

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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ISSUE 424

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

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

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Friday 12th January

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

followed by an AUCTION

A Happy New Year to all our members from the whole of the committee. We trust that the new year will be as good as the one you wish yourself.

January is traditionally the month we hold our Annual General Meeting – please note it is the 12th and not the 13th as stated in the December newsletter. We have a very strange Calendar on the wall here which runs from Monday to Sunday instead of the usual Sunday to Saturday. Every time I need a date in a hurry, I get caught out. Curse these designers who do things ‘just to be different’!

Full details of the proceedings of the AGM were included in the December newsletter so I trust you’ve all had time to peruse at length and decide which of the committee posts you’d love to stand for.

The AGM should be over very quickly and we can get on with the main

FEBRUARY 9th 2007 – author and fan Robert Holdstock will be visiting the Group to coincide with publication of his new book...

event of the evening – the Auction. Last year we had so much stuff donated (thank you, everyone) that we didn't get to sell everything, so we already have some items to start with.

That doesn't mean that we don't need more so please donate. All the proceeds go to help the running of the Brum Group – without the money raised from auctions we'd most likely have to increase the membership fees. So please bring a few items with you – books, magazines, fanzines, artwork, posters, videos DVDs, CDs, etc. 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.

NOVACON 37 UPDATE

Thanks in no small part to the success of Novacon 36, next year's event has got off to a flying start. We already had more than eighty members by early December, and the launch of our new website at www.novacon.org should keep the ball rolling until our first progress report appears in February.

We're particularly pleased Charles Stross was able to accept our invitation to become Novacon 37's Guest of Honour. Not only is Charlie one of the most successful British writers active in the SF and fantasy genres, he's also a regular on the UK fan scene (including Novacon); as such, he reflects the twin pro / fan nature of the Brum Group's annual convention.

Membership costs £35.00, which covers admission and all publications (including a numbered, limited-edition chapbook by Charles Stross). Cheques should be made out to "Novacon 37" and sent to 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail me at ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk.)

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the brave fools who've agreed to serve on this year's committee: Kevin Clarke (Internet), Vicky Cook (programme co-ordinator), Ann Green (secretary), Alice Lawson (treasurer) and Steve Lawson (registrations). In addition, Chris Murphy will be running the Ops Room and Mark Plummer will be looking after our dealers' room.

Curiously, there remain a few Brum Group members who've yet to join us at a Novacon. Why not check out our website and see what you've been missing?

-- Steve Green (chair & publications)

CONTEMPLATION HAS A HOTEL!

Last month we reported that Convoy, the 2007 Eastercon had been cancelled and that Chris O'Shea had volunteered to run a replacement –

Contemplation – IF a hotel could be found at such short notice. We're pleased to announce that a hotel has been found and that Contemplation will be held over the Easter weekend (6th to 9th April) in the beautiful, historic Chester - see the website at - <http://contemplation.conventions.org.uk/> - and NOT the address given last month. Apparently that was the address for some monks' retreat where one can go and contemplate!!! Oooops! Hotel booking forms will be available online Any Day Now.

BAD COVERS AND BLURBS

By Dave Hardy

You see a book. The cover has the title, with a very broadly-painted man's face inside a space-helmet and a yellow, pointy rocket taking off on a plume of fire. It also has text saying 'Science Fiction', circled, and 'Science-Fiction at its most fantastic and terrifying!'

The back cover has the title, and then: "At ten-thirty in the morning the sky over London was clear. Then an arrow formation of five bright points became visible.... The lights descend, and eventually reveal themselves as: Giant saucers, smooth and lustrous and blinding, more than a hundred yards in diameter. They hung over the city in neat formation." And that's all. The back cover blurb is repeated on the first page.

So what we have here is a novel about alien spaceships visiting Earth, right? Wrong. In fact what we find is a book of short stories, very few of which are SF, and most aren't even vaguely science fictional or fantasy in any form. It's certainly not 'fantastic' and definitely not 'terrifying'. There is no table of contents (though it could be missing).

There is a story called "When the Saucers Came", and one, "The First Martian", which has a spaceship landing 'gently on its tail of flame'. But most of the stories are gentle, poetic and evocative essays, several of them about young boys living their lives or moving into manhood in that golden, eternal summer of memory – reminding me very much of some of Ray Bradbury's work. There are fascinating glimpses of the sort of future envisioned for us back in 1960, none of which bear any relation to ours.

The book described is VOICES IN THE DARK by Edmund Cooper (Digit 1960). I bought it because I happen to have enjoyed a lot of Cooper's work. (And he did once come to the Brum Group; what a character!)

It's actually quite well worth reading - if you can find a copy (well, it *is* 47 years old - maybe I'll sell you mine!); but what a pity that the packaging is so far removed from the contents. It must have lost this book a lot of readers. . .

This book probably has the most misleading cover and blurb that I have seen. Perhaps other members might like to send in their own nominations – ?

DAH

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

For those interested in pulp cover art and specifically the covers of ASTOUNDING/ANALOG, please see this site which includes all the covers up to 2006 - <http://www.sfcovers.net/Magazines/ASF/navbar.htm> - this includes several covers by our very own David A Hardy.

JANUARY QUIZ

- 1 Iain Banks made his debut with which novel?
- 2 The film FORBIDDEN PLANET is loosely based upon which play by Shakespeare?
- 3 Name Dan Dare's spacecraft.
- 4 Who wrote the *Atlan* novels?
- 5 The spy organisation WIN (World Intelligence Network) featured in which 1960s tv series?
- 6 Which British SF magazine is due to celebrate its twenty-fifth birthday this summer?
- 7 Psychohistory is the central scientific principle in which series of novels by Isaac Asimov?
- 8 Which fantasy novelist was raised from his grave in the 1971 *Gas-s-s-s*?
- 9 Name the writer, critic and Brum Group member who was a runner-up in the 1974 Gollancz / Sunday Times Science Fiction Competition?
- 10 Which graphic novel by Raymond Briggs depicts a Britain devastated by nuclear war?
- 11 What was James Kirk's rank in Star Fleet at the time of his death?
- 12 Name the national leader who predicted a war between Britain and the United States, as well as German becoming the global language.

THE CHRISTMAS PUZZLE – THE RESULT?

As I write this, there are still two days to go to the deadline for entries. I'm somewhat disappointed in the response so far as the biggest number of titles submitted is a mere 36 (and some of those will not be allowed as they are fantasy, horror or non-genre titles). When I conceived this puzzle I thought someone would come in with a three-figure entry. But there's still time...

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... UK author's agent **Maggie Noach** died of a heart attack while in hospital on November 17th, aged 57. She represented many SF authors including **Brian Aldiss**, **Stephen Baxter**, **Storm Constantine**, **Mary Gentle**, **David Langford** and **Geoff Ryman** Author **Sydney J Bounds** died of cancer on November 24th aged 86. He was a prolific author who wrote SF, fantasy, horror, westerns, adventure and children's books. His SF novels included THE MOON RAIDERS (1955), THE WORLD WRECKER (1956) and THE ROBOT

BRAINS (1957) Author, critic and anthropologist **Leon Stover** died from complications connected with diabetes on November 25th, aged 77. He was primarily known in the SF world as the co-author of STONEHENGE and co-editor of APEMAN, SPACEMAN, both with **Harry Harrison**, and for being an expert on **H G Wells**, editing nine volumes of THE ANNOTATED H G WELLS Critically-acclaimed novelist **Deborah J Miller** has accepted an invitation to join The Write Fantastic collective of UK fantasy authors already consisting of **Sarah Ash, James Barclay, Chaz Brenchley, Mark Chadbourn, Juliet McKenna** and **Stan Nicholls** **James Gunn** has been named the newest Damon Knight Memorial Award Grand Master by SFWA, the 24th author so honoured **D G Compton** has been selected as Author Emeritus (for considerable contributions to the SF field) at the Nebula Awards. His best-known novels are THE CONTINUOUS CATHERINE MORTENHOE and the Nebula Award-nominated THE STEEL CROCODILE Voyager Publishing Director, **Jane Johnson** has bought THE SHADOW TWIN: by **George R R Martin, Gardner Dozois** and **Daniel Abraham** – ‘a spectacularly good, clever, sharp, funny, iconic and ultimately classic story’. Encapsulated in this short SF morality tale is the answer to the very large question: what makes us human? THE **JACK VANCE** TREASURY is now available from Subterranean Press in the USA. Over 230,000 words containing the very best of his mid-length and shorter works Also available from Subterranean is THE COLLECTED STORIES OF **ROBERT SILVERBERG**, Volume 1 - TO BE CONTINUED. Beginning with his first sale “Gorgon Planet” it collects 24 of his stories from the first 5 years of his career (1953-1958) **Philip K Dick**’s final unpublished novel, VOICES FROM THE STREET, out in January from Tor (hardcover) – a novel of depression and madness set in 1950s California A group of letters by **H P Lovecraft** sold in auction at Sotheby’s for \$48,000 and an autographed manuscript of “The Shunned House” went for \$45,000 J Boylston & Company has acquired the companies owned by the late **Byron Preiss** including the SF imprint iBooks And finally, an update on an item reported here several months ago concerning vanity publishing and scam agenting - On Thursday, November 29, 2006, in Syracuse, New York, **Martha Ivery**, aka **Kelly O'Donnell**, dba Press-Tige Publishing and New Millennium Publishing, was sentenced to 65 months in Federal prison, plus 3 years' probation. In December 2005, she had pleaded guilty to all counts of a 17-count indictment. Ivery will be required to pay restitution to her victims, starting immediately, at the rate of 10% of everything she earns or \$100 per month, whichever is greater. Since the total restitution amount is \$728,248.10 (representing her ‘take’ from nearly 300 victims), this is more symbolic than anything else. She must also pay court costs of \$1,700, and will be required to get mental health and substance abuse counselling. She will report to jail on January 9, 2007... Beware, you new/would-be authors!

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*

***RAINBOW BRIDGE* by Gwyneth Jones**

Gollancz / 374pgs / £12.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star rating: * * * *

Gwyneth Jones started this series with the proposition that the revolution did take place and that musicians were at the heart of it. The first volume, **BOLD AS LOVE**, began at a Reading festival, a meeting of musicians and mystics. Civilization in Britain collapsed dramatically when a virulent virus infected the internet and the rest of the world cut off the island to protect itself. Isolated, the revolution happened. Three musicians end up ruling the Rock and Roll Reich – Fiorinder Slater, Ax Preston and Sage Pender – with Ax elected President of Britain. This Triumvirate is able to survive everything thrown at them because of the love that binds them. It is not just the men’s love for Fiorinder but for each other that gives them their strength.

Throughout the series, disasters have beset Britain. At the end of the third volume, **MIDNIGHT LAMP**, a secret project in the United States went drastically wrong, resulting in the destruction of all of the world’s fossil fuels. Then at the end of **BAND OF GYPSYS** (volume 4), the Chinese invaded.

RAINBOW BRIDGE is the fifth in the sequence. The Chinese are canny. They have observed the effect music has on the populace and the influence the Triumvirate have wielded in holding the country together. Their conquest resembles that of the Romans two thousand years previously. They came with military superiority and showed they meant business by slaughtering and perceived opposition, real or imaginary. Everyone was aware of the mayhem they were prepared to create. Then they recruited the local leaders to help keep order. **RAINBOW BRIDGE** begins with a reprise of **BOLD AS LOVE** in that they both begin with a rock concert. After the first, at Ashdown instead of Reading, the Triumvirate go on tour. The Chinese sent them to the lawless stronghold of Rainbow Bridge in Norfolk. Initially a labour camp, the place is a fortress and the three are in effect spies as well as ambassadors. The Chinese are prepared to let most areas continue in relative normality but they do not want any pockets of insurgence.

It would be wrong to believe that the Triumvirate have become puppets of the new regime. Ax is a skilled diplomat and able to take advantage of opportunities presented. At the same time, the three are under constant threat. A number of their friends have been killed in previous episodes and it is never

certain that any of them will survive to the end of the volume. The skill of Jones as a writer is to keep the tension high with twists that will surprise the reader. Within the highly charged situations there is also the ongoing development of the relationship within the Triumvirate. Nothing must be taken for granted. Although the series is brilliantly conceived, this is probably not the place to start as the nuances of the unfolding world changes are carried through the narrative. To understand fully the shifts and subtleties it is best to start with **BOLD AS LOVE**.
PM

LIFE DURING WARTIME by Lucius Shepard

Gollancz / 418pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star rating: * * * *

LIFE DURING WARTIME has been reissued as part of the Gollancz SF Masterworks series (#66) and was originally published in 1987. The first part, “R & R” won the Nebula Award for best novella in 1986. It was a deserving winner. The story is a powerful, anti-war piece of writing. David Mingolla and two of his fellow soldiers are on a brief leave from their base in Guatemala. This part of Central America is the focus of ferocious fighting at some time in the not too far future. Like many people in stressful situations, they have developed rituals. If they deviate from the sequence, dire things will happen. If the rituals are adhered to then they will survive. Mingolla, Gilbey and Baylor arrive in a small town for a spell of R and R. At first they follow their usual patterns but the strains of being in constant battle readiness undermine the resolve to stick to the ritual of survival. Mingolla watches the foundations of his superstitions unravel. By the end of their leave the pattern is broken. One of Mingolla’s comrades has gone berserk and been hauled away into detention and the other has deserted, heading for Panama. This section achieves its power from watching the effects of war on the ordinary soldier. None of these three are older than about twenty. They are conscripts. They have no choice and no care is taken for their mental welfare. Seeing the skilful way that Shepard portrays the mindset of young combatants it is easier to appreciate some of the reasons behind the worst stories that have come out of battlefield Iraq.

The rest of the novel is written in a much less intense style. On returning to base, Mingolla volunteers for Psicorps training. It gets him out of front line combat. His first assignment, though, is to go after Debora, the woman he had met briefly on R and R. It was his encounter with her that persuaded him to join Psicorps. He is expected to kill her, but he has already fallen in love with her. Renewing the association they head towards Panama. En route, he discovers the centuries-long background to the conflict.

The plot is complex and the characters well developed. It is a book well worth reading and probably more than once to appreciate all the subtleties within it.
PM

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:-

January 18th - ABDUCTION by Robin Cook

February 15th - tba

March 15th - tba

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

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

March 9th – SF author **JUSTINA ROBSON**

April 13th – SF author **KEN MacLEOD**

May 11th – SF/Fantasy editor **PETER LAVERY** (tbc)

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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