

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2007

ISSUE 430

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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Friday 13<sup>th</sup> Jul y

ANDY LOUND

## "War of the Worlds"

We have Andy Lound as speaker this month. The title of his talk will be "War of the Worlds" and he will trace the history of the theme from H G Wells to the present. Wells could not realise that he had laid down the blueprint for a century of alien invasion stories. Andy dramatically tells the history of the famous book and subsequent incarnations with video, slides and audio. Be prepared for an invasion evening.

Andy has spoken to the group previously and because of his contacts with local radio and press can ensure that non-members will be there to hear his talk. Don't miss out !

*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.*

**August 10<sup>th</sup> – SUMMER SOCIAL – a Group meal at the Black Eagle pub. TICKET ONLY. Two spares as of July 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

## **DOUGLAS HILL**

It is with much sadness that I have to report the death of the bestselling author and editor Douglas Hill. Douglas was killed by a double-decker bus whilst crossing a zebra crossing in London, on Thursday June 21<sup>st</sup>. He was 72. The police and London Transport are still inviting witnesses to discover exactly how it happened.

The previous day he had apparently completed a new trilogy for Macmillan for which he had great hopes. He was the author of over 70 books, predominantly for younger readers.

Harry Harrison introduced me to Douglas way back at the 1965 Worldcon and we immediately hit it off and remained good friends over the ensuing years. In the late 90s I finally persuaded Douglas to come and talk to the Brum Group about his writing of SF and fantasy for younger readers. That night was a hugely successful evening.

Unfortunately I was never able to meet up with Douglas as often as I'd have liked. His commitment to his writing and his family meant he attended conventions only rarely. I'll miss him.

*RGP*

## **SUMMER/AUTUMN SOCIAL by Vernon Brown**

So, we sold all the tickets for the Autumn (or Summer if you prefer) Meal but then had two cancellations. The first two people to send their £5 deposits to Vicky (address on back page) or give them to Pat at the July Meeting will be guaranteed a place. The booking is 7.30 for 8.0pm at The Black Eagle, Factory Road on August 10<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to travel with others meet at the entrance to Snow Hill Station, Colmore Row at 7.0pm then we will go on by Metro.

If you want to go by bus catch the 74 or 79 in Bull Street. Get off at the second stop past Hockley Flyover, just before St Michaels Road on the left and Villa Road on the right - there are churches on two corners and a temple on another. Walk down St Michaels Road and keep going until you reach The Black Eagle on your right.

If you wish to get there by Metro get off at Soho Benson Road. Cross the tracks (care!) to the exit. Turn right down Benson Road until you see The Black Eagle on your left.

*VB*

## **LOCUS AWARD WINNERS**

The Locus Award winners, selected by the readership of Locus and Locus On-line, were announced on June 16.

*Best Science Fiction Novel:* RAINBOWS END by Vernor Vinge

*Best Fantasy Novel:* THE PRIVILEGE OF THE SWORD by Ellen Kushner

*Best First Novel:* TEMERAIRE: HIS MAJESTY'S DRAGON/THRONE OF JADE/BLACK POWDER by Naomi Novik

*Best Young Adult Book:* WINTERSMITH by Terry Pratchett

*Best Novella:* "Missile Gap" by Charles Stross

*Best Novelette:* "When Sysadmins Ruled the Earth" by Cory Doctorow

*Best Short Story:* "How to Talk to Girls at Parties" by Neil Gaiman  
*Best Magazine:* The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction  
*Best Publisher:* Tor  
*Best Anthology:* THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION: TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION edited by Gardner Dozois  
*Best Collection:* FRAGILE THINGS by Neil Gaiman  
*Best Editor:* Ellen Datlow  
*Best Artist:* John Picacio  
*Best Non-Fiction:* JAMES TIPTREE, JR.: THE DOUBLE LIFE OF ALICE B. SHELDON by Julie Phillips  
*Best Art Book:* Spectrum 13: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art, edited by Cathy & Arnie Fenner

## **...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 [rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) >>

*From Dave Hardy*

"I suppose you know that in Vernon's 'Autumn Meal' piece no date is given? Looking back, I see it's August 10 (is that Autumn?)... Speaking of Vernon: in his 'Phantom of the Opera' piece he writes: 'OK so its not SF but its widely considered. . .' Has he ever heard of apostrophes? (Oh yes, he must have because lower down he writes 'It's being shown. . .') But can't you, as Editor, correct it -- ?

'This is, after all, supposed to be the newsletter of a 'literary' group, innit?'"

<<Actually, the way things are going weatherwise, the August Social will be in Winter! Yes, Vernon has heard of apostrophes but omitted them in this instance. And yes, as editor, I could easily, and should have corrected it – if I'd have noticed they were missing. But even I make mistakes David.

I have to say that for you to take pen to paper (figuratively) to point out the above – nitpicking in the extreme – and not make \*any\* others comments, leaves me wondering if ... (a) I'm producing totally boring newsletters; or (b) you have too much time on your hands and should be taking over this Newsletter..... As you say you're too busy, the answer must be (a) so you'll be pleased to hear that I'm resigning and in future no apostrophes will be killed in the production of the newsletter. – RGP>>

## **MY FINAL NEWSLETTER**

I'm afraid that this will be my final newsletter. I did not want to stand this year but did, much against my better judgment, after having my arm twisted by Vernon. I now find that my interest in SF, and reading, is perhaps at its lowest for 50 years. I don't think I've read a book, SF or otherwise, in the last 4-6 months. I've simply lost the interest to read. My interests now lie elsewhere.

Hopefully someone can take over who has far more enthusiasm than I can muster – I simply feel tired after the several years I've edited this newsletter - 5 years? 6 years? I've lost count. It seems like decades.

Any volunteers? You need a computer and a reasonable knowledge of the English Language. You will have the support of an excellent team of reviewers and I'm sure that

William will continue collecting news. And I'm quite happy to help out in any way for the first issue or two. Please contact me on [rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) or Vernon on [vcbrown@btinternet.com](mailto:vcbrown@btinternet.com) if you think you'd be interested.

I'd like to thank all the people who have helped/contributed to these newsletters over the last few years – all the reviewers, article writers, letter writers, William for reliably doing his monthly search for new items and to Vernon who has taken over the actual printing and distribution of the newsletter over the last year or so. RGP

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

.... Anthologist **Roger Elwood** (b.1943) died on February 2 In Norfolk City, Virginia. Elwood created numerous anthologies and was estimated to constitute a quarter of the market for science fiction stories in the 1960s and early 1970s .... **Sterling E. Lanier**, writer, editor, and sculptor, died on June 28 in Sarasota, Florida. He was 79 years old. As an editor at Chilton Books in Philadelphia in 1965, Lanier championed the publication of **Frank Herbert's** *Dune*, which became one of the best selling science fiction novels of all time. Lanier's own books included *THE WAR FOR THE LOT* (1969), *HIERO'S JOURNEY* (1974), *MENACE UNDER MARSWOOD* (1983), and a series of novels about the strange adventures of Brigadier Donald Ffellowes .... UK fan **Dave Wood** passed away on June 5th after two years fighting cancer. Dave attended his first SF convention in 1951 and stopped in 1959 when he got married. He returned to conventions in the early 80s and was a regular attendee at Novacons where most of the Brum Group members would have met him The funeral was in Weston-super-Mare on June 18th and attending fans were Catherine & Greg Pickersgill, Peter Weston and myself. Dave was an all-round Nice Guy who will be missed by all who met him .... **Cormac McCarthy's** postapocalyptic novel *THE ROAD* (Knopf USA) received the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. **Ray Bradbury** received a special citation from the committee 'for his distinguished, prolific and deeply influential career as an unmatched author of science fiction and fantasy.' .... Winner of the 2007 **Philip K Dick Award** for Best Novel published as a paperback original was *SPIN CONTROL* by **Chris Moriarty** (Bantam USA) .... **Gregory Benford** received the Isaac Asimov Memorial Award at Lunacon for services to SF/science .... The next **Iain M Banks** novel will be a new *Culture* book, *MATTER*, due from Orbit in February 2008 .... **Peter Hamilton's** latest, *THE DREAMING VOID*, will be out here in August .... **Christopher Evans** (*THE INSIDER*, *AZTEC CENTURY*, etc.) finally has a new novel. *OMEGA* will be published by PS Publishing in October .... This month sees the publication in the US of *SLAN HUNTER* by **Kevin Anderson** and **A E van Vogt**, a sequel to van Vogt's classic *SLAN* .... **Daniel F Galouye** (*DARK UNIVERSE*, etc.) wrote far too little SF so it is most welcome to see a collection of his short fiction in hardcover, titled *THE CHILDLESS ONES*. Due from Darkside Press in August .... A new book by **John Lauritsen**, *THE MAN WHO WROTE FRANKENSTEIN*, argues that poet **Percy Bysshe Shelley**, and not his wife **Mary Shelley**, actually wrote *FRANKENSTEIN* .... **Warner Books**, after a takeover by Hachette Livre, is changing its name to Grand

Central Publishing .... The US Department of Homeland Security has called upon science fiction authors **Arlan Andrews, Greg Bear, Jerry Pournelle** and **Sage Walker** for suggestions as to how the next attack on the United States might occur. DHS has turned to SF writers after authorities were taken to task for a failure of imagination in the 9/11 Commission Report .... The producers of SciFi's **BATTLESTAR GALACTICA** have announced that the series' fourth season would be its final season. It will air in 2008 and consist of 20 hour-long episodes ....

RGP



## BOOK REVIEWS



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

RGP

### ***THE BROKEN KINGS* by Robert Holdstock**

**Gollancz / 357pgs / £14.99 / Hardcover**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**

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

Robert Holdstock understands the process of myth-making, whether it is in contemporary writing or behind the tales that have passed to us from classical times. In this 3<sup>rd</sup> novel in the *Merlin Codex* series, as well as the previous two in the series, he is interweaving accepted myths from different cultures with constructs of his own. Most people know of the stories of Jason and the Argonauts even if they are not sure of the details. They probably know that Medea, Jason's wife, killed their two sons when he went off with another woman. Merlin, too, is a familiar figure, though normally associated with Arthurian myth. The setting here is before Arthur's birth but seven hundred years after Jason's time. The common factor is the man Arthur will know as Merlin. He is a wanderer who ages only slowly and only when he uses his magic. He sailed with Jason and is now advisor to Urtha, a king of Albion. Across the river from Urtha's fortress is the Otherworld, a place of both the dead and the unborn. Both these groups are threatening the world of the living.

At the heart of the problem is the wedding gift that Jason gave Medea. After seven hundred years, Jason and his ship, Argo, have been resurrected. In the previous two volumes Jason sought his sons who, he discovered Medea had actually hidden in the future. The effects of their relationship are still reverberating. To solve the situation, the principle characters need to voyage to Crete.

Three themes reoccurring in Holdstock's work permeate this novel. Along the river hostels appear as the first sign of trouble. These are portals between the worlds of the living and the Otherworld. Normally, the dead pass one way, the unborn the other. The living are not supposed to be able to cross over but the rules are breaking down. Masks are also a common phenomenon. Merlin masks himself, often as a bird when he wants to spy on others, he uses disguises to travel in the otherworld. Intentions and feelings are hidden and in the heart of Argo is the fragment of the boat Merlin first built as a child. Argo's

origins and loyalties are masked. She has deliberately hidden a betrayal to one of her past captains which has helped worsen the current situation.

Throughout the novel there are mazes and labyrinths. The most overt ones are on Crete itself where the physical maze of tunnels beneath the ground is overlaid by the twists and turns of time. The same is true in the Otherworld and Merlin needs to walk the mazes to unravel the cause from effect and gain a greater understanding of his own nature before he can help Urtha, Argo or Jason.

It is not absolutely necessary to read the other two books in the series to appreciate this one but it helps. It is the kind of book that needs to be read carefully and thoughtfully to understand even part of the contexts within it. However, there is sufficient action and pace to satisfy most readers. PM

## ***THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH***

***by Philip K Dick***

**Gollancz / 243 pages / £7.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by William McCabe**

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

Philip K Dick wrote many stories with the same ideas presented in different ways. Characters use drugs to enter some other reality in which they are not the same person. That (and other effects) often leave them doubting whether their experience is real and if they are who they believe themselves to be. Sometimes a (usually false) messiah will present himself by connecting everyone's experience. Sometimes people will join together in some other form of psychic sharing. All of these are present in this novel. Most of them are executed here better than in any other novel that Dick wrote.

You could say that this makes this novel clichéd. As this was one of his earlier novels, he hadn't used the themes so much but, you may have read other, later stories as well so this is a good point. If nothing else, the clichés were his own and not copied from someone else.

There's also the problem of the distortion of reality. Some readers may not be willing to read something that doesn't tell them definitively whether this is real or just someone's drugged dream. If you're one of those, this book isn't for you. If you can take a degree of uncertainty, this is a better choice than some of his other uses of that effect.

Once again the setting is an Earth after some great disaster. This time the sun is so powerful that most people live underground and rarely venture out in the daylight. There are now colonies on Mars. This is a place so depressing that almost all of the inhabitants are compelled to go there and everyone uses a drug to escape into a false world that they experience from the point of view of a Barbie doll. There is a great market in the production of the dolls and the accessories and a similar black market in the drug. All of these are controlled by one corporation. Then Palmer Eldritch returns from the stars with a new drug that doesn't require the dolls to complete the escape. This threatens everything for the corporation. But is Palmer Eldritch still the man that left Earth all those years ago? Is he even human? Is the new drug really what it seems to be? Maybe you will find answers to these questions. Probably not. WAM

## **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:-**

July 19th - **THE STARS MY DESTINATION - Alfred Bester**

**OUT OF THIS WORLD - The Art of Josh Kirby** will be at The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool - 15 June to 30 September 2007. Explore a colourful world teeming with other-worldly characters, creatures, fantasy cities and landscapes. Spans Kirby's artistic career from his early days as a freelance artist to his famous cover illustrations for Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* fantasy series. For more details go to <http://www.artinliverpool.com>

**THE DOCTOR WHO UP-CLOSE EXHIBITION** at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester is the largest Doctor Who exhibition in the UK. It is now open and will run till November 5th. Visitors will be able to get Up-Close to actual props, costumes and monsters from the hit BBC programme, including the Empress of Racnoss from the Christmas Special, The Runaway Bride. The exhibition coincides with the start of the new, third series starring David Tennant and Freema Agyeman and will feature exciting new items from the latest programmes once they have been seen on TV. Season Passes to Doctor Who Up-Close are only available from the Museum Information Desk. Prices are as follows: Adults £15.00, Concessions £10.00 and Family Season Ticket (4 people - max 2 adults) £35.00. More info at <http://www.msim.org.uk/index.asp?menuid=723>.

**SCI-FI SYMPHONY II: THE FINAL FRONTIER** - Friday 31 August, 7,30pm at Symphony Hall, Broad Street. Back by popular demand, Carl Davis conducts the CBSO and takes us on a fantastic journey through the greatest music ever inspired by space, science-fiction and fantasy. From John Williams' unforgettable themes for ET and Star Wars to highlights from Holst's spectacular odyssey through The Planets (and Pluto!), and whether by Thunderbird or Tardis, it's an out-of-this-world programme. Begin the count-down, engage warp-drive, and beam on board as Carl and the CBSO boldly go where no orchestra has gone before! Friday Night Classics prices apply: £8, £14.50, £20.50, £26.50, £31, £34.50, £38

**FANTASYCON 2007** The British Fantasy Society will be holding their annual Convention, FantasyCon, on 21st-23rd September 2007 at the Britannia Hotel, Nottingham. Confirmed guests to date are **Terry Brooks, Michael Marshall Smith** and **Stephen Jones**. We have over 100 guests already registered, including many genre authors and fans. This is an event where writers, media people, editors, agents and fans can get together to celebrate fantasy in all its different formats - including SF and horror. The convention is open to everybody, although BFS members do get a preferential membership rate. At FantasyCon, you can meet your favourite authors, attend book launches and listen to panels. Or, if you prefer, you can sit in the bar with friends old and new and perhaps win a prize in the acclaimed FantasyCon Raffle! One of the highlights of the event is the presentation of the British Fantasy Awards. Membership of the BFS entitles you to vote for the annual British Fantasy Awards, which are well respected

throughout the genre. For further information please see [www.fantasycon.org.uk](http://www.fantasycon.org.uk) or email [fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk](mailto:fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk)

**NOVACON 37** – the Brum Group’s own convention – will again be at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Nr Walsall, W Mids. It’s the weekend of 2-4 November and the Guest of Honour is **Charles Stross**. Registrations are currently £35. Cheques to ‘Novacon 37’, Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Email: [x15@zoom.co.uk](mailto:x15@zoom.co.uk) Website: [www.novacon37.org.uk](http://www.novacon37.org.uk) (**PLEASE NOTE NEW ADDRESS**)

**WAR OF THE WORLDS Returns** - Following a hugely successful and critically acclaimed sell-out UK tour in 2006, the award-winning Jeff Wayne’s Musical Version of THE WAR OF THE WORLDS is set to head back to The NEC Arena in December 2007. For 2007, the production will be boasting a raft of exciting new features, including new innovative technology by Californian company EON Reality who will create a new Richard Burton ‘head’. With 3D GGI photo-real holographic imagery it aims to take the replication even further than last year’s tour and to set the bar for all theatrical technology in the future. Tickets now on sale priced at £39.50 plus booking and transaction fees.

*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 BSGF***

Aug 10th – **Summer Social** – a meal at the Black Eagle

Sep 14th – the group of fantasy writers, **The Write Fantastic**, now numbering seven – **DEBORAH MILLER** has joined since their last appearance - will be visiting us.

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #430** copyright 2007 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