOLARIS* which was twice filmed – in 1971 and in 2002 **Robert Jordan** (real name **James Oliver Rigney Jr**) has been diagnosed with a rare blood disease that only affects 8 in every million people. People with amyloidosis who are treated have a median life expectancy of five years, although Jordan is aiming to live much longer than that There's an interview with **Robert Jordan** in the March issue of *LOCUS* The same issue has an interview with **Harry Harrison**, titled "When the World Was Young" **Diana Wynne Jones** has been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Bristol *AIR: OR, HAVE NOT HAVE* by **Geoff Ryman** is the winner of the 2005 Tiptree Award Finalists for the Lambda Literary Awards include, in the SF/fantasy/horror category, **Octavia E Butler's** *FLEDGLING* and **David B Coe's** *SHAPERS OF DARKNESS* The **Octavia E Butler Memorial Scholarship Fund** has been established by the Carl Brandon Society, Warner Books, the SF Museum and Hall of Fame, and others, to enable

writers of colour to attend one of the Clarion writing workshops where Ms. Butler got her start. The first scholarship will be awarded in 2007 The four inductees for this year to the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in Seattle have been announced. The two living inductees are **Anne McCaffrey** and **George Lucas**. The two posthumous inductees are **Frank Herbert** and **Frank Kelly Freas**. The ceremony will be toastmastered by **Neil Gaiman** on June 17th and will coincide with the announcement of the Locus Awards, emceed by **Connie Willis**. The events will be held at the Science Fiction Museum The first annual **Science Fiction Short Film Festival**, co-sponsored by the SF Museum and Hall of Fame and the Seattle International Film Festival, was held in February. 20 films were presented, each under 12 minutes long, to a sell-out crowd of over 1400 **Amazing** dies again! Fourteen months after announcing it was putting **Amazing Stories** on hiatus, Paizo Publishing recognized the magazine's eightieth anniversary by announcing it was pulling the plug on the latest incarnation of the world first science fiction magazine The **Time Warner Book Group** which owns Orbit books here in the UK has been sold to French conglomerate **Lagardere** for \$537.5 million. Lagardere is the parent company of Hachette Livre which owns Hodder Headline and Orion/Gollancz. It now becomes the third largest book publisher in the world **Terry Pratchett's** HOGFATHER is being adapted as a two-part, four-hour movie for Sky One TV, to be shown this Christmas Subterranean Press have published **THE BEST OF PHILIP JOSE FARMER** – a 600pg deluxe hardcover at \$38.00 and will soon publish PEARLS FROM PEORIA, 300,00 words of rare and previously unpublished short stories and articles by Farmer (see www.subterraneanpress.com)....

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

THE COMPLETE CHRONICLES OF CONAN

by Robert E Howard

Gollancz / 925 pgs / £18.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Laurence Miller

Star rating: * * * * *

I originally thought that this would be a nice simple review until I heard Rog saying that he'd had a customer ring up and ask if this was the same as the two volume omnibus edition of Robert Jordan's Conan stories!!

So rather than just review the book, I decided to also place it in context... The book itself is a collection of REH's 21 Conan stories as well as

three drafts, a synopsis, two verses and a fragment together with an article on the Hyborian Age, notes on the people of the Hyborian Age and Stephen Jones' Afterword on REH and Conan... and is also one of the best book bargains of recent publications at £18.99

For a writer who died at the age of thirty (by his own hand), Howard had an incredible influence on the world of fantasy writing. He has probably influenced most non-Tolkienesque fantasy by virtually originating the 'Swords and Sorcery' genre. He started writing as a child and tried to turn professional at fifteen although it would be another three years before his first story was accepted by the influential pulp magazine WEIRD TALES... and that was what Howard was... a pulp writer paid by the word, no great literature here but he could tell a story, and he quickly became very popular over the twelve years before his death with his best work transcending its pulp origins.

During his short career he wrote almost every type of pulp fiction: Horror, Sports, Western, Historical and Detective but it's his fantasy and Conan in particular, that ensured his memory will endure. Over the years since he died, his work has been reprinted so many times in hardcover, paperback and comic format that he's probably only outsold by Tolkien.

For anyone who reads Sword and Sorcery or any form of heroic fantasy, you must read this collection of Conan stories... and for anyone familiar with Howard's work, get this volume to replace your mouldering paperbacks or to read instead of damaging your expensive collectable reprints. Heroic warriors, magic, evil sorcerers, beautiful slave girls to rescue, kingdoms to seize, dark gods and civilizations from beyond the dawn of history... Conan has it all. And don't be fooled by the movies, the real Conan is Howard's in these stories... other media versions are pale imitations and so are most of the third party Conans written by other authors since Howard's untimely death.

This volume celebrates the Centenary of Howard's birth and is bound in imitation leather and beautifully illustrated by our guest speaker this month – Les Edwards. LM

THE DRACO TAVERN by Larry Niven

Tor / 300pgs / \$24.95 / hardcover

Reviewed by Peter Weston

Star rating: * * * *

I have a theory about Larry Niven. This most brilliant and original of late-1960s SF writers has lost it. Somewhere in the last twenty years he's forgotten how to write a readable story. Maybe it's because of all those collaborations but as evidence I point to THE SMOKE RING, THE INTEGRAL TREES, RINGWORLD THRONE, and worst of all, RAINBOW MARS. I ask you honestly, did you finish any of that lot?

But there's a saving grace – while Niven at novel-length is excruciatingly awful, at short forms he still has that old magic, the gift of being able to take an

idea and run with it, the ability to extrapolate and provide a new perspective that no-one has seen before. So we have a sort of inverse-square law; readability is inversely proportional to length, or in other words, the shorter the better. And the stories in this book are very short indeed. That's why they're so very good!

Annoyingly, the acknowledgements page doesn't show sources of first publication, but I've been enjoying the *Draco Tavern* yarns for a long time in ANALOG and the earliest date from the mid-seventies. The idea is quite simple, and Niven is at least the fourth person to have used it; create an imaginary bar (we'd say 'pub') in which unlikely tales are told. Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp started it with 'Gavagan's Bar' in the early fifties, closely followed by Arthur C. Clarke with 'Tales from the White Hart', then Spider Robinson, and for all I know a half-dozen others.

Typically, Larry Niven goes that extra mile and gets various species of ET to tell his tall stories, in a locale he makes at least superficially plausible. So we get to hear about Earth's *first* intelligent species and what happened to them; about bloodthirsty alien people-eaters from another Star who happily drink consommé when in polite company, and twenty-five other yarns about contact with the interstellar community. Some of these (the shorter ones) are better than others, and the book is probably best dipped into at odd moments rather than being read straight-through. But it's fun, thought-provoking, and I recommend it.

PRW

***BLACK JUICE* by Margo Lanagan**

Orion / 230pgs / £8.99 / hardcover

Review by William McCabe

Star Rating: * * * * *

It's difficult to fault any of the stories in this collection. The characters and situations are as well-conceived as any I've read. The writing is up to any standard you care to name. Although you don't often get much of a plot, that's just a function of the short story. The longest here is 33 pages long so there isn't much chance of anything too elaborate. There's no real theme here. I would have said that many of the stories here are mainstream fiction rather than any particular genre but it seems that some would argue.

Consider the first story here. It's a moving portrait of a very public execution. The method of execution seems odd (slowly sinking into a tar pit) but then different places have different methods of execution. The only unusual thing about the people here is that they seem to have adopted this method of legal execution and they accept it. They seem to be a small tribal community. There is reference to a 'chief'. Plants have names I don't recognise. There is a group of outsiders known as the fish-people but this could be a reference to how they live (fishermen). I couldn't tell you how these people compare to modern-day tribal communities in Australia or America. I would have said this would belong to the mainstream. Nevertheless, this story "Singing My Sister Down", won the World

Fantasy Award in 2005. I've no doubt that the story deserved awards but I'd not have called it fantasy.

There are stories here that obviously belong to various genres. "My Lord's Man" seems to be historical. "Sweet Pippit" is Richard Adams with elephants. "Red Nose Day" is an alternate-world where Christ was a clown. "Yowlinin" and "Earthly Uses" involve SF-type creatures even though the latter is referred to as an 'angel'. Others might be taken as some other-world or fantasy situation but I don't think they belong. Almost all of the stories here are set in small communities or out-of-the-way places. Almost all involve families or small communities. If I had to compare her writing to anyone else's, it would be Ray Bradbury. If this were a regular collection and not a selection from a larger body of work, I'd have said she was his equal already and showed promise for better things. I just wonder whether we'll see any of rest of that work in this country.

Despite my comments as to it being fantasy, the story "Wooden Bride" is shortlisted for the James Tiptree Jr Award and this collection is shortlisted for the LA TIMES Book Award in the Young Adult section. WAM

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:-

20th April - **Iain M Banks – THE ALGEBRAIST**

An Afternoon with Ruth Boswell - 1st April, 2.30pm at the MAC in Birmingham. Ruth Boswell is best known for creating *TIMESLIP* and producing *THE TOMORROW PEOPLE* during the 70s - more information on her career and the event can be found at www.fantomfilms.co.uk. She has just finished writing her new fantasy novel. *OUT OF TIME*. If members wish to attend under a group booking, a discounted rate of £5 each can be arranged (contact Vicky on aunico@hotmail.com).

CONCUSSION – the 57th Annual British National SF Convention will be held 14th to 17th April 2006 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Glasgow. Guests of Honour are M John Harrison, Elizabeth Hand, Justina Robson. Brian Froud and Ian Sorensen plus Special Guests Dan Abnett, Marc Gascoigne, Mat Irvine, Dee Parker and Johanna Sinisalo. Details from 23 Ranelagh Road, Bruce Grove, London N17 6XY – email info@eastercon2006.org or phone 07799 771309. See their website at <http://www.eastercon2006.org>

Derby Alt-Fiction - A whole feast of folks will be appearing at the event to be held in Derby's Assembly Rooms on Saturday May 6th 2006. The Alt-Fiction

event consists of workshops, discussions, talks and readings from major names in the genres of science-fiction, fantasy and horror. It's an all-day event and some of the names involved include **Ramsey Campbell, Simon Clark, Simon R Green, Storm Constantine, Mark Chadbourn, Ian R Macleod, Justina Robson, Chaz Brencley, Richard Morgan, James Lovegrove, John Jarrold, Peter Crowther** and oh so many more. The event has been designed to give fans and aspiring writers of the genres a chance to meet published authors and to find out more about being published. The event opens at 12:30pm in the Darwin Suite, Assembly Rooms and ends at 8:30pm. Admission is £18, £15 concessions. All guest appearances are subject to change. Please check with the event before traveling.

Next BFS Open Night will be held on 2nd June 2006 at the Devereux - 20 Devereux Court, Essex Street, The Strand, London, WC2R 3JJ. Entrance: FREE. Starts at 6.30pm. GoH: **Sean Wright** and **Allen Ashley** will be promoting Allen Ashley's "Urban Fantastic" book which, coincidentally, is published by Crowswing on the same day.

Fantasycon 2006 - Date: 22nd - 24th September 2006. Place: The Britannia Hotel, St James Street, Nottingham. GoHs: **Neil Gaiman, Juliet E. McKenna, Ramsey Campbell, Raymond E. Feist & Clive Barker**; with MC: **David J. Howe** For more information check out www.fantasycon.org.uk. For those of you who would prefer to make your booking via credit card, please email Debbie Bennett at fcon-admin@britishfantasysociety.org.uk ... this facility is by request only and will not be available on the main website. For any other queries email fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk Further information can be found at our new website, www.fantasycon.org.uk or email Vicky on fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk

Juliet E McKenna will be tutoring a residential creative writing course focusing on SF&F at the Castle of Park in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, from 1st to 7th October 2006. This week will cover key elements of writing strategy, and practical approaches. Group work will develop skills for exploring ideas on plot, character and world building while individual exercises will enable participants to relate the sessions to personal projects. For more details, visit www.castleofpark.net or www.julietemckenna.com

NOVACON 36 – the BSFG's own convention will again be held at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, Nr Birmingham. Guest of Honour will be **Ken MacLeod**. Registrations are currently £33. Cheques to 'Novacon 36', 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

April 7th – Horror/Fantasy artist **Les Edwards**

May 12th – Fantasy author **Storm Constantine**

June 9th – SF/Fantasy artist **Jim Burns**

July 14th – negotiations still pending

August 11th – **Social Evening** – a meal out at the Black Eagle, Hockley. We tried this two years ago and due to it's popularity we've decided to repeat.

September 8th – we'll be trying to get one of the Big Names visiting the area for Fantasycon, **Neil Gaiman, Raymond E Feist** or **Clive Barker**.

October – tba

November 3rd – tba

December 1st – Christmas Social – details to be announced.

Newsletter 415 copyright 2006 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership or, for that matter, the person giving the 'opinion'.

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