

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

OCTOBER 2006

ISSUE 421

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

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);**
PAT BROWN (TREASURER); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);
TIM STOCK (PUBLICITY); WILLIAM MCCABE;
NOVACON 36 CHAIRMAN: TONY BERRY

WEBSITE: www.bsfg.freesevers.com

EMAIL: bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 13th OCTOBER

HUGO AWARD-WINNING SF ARTIST

JIM BURNS

Delayed from earlier this year we are now extremely pleased to welcome Award-winning SF artist Jim Burns to the Brum Group.

Jim grew up wanting to be Dan Dare – so much so that he joined the RAF in 1966. His love of painting started at a very early age and he had his first paid commission in 1972. Jim has painted hundreds of book and magazine covers and is now considered one of the greatest SF artists in the world. His artwork is classed as fine art and his work has been displayed and sold at top galleries in the UK and in the USA.

In addition to hearing Jim talk about his work and seeing dozens of his painting in a Powerpoint presentation, you will also have the rare opportunity to see some of his actual artwork ‘in the flesh’. Yes, Jim will be bringing a few originals with him!

November 3rd – one week earlier than normal – will be a quiz against the Birmingham University Sci-Fi (that's wot it sez 'ere) & Fantasy Society.

Bring your chequebook with you in case he wants to sell!

This really is a rare opportunity to see superb artwork up close and I trust that we will have the largest turnout we've had for a very long time. I may be Friday the 13th but this is your lucky Friday!
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.

THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

By Dave Corby

The special guest at the September 2006 Birmingham SF group meeting was none other than Peter Weston. In his usual solid introduction Vernon Brown highlighted, for those who were unaware, Peter's great contribution to the group as co-founder, and Peter's long involvement in SF fandom from the 1960s to the present. Throughout the formation of the Brum SF group and the establishment of events such as Novacon and regular attendances at Eastercons, Peter Weston has been at the centre of it all.

As such Peter is a recognised expert on many aspects of SF and fandom. This evening he kindly gave us the benefit of his extensive knowledge of SF pulp magazines via a guided slideshow tour of the cover artworks of many either well-known or character-full examples.

The depth of Peter's experience with this subject was clearly undeniable; a lesser presenter may well have had an excellent presentation on hand, but Peter needed no such structure to stick to, encouraging audience participation to guide his talk from one publication to the next. Despite this allowance for questions on any pulp from any period Peter had all the details and answers on hand, only very rarely needing to consult his reference material.

Beginning logically enough with the genesis of SF pulp magazines Peter started his presentation with Hugo Gernsback and his magazine SCIENCE AND INVENTION. Clear was the serious-science-presented-as-the-way-to-the-future angle. Perhaps Gernsback's original idea of using SF to bring scientific education to the masses may not have worked exactly as he anticipated, but I feel he was not too far off the money considering certain later scientific discoveries having been anticipated by SF...

Peter moved from this start through a bewildering array of different publications. Prominent examples would include AMAZING STORIES, with its serialised Verne, Wells and Murray Leinster, all in the grand tradition of 'Scientification' – the bridge between fact and fiction? Gradually the pulps started to publish new SF, but SCIENCE WONDER STORIES (and its sister

publication, AIR WONDER STORIES) were still educating the masses in science. After ASTOUNDING commenced publication the spread of pulp magazines becomes so varied and myriad that a full description of Peter's presentation lies well outside of the scope of this article!

Through the history of pulps and the introduction of many well-known authors (covers boasting Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke stories) the tremendous breadth of the cover art lead from the imaginative yet terrible, through to classic examples of excellent art. Some magazines clearly stressed a high-quality and artistic approach, while others catered to a more commonly accepted level. Notably interesting to the audience were the cover artworks produced during the period where editors worked out that putting a pretty woman on the cover would possibly sell a few extra copies...

And what was the audience's reaction to all this? One notable critic (Eileen *Weston*) predicted at the start that the presentation would be (and I quote) "Really boring." However, so detailed and curious were many of the points that even Eileen had to admit her error on this part by the end! I am, sure I will not be alone in having been extremely impressed, not only be the subject matter itself but also by Peter's obvious total command of the subject. By the end of the presentation it was clear that all had gained a great deal and thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the process! So here's looking forward to the next time Peter volunteers to step in and entertain us... DC

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Christmas Social will once again be held at the Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak. where we have hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00 to 11.00pm on Friday 1st December. **PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE FROM THE USUAL SECOND FRIDAY.**

Tickets are £10 each which covers the cost of the Skittle Alley and the food but not your drinks (we have our own Bar). There will be prizes for individual games – you don't have to know how to play skittles because we have our own variants of the game designed to give everyone a chance, none of which would be allowed at Competition or any other level. There will be a free half hourly raffle, crackers and, to judge by comments after the last two last year's Socials, a good time to be had by all.

IF YOU REQUIRE A TICKET, SEND YOUR £10 PER PERSON TO VICKY, OUR SECRETARY, AT THE ADDRESS ON THE BACK PAGE. YOU WILL THEN BE SENT A MENU FOR YOU TO PRIORITISE YOUR CHOICES, PLUS FULL DETAILS OF THE EVENT.

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Charles L Grant** (b 1942) died of a heart attack in his home on Friday evening, September 15th. Following 2½ years of hospital care, he return to his New Jersey home 10 days earlier, to pass away at home with his family rather than in a hospital. Grant was a writer and editor. Although best known for dark fantasy and horror, he wrote over 100 books and 200 short stories in several genres and using several pseudonyms, including: Felicia Andrews, Lionel Fenn, Simon Lake, Deborah Lewis and Geoffrey Marsh. A former officer and the first Executive Secretary of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Grant received SFWA's Nebula Awards for "A Crowd of Shadows" and "A Glow of Candles, a Unicorn's Eye." His work was nominated for over 20 other awards and he received 3 World Fantasy Awards, the British Fantasy Society's Special Award for life achievement, Horror Writers Association's Lifetime Achievement Award and the World Horror Convention's Grandmaster Award **John M Ford** (b 1957) died September 24th from as yet unknown causes though he had been in poor health for many years. Known for his originality, Ford was the author of THE DRAGON WAITING (1983) a fantasy involving vampires, Edward IV and Richard III that won the World Fantasy Award; GROWING UP WEIGHTLESS (1993) which won the Philip K Dick Award and two very different STAR TREK novels, FINAL REFLECTION and HOW MUCH FOR JUST THE PLANET? which concentrated on a small group of Klingons and relegated the main Trek characters to cameo appearances Congratulations to **Brian Aldiss** - BROTHERS OF THE HEAD, based on his story of the same name, won the Michael Powell award for best new British feature film on August 26th. The story follows twins Tom and Barry Howe as they rise to fame in the world of rock music in the 1970s This year's Sunburst Award winner, for an SF novel or book-length collection by a Canadian writer, is **Holly Phillips'** IN THE PALACE OF REPOSE, published last year by Prime Books Joining other one-off fan funds this year is the Get Harry Fund to send **Harry Bell** from England to Austin, Texas for Corflu Quire in February 2007. The website explaining the fund is located at <http://www.cosmicminds.net/> **Ken MacLeod**, Guest of Honour at this year's NOVACON (BE THERE!) has handed in his latest novel THE EXECUTION CHANNEL, to Tor in the USA and Orbit here in the UK **Frederik Pohl**, 86, will complete THE LAST THEOREM, started by **Arthur C Clarke**, 88, which was sold to Ballantine and Gollancz in 2003.... Last year's NOVACON Guest of Honour, **Alastair Reynolds** has a new book out in the USA – ZIMA BLUE AND OTHER STORIES, from Night Shade Books. His new novel, GALACTIC NORTH, is out from Gollancz this month Just out in the USA is VARIABLE STAR by **Robert A Heinlein** and **Spider Robinson** Lois McMaster Bujold has just sold a new *Vorkosigan* novel to Baen (title unknown) The US Postal Service has issued a series of first-class stamps depicting **DC Comics characters** – Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, etc. Half of the 20 stamp set show characters and the other half show classic comic covers. A set featuring Marvel Comics

characters will be issued in 2007 **Dwarf Planet 2003UB313**, previously nicknamed Xena, has been given a new, official name. The dwarf planet, which is believed to be larger than Pluto, will be named **Eris**, after the Greek personification of Discord. Eris' moon, previously known by the nickname Gabrielle, is now known officially as **Dysnomia**, who was Eris' daughter and which translates as Lawlessness <<and the actress who played Xena was Lucy Lawless! Hmmm? Neat – RGP>>.... **Christopher Tolkien**, son of the late **J R R Tolkien**, author of THE LORD OF THE RINGS, THE HOBBIT and other books set in his mythical *Middle Earth*, spent the last 30 years editing an abandoned tale of his father's called “The Children of Húrin”. Although it has appeared in excerpt form in other books, it is now being released as its own novel. The story refers to the tragic tales of the descendants of Húrin, a captive of Morgoth. In particular, his son Túrin and daughter Nienor, in a story with Elves, Dwarves, and even a dragon (Glaurung, Father of Dragons). The book is set to be published in the Spring of 2007 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

***FLIGHT OF THE NIGHTHAWKS* by Raymond E Feist**
Voyager / 400pgs / £6.99 / paperback
Reviewed by Vicky Cook
Star rating: * * *

This is a complex book in some ways, full of ideas and characters – and it can take some thought to get your head around it. It features a powerful mage and his sons fighting to keep peace as their enemies seek to thwart this, especially the evil Leso Varen. Kasper, Talwin and Amafi are three ordered by Magnus to find out the conspirators against the emperor. But as they soon discover, the royal house contains those already bound to Varen's service.

The book revisits the land of Kesh, which the author has already described in books such as the Riftwar saga. This point was rather lost on me since I had never read a Feist book before. I liked the family theme – Magnus is shown sending his sons into danger and often regretting this although it is necessary. The family bonds are shown strong and clear and I appreciated the sense of realism this brings to the story. There is some good repartee and scripting, the book flows well and does not come across stilted. There is a lot to follow in this book, so I found it had to be read carefully, or I would miss an important bit of plot! This could work against the book as the number of action scenes and complex plotting could prove too demanding for the reader looking

for some light entertainment. I was mostly fairly satisfied though with this. I did however find the characters ultimately were not very memorable – a couple of weeks after reading the book, I am finding it hard to remember some of the more important ones. This is my main criticism of the book, despite the excellent use of action sequences, and my favourite part, the family bonding. *VC*

***HOUSE OF STORMS* by Ian R MacLeod**
Simon & Schuster / 464pp / £6.99 / paperback
Reviewed by Vicky Cook
Star rating: * * * *

I was thoroughly impressed with this book. I found it a little strange at first – from the cover and blurb on the back (GORMENGHAST-comparisons) I assumed I would be entering a different world, but indeed the one in the book is strikingly identical to the one we know. The only thing different is that aether – a magical element – has taken over the world (described in his first book *THE LIGHT AGES*), and the world is stuck in a Victorian-type era. In this world dwell Alice Meynell, ruthless great grandmistress of the Guild of Transporters, and her son Ralph. There are two halves to this book – Ralph growing up on a huge estate near Bristol, and then him finding health and love. The second half to me was less appealing – it featured strongly a civil war and nasty associations with that. He brings out the ‘Chosen’ in this half – those overcome and changed by aether. This part is how war changes the world.

The book is firmly set in English soil and likeably so. The south-west and Bristol are especially strongly featured and this was interesting for me., who has never been to Bristol. I started to feel like it would be familiar should I visit in the future. The character are well-drawn particularly Alice. You can really feel the pains and troubles they go through during the course of events. Alice is cunning and manipulative but displays a touching love for her son, and this fleshes her out into more of a three-dimensional character rather than just a stereotypical bad guy. This big book was read through very quickly as a result of Ian’s writing style. His is a different but fascinating world based on our own.

In fact his ideas are such that it is almost too much to take in at once, but I have been converted and will now look for *THE LIGHT AGES* to catch up on what went before, the take-over by aether which is referred to in the *HOUSE OF STORMS*; but not too tantalisingly, so that one feels one should have read them in the correct order - to my mind this ‘sequel’ of sorts is enough of a stand-alone book, especially as Ian has focused on different characters to those in his first book. All in all an excellent read. *VC*

***RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA* by Arthur C Clarke**

Gollancz SF Masterworks / 252pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Vicky Cook

Star rating: * * * * *

A classic indeed, this stands head and shoulders above everything else I have read recently. Rama is a mysterious vessel apparently heading towards the Sun, for what reason nobody seems able to answer. The populations of the civilized planets, and their chiefs have many a discussion about this, but eventually as it draws closer, a taskforce is dispatched to investigate and get inside it. What they find there is beyond their imaginations...

Beautifully descriptive narrative, by the end of the book I really felt a rapport with this strange alien colossal vessel. Clarke, by way of his exploring astronauts, brings the world to life for the reader, and who can forget the soaring stairways and upside down oceans? I found the mysterious South Pole harder to envisage – with all the spikes and lightning conducting going on, but this was the obviously alien side to the world, and it is a shame this was not explored further in this book.

It is of course not just about description, the sudden action sequences (with storms, hurricanes, extreme heat as well as human interventions) are enthralling and exciting, and a welcome change from the descriptions. Clarke is a master of narrative, knowing when to give the reader a break and when to keep them enchanted. The characters are well drawn too, for the most part, without delving too much into their lives back at home, we are led to feel we know them and can thus empathise with them.

The world itself is never fully explained though hints are given as to what it could be for. This maintains some mystery about it, but is ultimately frustrating – or maybe I just like loose ends to be tied up. I believe there is a sequel to this book which I have yet to read, so maybe it is a deliberate ploy on the writer's part, who knows. An excellent book anyway, full of suspense, action, sadness, wonder.

VC

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm 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:-

19th October - tba

The 17th Paperback and Pulp Bookfair at Victoria Park Plaza Hotel, Vauxhall Bridge Road near London Victoria Station. Sun 15 Oct 2006, 10-4, 30+ booktables (tables £45 each), entry £2.50. Thousands of secondhand and

collectable Crime, Mystery, SF, Fantasy, Horror, War, Western & Adventure paperbacks, pulps and hardcovers. With many attending authors and book cover artists..

**NOVACON 36 – the BSFG’s own convention will again be held at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, Nr Birmingham – Nov 10th to 12th. 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

November 3rd – **QUIZ** versus our guests – the Birmingham University Sci-Fi and Fantasy Society.

December 1st – **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**

January 2007 – **Annual General Meeting**

February – tba

March – SF author **JUSTINA ROBSON**

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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