

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

DECEMBER 2006

ISSUE 423

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

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Friday 1st DECEMBER

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Christmas – a time to party – and the Brum Group and our guests from the Birmingham University Group will do just that! As in the past few years, we're having our Christmas Party/Social ONE WEEK EARLIER than the usual second Friday of the month. And once again we're skittling. We're starting your Christmas festivities on December 1st. This year's Christmas Social will 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. To get there take a 45 or 47 bus from Corporation Street. Ask for Selly Park Tavern – it's about 15 minutes ride.

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 we're sure a good time will be had by all. Hopefully you've purchased your ticket – if not, it's now too late. BUT - you can always ring me NOW on 477 6901 to see if there are any cancellations/spare tickets available..

RGP

**JANUARY 13th 2007 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
and election of 2007 committee – committee
requirements in this issue....**

RON BENNETT DEAD AT 73

Book and comic dealer Ron Bennett died November 5th after being diagnosed with leukaemia a short four weeks earlier. Ron edited the SF newsletter SKYRACK for many years – all 96 issues were posted on the internet shortly before his death – see <http://www.gostak.co.uk/skyrack/index.htm>. When I attended my first con in 1964, Ron was the organiser of the Saturday night brag/poker sessions and over the 40 years that I knew him we got together more often as the years went by. In recent years we had dinner together at least once at every convention – at Worldcon in Glasgow last year, we dined out together every night. Little did I realise it was to be the last time we would meet.

Both of us were book dealers, both of us sold through ebay. I wish I had kept all the emails from him telling me of his hilarious ebay experiences. With his dry wit he reported the ‘idiots’ he encountered and many times had me creased up with laughter. I will certainly miss him. A good friend – gone. *RGP*

CONVOY CANCELLED

Convoy, the 2007 Eastercon, has announced that because the con cannot be held at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, as originally scheduled, it will be cancelled. Beginning in December, all memberships will be reimbursed. At Novacon 36, a ‘bid’ was put forward by Chris O’Shea to organise a small Eastercon as a replacement – Contemplation 2007 is the name.- see their website at www.contemplation.com

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Jan 2007

NOW is the time to be thinking about the Group’s activities during the forthcoming year. At next month’s AGM the 2006 Committee will stand down and elections will be held to elect the 2007 Committee. Not all the present committee members are standing for re-election, so if you want to do your bit and are interested in standing for any of the posts please read the following ‘Job Descriptions’ and email the Committee for more information and details of current Committee activities.

GENERAL DUTIES (and a requirement)

To organise BSFG Meetings throughout the year.

To attend monthly Committee meetings in the City Centre, usually on the Tuesday evening of the week preceding the week in which the Group Meeting is held.

To assist other Committee members in their duties as necessary.

To present a report at the AGM.

To have email access at home.

OFFICERS’ DUTIES

CHAIRMAN

To chair Committee meetings and present a report as necessary.

To chair Group Meetings, introduce and thank the Speaker.

To negotiate with hotels and other organisations on behalf of the Group.

To organise, prepare and supervise the annual Christmas Social.

To liaise with the Secretary in arranging the Committee meeting agenda.

SECRETARY

To communicate with Speakers on behalf of the Committee.

To communicate with other persons and organisations on behalf of the Committee.

To present a report at Committee meetings.

To take and circulate ASAP Minutes of Committee meetings.

TREASURER

To maintain the current BSFG Bank Account.

To attend Group Meetings, arriving early and ensuring that the Meeting room is prepared for Group use.

To collect admission money etc at Group Meetings.

To liaise with the Membership Secretary about collection of membership fees etc.

To present a detailed current Financial Report at Committee meetings.

To present an Annual Financial Report at the AGM.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY (This post and the post of Secretary are held by one person)

To maintain BSFG Membership records.

To organise the collection of membership subscriptions, renewals etc.

To liaise with the Treasurer as necessary.

To present a report on current membership numbers at Committee meetings.

PUBLICITY OFFICER

To advertise the BSFG by all means possible.

To present a report at Committee meetings.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

To maintain contact with sources of potential information for the Group Newsletter.

To edit and produce master copy ready for printing.

To organise printing of the Newsletter, and to distribute it, to a specific timescale.

To liaise with book publishers for review copies.

To present a report at Committee meetings as necessary.

ORDINARY MEMBERS – one of whom will automatically be...

WEBSITE MANAGER

To maintain the BSFG Website to an agreed format and to update it as necessary.

To present a report at Committee meetings.

The other ORDINARY MEMBER

To take on specific special jobs as directed by the rest of the committee.

To contribute to the efficient functioning of the Committee.

LET'S HAVE SOME NEW BLOOD ON THE COMMITTEE.....!!!

WORLD FANTASY AWARDS

The World Fantasy Award winners were announced at a banquet at the World Fantasy Convention in Austin, Texas on November 4, 2006.

Novel: KAFKA ON THE SHORE by Haruki Murakami

Novella: "Voluntary Committal" by Joe Hill

Short Fiction: "CommComm" by George Saunders

Anthology: THE FAIR FOLK ed. Marvin Kaye

Collection: THE KEYHOLE OPERA by Bruce Holland Rogers

Artist: James Jean

Special Award: Professional: Sean Wallace for Prime Books

Special Award: Non-Professional: David Howe and Stephen Walker for Telos Books

Lifetime Achievement: Stephen Fabian and John Crowley

...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS'

From member Robert Day – “A comment on Vicky's reviews in the last Newsletter... Re. CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY; there was much in this to enjoy. The first half-hour or so is a stunning neo-Marxist critique of globalisation and the evils of unbridled capitalism as Willy Wonka fires all his workers to replace them with immigrant slave labour. Then, when Charlie wins the competition, the film changes completely as we see Johnny Depp's masterful portrayal of Michael Jackson... - no, that's surely wrong - I think....

“The vile kids and their equally vile parents get exactly what they deserve, and it always teeters on the verge of something truly horrific - well, this is a Tim Burton film, after all. The ending of the film is a great improvement on the 1970s film with Gene Wilder, as the happy ending isn't saccharine in any way.

“Criticisms? Well, there's a couple of places where the CGI is less than flawless (a couple of very obvious back projections which look about as well done as they were in the 1950s, rather than invisible as they should be in the 21st century). The actual setting, whilst it is supposed to be Anytown in Anyland, comes out wrong because the scene looks, to British eyes, almost but not quite like the industrial North of England. The houses have the wrong proportions, and details of the setting jar. And it is an appalling act of cultural imperialism to have all these fine British actors mouthing alien words like ‘candy’. (In the same way that V FOR VENDETTA stumbled badly when, right at the end, a British detective told Natalie Portman to “Let go of that lever.”

“But on the other hand, the chocolate factory is a glorious piece of 1930s Art Deco megalomania straight out of Alexander Korda's THINGS TO COME, and the Oopma-Loompa - just the one, digitally multiplied - started out as a surprise and ended up challenging Depp for the star role! The songs were also a pleasant surprise - not a cringe in any one of them.

“In my book, probably the most enjoyable film I've seen in the past year in terms of pure entertainment!”

A 'THANK YOU' TO DAVE HARDY

The committee would like to thank Dave Hardy for his kind and generous donation to the Group of a printer, which will now help us to print the newsletter each month, hopefully at a greatly reduced cost. Now all I have to do is find which buttons to press! (which one makes the coffee?).

CHRISTMAS PUZZLE

Something to ponder on while you've nothing to do over Christmas - how many science fiction books (not short stories) can you name containing a place on earth? The specific place (country, city, town, region, ocean, sea, mountain, desert, etc.), must be real, not fictional. Each place can be used once only and you can use different forms of the place – i.e., if we were outside the SF genre, *THE FRENCH CONNECTION* would be allowed for France but you can't use 'France' as well (one or the other but not both). Earth itself, or other names (Terra, World) cannot be used. The author's name must be stated also. To start you off – *THE ENGLISH ASSASSIN* (Michael Moorcock).

Email your answers to rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk or snail mail to 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL. Answers to be with me by midnight, January 4th. The person with the most correct answers will be the winner of a bottle of wine.

Answers to TWENTY QUESTIONS (Nov Newsletter)

- 1 Gentry Lee 2 Kindred 3 DUNE by Frank Herbert
- 4 C M Kornbluth (published in the USA as NOT THIS AUGUST)
- 5 Ken MacLeod 6 MONKEY PLANET by Pierre Boulle
- 7 Kevin Costner 8 New England Science Fiction Association
- 9 All had stories used in, or written for, the original STAR TREK series.
- 10 ANOTHER FLIP FOR DOMINICK 11 No 6 12 Cheryl Ladd
- 13 Jack Vance's *Alastor* series - TRULLION: ALASTOR 2262, MARUNE: ALASTOR 933, AND WYST: ALASTOR 1716 14 Harry Harrison
- 15 HOT WIRELESS SETS, ASPIRIN TABLETS, THE SANDPAPER SIDES OF USED MATCHBOXES, AND SOMETHING THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN CASTOR OIL
- 16 Dave Langford 17 SPIN by Robert Charles Wilson
- 18 Robert A Heinlein *THE ROLLING STONES* (retitled in UK as SPACE FAMILY STONE)
- 19 Ian M Banks 20 Spider Robinson

Disappointingly, only one person entered this month – Wendell Wagner, our one USA member, who scored 18 out of 20. You get the prize Wendell – a free pint at the Christmas Social...!!!!

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Nigel Kneale** (b 1922) died October 29th. He was primarily known as the creator of the *Quatermass* serials on BBC TV, filmed for the big screen by Hammer Films, but was also responsible for the BBC's adaptation in the 1950s of Orwell's NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR and his 60s play YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS. See more on the Hammer Films website –

http://www.hammerfilms.com/features/tributes/nigel_kneale.html Author **Nelson S. Bond** (b.1908) died on November 4. He died following complications from heart valve problems. He began publishing science fiction in 1937 with the story "Down the Dimensions" in *Astounding*. His first novel, *EXILES OF TIME*, appeared in 1949 Grand Master and past Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America President, **Jack Williamson** (b.1908) died on November 10. Born in 1908 in Arizona, Jack Williamson's family brought him to New Mexico by covered wagon in 1915. Williamson's first published short story, "The Metal Men" was published in *Amazing* in 1928, and he has published stories or novels in every decade since then, with his most recent novel being *THE STONEHENGE GATE* in 2005. His writing runs the gamut of the field, including such seminal works as the *LEGION OF SPACE*, *DARKER THAN YOU THINK*, *THE HUMANOIDS*, and several collaborations with Frederik Pohl. Co-author of the *Illuminatus* books, **Robert Anton Wilson**, is dying from post-polio syndrome. In October it was revealed that his finances were low and he would not be able to pay his rent for more than another month. Within a few days, Wilson received over \$68,000 in donations, enough to let him live out his remaining days in comfort. Now, that's the kind of action that makes me proud to be part of the SF community! **Orson Scott Card**'s new novel, *EMPIRE*, is published in the USA on November 28th, and is a disturbing look at a second Civil War A 250,000 word collection of short stories by **Connie Willis** has been sold to Subterranean Press **William Gibson** has delivered *SPOOK COUNTRY* to Viking Penguin in the USA **Alastair Reynolds** has delivered his new *Revelation Space* novel *THE PREFECT* to Gollancz **Mike Ashley** has turned in *GATEWAYS TO FOREVER*, the third volume in his *History of the SF Magazines* to Liverpool University Press. As the 70s were so complicated, a 4th volume, *THE ETERNAL CHRONICLES*, is now planned **Terry Gilliam** has optioned *GOOD OMENS* from **Terry Pratchett** and **Neil Gaiman** for one groat (the agents will be paid in farthings) Veteran author **E C 'Ted' Tubb** has sold a new novel, *DEAD WEIGHT* plus reprints of *DEATH IS A DREAM* and *MOON BASE*, through agent **Phil Harbottle**, to publisher F A Thorpe Harbottle has also sold *THE MASTER MUST DIE* and *THE LONELY ASTRONOMER* by – ee gad! – **John Russell Fearn** to the same publisher. Er? Now if the publisher's third name started with an N, we'd have F A N Thorpe. Lionel, please don't tell us you've gone back into publishing after your *very* successful *BLACK LINO*???? I tell you, this world gets stranger and stranger Christie's New York *STAR TREK* memorabilia auction, expected to raise \$3 million, finally totalled \$7.1 million, with a replica of the *Enterprise-D* from *NEXT GENERATION* selling for \$576,000, a model of *Enterprise-E* for \$120,000 and a model of a Borg cube ship went for \$96,000. Over 20 years ago, I said that *STAR TREK* fans had more money than sense. These prices put that statement into a whole new ballgame. They're f**kin' NUTS!"

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

***RESPLENDENT* by Stephen Baxter**

(Destiny's Children Book Four)

Gollancz / 548 pgs / £18.99 hardback £12.99 trade paperback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Star rating: * * * *

Baxter's fourth short story collection is announced as the latest *Destiny's Children* volume, thus concluding another massive four-part trilogy. More than that, it continues the process of tying the series to previous books including *TIMELIKE INFINITY* and *VACUUM DIAGRAMS* in a million-year history of mankind's war for supremacy over the alien Xeelee – a war which ends with defeat snatched from the jaws of victory. Not, however, a complete history – it would surely require dozens, if not hundreds, of volumes to cover such an immense span of time. Instead, a series of snapshots is provided, briefly illuminating various events some of which seem more significant or important than others. The stories range from straightforward action to weird metaphysics and cover a wide range of themes such as contact with alien lifeforms, super-tech, epic space war, genetics, virtual reality and immortality - all subject to typical human weaknesses and failings.

However, the people involved seem for the most part to be lost, submerged beneath the technical requirements of the situations in which they find themselves. There is a sketchy framework of comments to link the stories together, ostensibly provided by one Luru Parz, an immortal who appears in the first and last stories but scarcely at all elsewhere, and it is hinted that she has guided the progress of human history throughout. Apart from her, however, there are hardly any memorable characters to stand out or to be recalled as the architects of great events. In fact, reading between the lines, it becomes apparent that in the far future individuality has had to be ruthlessly suppressed, human beings becoming little more than a resource to be used as required to promulgate the millennia-long wars which have to be won if humankind is to achieve anything resembling survival. And for what?

Taken as a whole, this *Destiny's Children* series seems bitty and disjointed. In part, this may be due to the fact that such an enormous span of time cannot be covered other than by viewing little fragments here and there, but even so it lacks a sense of cohesion – there is no single continuous thread which one can readily follow from beginning to end. This lack of structure is also apparent in this volume: with the exception of the last story in the book, written to complete the

collection, these stories were variously published over a six-year period and although they have been revised for this publication it still shows.

This is, nonetheless, quite an impressive collection, hard technical SF at its best, and I have no hesitation in recommending it. Mj

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:-

December 14th - THIGMOO by Eugene Byrne

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

December 1st – **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**

January 12th 2007 – **Annual General Meeting**

February 9th – SF/Fantasy author **ROBERT HOLDSTOCK**

March 9th – 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