

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2006

ISSUE 418

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

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**FRIDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JULY**

## **JUSTIN RICHARDS**

Justin Richards is the author of over a dozen genre and SF novels for young readers, including the popular *Invisible Detective* series, as well as non-fiction books. He has also written audio and television scripts. He has edited anthologies of short stories, been a technical writer, founded and edited a media journal, and contributed articles to many mainstream magazines.

On the technical side, Justin worked for a multi-national computer company for fourteen years, where he architected and designed numerous software products. He spent several years working on a project to define the way in which people will interact with computers in the next millennium, and is pleased to see many of his predictions coming true. Justin has been granted more than half a dozen patents and has published many technical papers.

Justin now writes and edits full time. He also acts as a Creative Consultant to BBC Worldwide, which includes working as the 'Doctor Who Range Consultant' advising on commissioning and editing of all BBC Books' Doctor Who titles. RGP

*August 11<sup>th</sup> - THE SUMMER SOCIAL. We've booked places at the Black Eagle, Hockley and by now you should have booked your ticket. If not - sorry - all tickets are sold.*

*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.*

## ***HARRY HARRISON WINS AWARDS***

Our co-President received the Philosopher's Stone Award for distinguished services to Her Majesty Science Fiction, given at the Eurocon in Kiev. He also received the Prix European de Science Fiction, naming him a European Grand Master. Congratulations, Harry!

## ***LOCUS AWARDS 2006***

The Locus Awards were presented at the SF Museum in Seattle, Washington.

***Best Science Fiction Novel:*** ACCELERANDO by Charles Stross

***Best Fantasy Novel:*** ANANSI BOYS by Neil Gaiman

***Best First Novel:*** HAMMERED/SCARDOWN/WORLDDWIRED by Elizabeth Bear

***Best Young Adult Book:*** PAY THE PIPER by Jane Yolen & Adam Stemple

***Best Novella:*** "Magic for Beginners" by Kelly Link

***Best Novelette:*** "I, Robot" by Cory Doctorow

***Best Short Story:*** "Sunbird" by Neil Gaiman

## ***SIDEWISE AWARD NOMINATIONS***

This year's Sidewise Award for Alternate History nominations have been announced. The awards will be presented at L.A.con IV during the weekend of August 23-27.

### ***Long Form***

A PRINCESS OF ROUMANIA by Paul Park

ROMANITAS by Sophia McDougall

THE SUMMER ISLES by Ian R. MacLeod

### ***Short Form***

"Harvest Moon" by William Barton

"The Illuminated Heretic" by A.M. Dellamonica

"Panacea" by Jason Stoddard

"Pericles the Tyrant" by Lois Tilton

"Prix Victor Hugo Awards Ceremony," by Kim Newman & Paul J. McAuley

# ***BSFG June 2006 meeting report***

## ***by Dave Corby***

Due to immense work commitments Jim Burns was unable to join the group as previously advertised; so our very own Dave Hardy generously stepped into the breach to entertain us all. He therefore took the opportunity to demonstrate his brand new presentation of space and science fiction art; indeed this presentation is in preparation for a European convention next year, so we are particularly honoured to see it so far in advance. In fact, Dave admitted that our group meeting has given him the motivation to finish it off!

By 8:05pm the crowd had gathered in anticipation. Personally, I am aware that many of the group are familiar with Dave's art, but being a relatively new member, I (to my shame) had not seen much of Dave's art previously. The first half of the presentation gave a history of Dave's start in space art and subsequent career. The second half of the presentation promised to take us through some of Dave's more fantastic and fictional pieces.

At this point it is worth noting that the presentation itself was of the highest calibre, being professionally produced and including brilliant, clear images throughout.

Dave's presentation started, therefore, with an explanation of the early influences on his art, quoting in particular *THE MOON* by James Nasmyth (1874). From here to pulp magazines, and the excitement felt by Dave on encountering these for the first time. Surely, space travel was just around the corner!

Dave reflected upon Chesley Bonestell, clearly an influence on many artists, and showed a particular excerpt from *DESTINATION MOON*, where an entire panning shot is one Bonestell picture (Ooooh! Animation within the presentation!).

Subsequently, Dave presented his first published works, in 1952, during his time with the RAF. It was easy to see the lineage from Bonestell to Hardy in these pictures. From here Dave took us on a whirlwind tour of the solar system, visiting each planet and many moons in turn. Personally, I find the prehistorical swamp version of Venus to be the most plausible, but then maybe that's just me.

To my eye, the popularity of "The Marshmallow Moon" is easy to justify – the juxtaposition of the spaceship in front of Jupiter is timeless. I would also like to praise the astonishing quality of the more recent, digital pieces. But I'm not sure about the authenticity of the Hardy-Davidson.

It is also interesting to note that Dave kindly included within the presentation "The Four Minute Guide to Photoshop" showing how he can quickly create a convincing piece of space art using the tools and techniques of that program.

And then; onto the SF & F! Dave presented a history of his more fictional pieces, starting with the early 70s in F&SF magazine, and then talking about Patrick Moore and his book CHALLENGE OF THE STARS. Really, there were too many fine pieces shown to comment in this article, space simply does not permit me to go into the level of detail that Dave's presentation would justify. From alternative covers to "The Dark Side of the Moon" (no such thing, indeed) to his most recent pieces of privately commissioned fantasy art, the breadth of work is truly impressive.

The evening rounded off with questions as usual, ranging from technical aspects of Photoshop, to my own question: "Are there any more subjects that Dave has yet to paint?". The reply seems, in retrospect, to be obvious "Only the depictions of scenes as yet undiscovered..." *DC*

## **NEWS IN BRIEF . . .**

.... Editor/Publisher **Jim Baen** (b.1943) died on June 28, two weeks after suffering a major stroke. Baen was the editor of *Galaxy* and *If* beginning in 1974 and eventually left to help start up the science fiction line at Ace. Once that was up and running, he left to start up the sf line at Tor Books. In 1983, he had the chance to start his own line, Baen Books. At Baen Books, Baen published many new and established authors, including **Lois McMaster Bujold**, **Elizabeth Moon**, **Eric Flint**, and **David Weber** .... Artist **Tim Hildebrandt** (b.1939) died from complications related to diabetes on June 11. Hildebrandt made a name for himself working with his brother, Greg, as the **Brothers Hildebrandt**. They are, perhaps, best known for their work featuring the worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien and the original poster for STAR WARS .... **CREEPERS** by **David Morrell** and **DREAD IN THE BEAST** by **Charlee Jacob** tied for Best Novel at this Year's Bram Stoker Awards .... **John Meaney's** **PARADOX** won the 2006 Independent Publisher Book Award, or 'Ippy', in the SF/Fantasy category .... The Compton Crook/Stephen Tall Award for best first novel of 2005 was presented to **Maria V. Snyder** for her book **POISON STUDY** at Balticon 40 on May 27. The award has been presented by members of Balticon since 1983 and includes a prize of \$750 .... The June issue of **LOCUS** has an interview (and cover photo) of **Christopher Priest** .... **Peter Hamilton** has sold the new *Void* trilogy set in the same universe as **PANDORA'S STAR** and **JUDAS UNCHAINED** to Macmillan in the UK and to Del Rey in the USA. The contract had no mention of how many trucks were needed to deliver the manuscript .... Jack Vance has sold **THE JACK VANCE TREASURY**, a retrospective, to Subterranean Press. It will commemorate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday this year .... The winners of the fifth annual **Ursa Major Awards** for the best in 'funny animal' literature and art have been announced but if you think I'm wasting paper giving you that old load of rubbish, you're mistaken .... Equally Not Of Interest are the **Web Cartoonists Choice Awards** which had no less than 26 categories, only omitting 'Outstanding use of the colour red by a left-

handed midget' as far as I could make out. If you're really sad you can always find ALL the results via Google .... August will see the publication of the FINAL *Dune* book, HUNTERS OF DUNE which apparently is a direct sequel to the last *Dune* novel actually written by **Frank Herbert**, PRIEST-KINGS OF DUNE Ooops, sorry, have I got my series mixed up? I meant GOR MESSIAH – er, no that's not right either. Oh, go and look it up in the SF ENCYCLOPEDIA .... Legendary visual-effects pioneer **Ray Harryhausen's** unproduced works may see the light of day now that independent production company Mindfire Entertainment has optioned the material for films. The deal with Mindfire allows for four films to be made under the 'Ray Harryhausen Presents' banner and will draw on ideas Harryhausen has had over the years for new SINBAD, JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS and CLASH OF THE TITANS movies, as well as a science fiction concept called THE ELEMENTALS. The deal also includes projects that have 'lost world' and 'alien invasion' themes .... An ancient lake has been found inside a cave near the city of Ramle in central Israel. Located 328 feet below ground, the lake holds at least eight previously unknown species, including some which are similar to scorpions and shrimp. The cave is shielded from exterior water sources by a layer of chalk .... Archaeologists believe that have found a rock carving by the Hohokam tribe of native Americans which depicts the supernova of 1006. If so, the carving, or petroglyph, may help archaeologists determine the age of similar artwork. This is the first known American depiction of the supernova of 1006, which occurred in the constellation Lupus and was the brightest known supernova in history

*RGP*

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

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

*RGP*

***KEEPING IT REAL by Justina Robson***

**Gollancz / 279pgs / £10.99 / trade paperback**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.**

**Star Rating: \* \* \* \***

Some people consider Justina Robson's work to be too deep and complex to be enjoyable. It is true that her early books aspired to a high literary standard, a fact recognised by two nominations for the Arthur C Clarke Award. Though still keeping the high quality in the writing, this book is a complete change in approach.

KEEPING IT REAL is the first in a series of books that are fast paced, fun and very accessible. In 2015 a quantum bomb explosion had ripped a hole between dimensions and ours has now become linked with five other realities

allowing for a two-way passage. Lila Black was on a fact-finding mission to Alfheim, the dimension of the elves, when she suffered horrific injuries. She has been rebuilt and is half woman, half machine, the machine parts being powered by an atomic reactor. Her first assignment since her rebuilding is as a bodyguard to the Elf musician, Zal, lead singer in the band, The No Shows. Zal has been sent threatening letters and their content is being taken seriously. Both are soon thrown into a chase situation with Lila trying to keep Zal out of the hands of a group of elf fanatics who are trying to take him back to Alfheim. The suggestion is that they disapprove of his life-style.

On the surface, this is a science fiction/fantasy thriller but as the story develops, Robson adds twists and layers of complexity. Nothing can be assumed, and that is part of the pleasure. Lila makes mistakes, she misreads the nuances of the other species' characters and her mechanisms and inbuilt computer programmes can malfunction. Both reader and characters are kept on their toes. Marketed correctly, this is the book that should open Robson's writing to a wider audience. If you come to this volume leaving any prejudices you may have accumulated behind, you will have the chance to participate in an exceptional experience. Robson had fun writing this book. Have fun reading it. *PM*

### ***STAMPING BUTTERFLIES* by Jon Courtenay Grimwood**

**Gollancz / 424pgs / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**

**Star rating: \* \* \* \***

There is a theory that if a butterfly stamps its food in the Amazon, a hurricane will develop a world away. The idea is that even the smallest of actions can have a profound effect. Similarly, so can inaction. Each decision we take, however small, can have greater consequences for other people. This is a concept worth keeping in mind while reading this book.

The story is told as three separate narratives – past, present and future. In the period from 1969 into the mid seventies, a young Arab boy struggling to survive in Marrakech becomes involved with musician Jake Razor. When we first meet him, he appears to have only one arm, though it transpires that it is tied behind his back to prevent him using it. In Muslim society, using the left hand is unclean. Many of the things he does are in order to protect Malika, the girl who lives in the rooms below those rented by his mother.

The present is either near future, or a slightly alternative one. They revolve around Prisoner Zero. He made a rather feeble attempt to assassinate the president of the United States. At first, the question is whether the man is sane. He refuses to speak so they have no idea who he is. Then it is noticed that the symbols he has daubed on his cell wall are of mathematical importance. Unfortunately, someone washed them off before they can be fully recorded.

In the far future, the Chinese have colonised a complex of planets orbiting one central star in the form of an unfinished Dyson sphere. On one of

them, the Forbidden City has been meticulously recreated. The current Emperor, who seems to be selected in a similar way to the Dalai Lama, has decided that he is the only real person and that everyone else is computer generated. However, a young woman by the name of Tris, is on her way to assassinate him.

At first, these three intercut stories seem to be disparate. As the novel progresses, the links between them begin to emerge. It is a cleverly constructed novel and well worth reading. 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:-**

July 20<sup>th</sup> - CENTURY RAIN - Alastair Reynolds

August 17<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 19<sup>th</sup> October - tba

**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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk)

Further information can be found at our new website, [www.fantasycon.org.uk](http://www.fantasycon.org.uk) or email Vicky on [fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk](mailto:fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk)

**Raymond E Feist** will be in Birmingham the 25th September at Forbidden Planet at 12.30pm for signing.copies of INTO A DARK REALM

**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](http://www.castleofpark.net) or [www.julietemckenna.com](http://www.julietemckenna.com)

**Terry Pratchett** will be at Ottakar's in Bromsgrove on October 2nd 2006 to sign copies of WINTERSMITH. The signing will start at 5.30pm. Address:

Ottakars, 66-68 high St, Bromsgrove, Worcs, B61 8EX For further information call Stuart on 01527 833339

**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](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)*

## ***FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG***

July 14<sup>th</sup> - **JUSTIN RICHARDS**

August 11<sup>th</sup> – **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 8<sup>th</sup> – tba.

October – award-winning SF artist **JIM BURNS**

November 3<sup>rd</sup> – tba

December 1<sup>st</sup> – **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL** – details to be announced.

January 2007 – Annual General Meeting

February – tba

March – SF author **JUSTINA ROBSON**

**Newsletter 418** 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