

BRUM GROUP NEWS

The Free Monthly Newsletter of the
Birmingham Science Fiction Group

December 2007

Issue 435

Honorary Presidents

Brian W Aldiss O.B.E. & Harry Harrison
Committee

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Novacon 37 Chairman - Steve Green

Website www.bsfg.freesevers.com Email bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 7th December

Christmas Party

Back to the Selly Park Tavern for the regular round of beer and skittles, silly games, buffet food, spot prizes, and all the other stuff that people had so much fun doing last year and the year before ... There are tickets still available until Saturday 1st December. If you haven't got yours yet, try Vicky at the email address above.

You have booked tickets to the Christmas Party.

Contact Vicky if this is incorrect.

The Selly Park Tavern is on the Pershore Road on the way out of town just past Cannon Hill Park and the Police Training Centre. The 45 & 47 buses go straight past it and you can get either one from Corporation Street.

Tickets are £10 per head and include a buffet meal—vegetarian options are available.

Next Meeting—11th January : Annual General Meeting. Time to elect the new committee, raise any points about the running of the group, and buy lots of stuff at the auction.

Andy Remic, 12th October (meeting review by Dave Corby)

The guest at the BSGF meeting on 12th October was an interesting speaker in many ways. Andy Remic is a thoroughly modern writer, currently in his 30s. In this age finding a young (and successful) SF writer is something of a rarity, it seems; Andy himself admits that his writing is influenced by his agent / publisher into genre directions not wholly 'pure' SF. Surely this is symptomatic of the plight of literary SF – that pure SF is no longer 'fashionable', with publishers preferring more saleable genres, such as crime or war.

Andy's frank talk on his start in writing, his methodologies and habits in producing the books and refreshingly un-technical forms of inspiration actually stand as a ray of light to folk like myself, who might feel that to aim to emulate great SF writers of the past (Aldiss, Asimov, etc.) seems an unbelievably lofty goal; yet here is a man who, essentially, just goes out there and writes. Sure, he has avenues of research, but for Andy the priority is clearly on telling his story, rather than worry endlessly about technical detail. And he clearly has much scope for being published! To believe in your own ability to write a decology and seem to have reasonable expectation of such being printed is surely no small feat...

Another interesting facet to this evenings' talk was the discovery that Solaris, Andy's publisher, is a Black Library (read: Games Workshop) company. Anyone who has been into Waterstone's in the last ten years can hardly have failed to notice that almost 25% of 'SF' or 'Fantasy' published seems to spin from some role-play, war game or computer game. These lines are desperately popular, and I know a number of teenagers who not touch anything else (partly out of ignorance of literary SF, but mostly because they know what they like). Andy stands with one foot in both camps; his war games-originated publisher encourages his stories' war aspect, but Andy is writing his own original backgrounds and not sub-creating under another license. Hopefully, younger generations of SF fans can be curious about Andy's writings, advertised as they are alongside GW's other lines, and from there, perhaps, wander out into the wider world of SF literature.

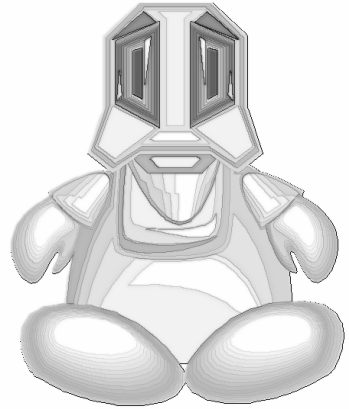
The usual crowd certainly gave Andy a good grilling with their questions, probing the depth of Andy's SF reading, the accuracy, or at least plausibility of his technical creations, and generally putting him on the spot before the combined SF might of the group. Andy bore up with a good degree of fortitude under the withering hail of questions.

In counter to this assault, Andy liberally distributed free copies of one of his volumes (alas, a second in a series of three, but free nonetheless). Any author giving out free books is alright in my humble opinion! Overall I found Andy to be friendly and approachable, unashamed of his action meets Science Fantasy approach to storytelling, and quite open about his lofty writing plans. Credit must also be given to his boisterous and clearly enthusiastic young son as well his obviously patient wife... Overall another interesting, and quite surprising evening at the BSGF.

News

Following the failure of the film of "Wonder Woman" Joss Whedon is to return to TV with a show called "Dollhouse" co-produced by and starring Eliza Dushku.

Producers of the TV show Heroes are shooting an alternate ending to the Dec. 3 (US) episode that will wrap up the second season early in the event an expected writers' strike prevents the show from continuing with new episodes.



Chris Garcia was announced as the winner of the Trans Atlantic Fan Fund. Garcia beat a field of three other contenders, including Chris Barkley, Christian MacGuire, and Linda Deneroff .

There is a new wave of 3D movies at the local cinemas. Beowulf is already running, a new version of "The Nightmare before Christmas" is due soon. You will need 3D glasses for these showings so check before you go in.

The latest "Lord of the Rings" fragment "The Children of Hurin" is to be sold as a special leather bound limited edition at £350 per copy. It's signed by Tolkien's son and the illustrator and there are only 500 of them.

Awards

2007 Nova Awards

Best Fanzine: 1. Prolapse, ed. Peter Weston (43 points); 2. Banana Wings, ed. Mark Plummer & Claire Brialey (38); 3. Tortoise, ed. Sue Jones(19); 4. iShoes, ed. Yvonne Rowse (11); 5. Plokta, ed. Steven Davies, Alison Scott & Mike Scott (9).

Best Fan Writer: 1. Mark Plummer (32 points); 2. Claire Brialey (30); 3. Peter Weston (19); 4. Yvonne Rowse (9); 5. James Bacon (8).

Best Fan Artist: 1. Alison Scott (26 points); 2. Sue Jones (19); 3. Sue Mason (17); 4. Anne Stokes (6); 5. Arthur "ATom" Thomson (6).

Best Fan (Committee Award) : Peter Weston "in recognition of his contribution to both the Brum Group and Novacon"

2007 World Fantasy Award Winners

Novel: *Soldier of Sidon* by Gene Wolfe

Novella: "Botch Town", Jeffrey Ford (*The Empire of Ice Cream*)

Short Fiction: "Journey Into the Kingdom", M. Rickert (*FSF 5/06*)

Anthology: *Salon Fantastique*, Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, eds.

Collection: *Map of Dreams*, M. Rickert

Artist: Shaun Tan

Special Award: Professional: Ellen Asher (For work at SFBC)

Special Award: Non-Professional: Gary K. Wolfe (for reviews and criticism in *Locus* and elsewhere)

Life Achievement: Betty Ballantine and Diana Wynne Jones

International Horror Guild Awards

Novel: *The Unblemished* by Conrad Williams.

Long Fiction : *Dark Harvest* by Norman Partridge

Mid Length Fiction : *The Old North Road* by Paul Finch.

Short Fiction : *The Box* by Stephen Gallagher.

Single Author Collection [TIE] *Basic Black* by Terry Dowling. *American Morons* by Glen Hirshberg.

Anthology : *Lords of the Razor* edited by William Sheehan and Bill Schafer
Periodical : *Subterranean*

Art[TIE]

Exhibits from the Imaginary Museum by Aeron Alfrey.

Cover Story: *The Art of John Picacio* by John Picacio

Living Legend : Ramsey Campbell

Obituaries

Novelist Ira Levin (b.1929) died on November 12. Levin is best known for his novels *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Boys from Brazil*, and *The Stepford Wives*, all of which were turned into successful films.

Anthologist Peter Haining (b.1940) died on November 19. Haining not only edited several anthologies of short stories, including , but also wrote several books about *Doctor Who*.

The BBC reported on 23rd November that Producer Verity Lambert had died at the age of 71. Lambert was the first woman producer at the BBC and the original producer of *Dr. Who*. She also produced one of the versions of *Quatermass*.

Reviews

THE NIGHTMARE FACTORY (based on the stories of Thomas Ligotti)

Fox Atomic Comics— 108 pages—£9.99—Paperback

This is a collection of four short stories in comic book form written for the medium, drawn and coloured by the likes of Colleen Doran, Ted McKeever, and Ben Templesmith from horror stories by and with new introductions from Thomas Ligotti.

I'd not heard of Ligotti before this collection and, on this showing, I'm not sure that I really want to. I can see bits of Ray Bradbury, Poe and Lovecraft on occasion but nothing really comes up to any of them. This may not be Ligotti's fault. Each story is rewritten by a different writer and some don't seem able to get to the grotesque nature that the story tries to imply. If anyone has produced the right kind of artwork here, it's Templesmith on "Dream of a Mannikin" but the material of that story is the least grotesque in the book. The only outright monsters are in Doran's "The Last Feast of Harlequin" and they are shown in such a traditional style that they are no more shocking than anything in an old superhero book. The other two stories—"Dr Locrian's Asylum" and "Teatro Grottesco" - are much better fits but mostly more mundane.



WAS by Geoff Ryman

Gollancz—464 pages—£7.99—Paperback

"Every work of fiction, however realistic, is a fantasy. It happens in a world alternative to this one." says the author in the book's final section. Without this definition, I couldn't call this book fantasy in any way. Surprisingly, the last edition was as part of the "Fantasy Masterworks" series.

This is the story of several characters that are connected in some way by "The Wizard of Oz". All of them seem damaged in some way and detached from their home. There's Frances Gumm (later Judy Garland) whose father moves their family from town to town to conceal his secret and Dorothy Gael whose mother has died leaving her to live with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry in Kansas. There's also Jonathan, an actor who is dying of AIDS, trying to find Dorothy in historical records before he dies. Somehow there are two massive absences here. Frank Baum appears briefly as a teacher at Dorothy's school. This seems only to serve the purpose of validating Dorothy's right to be here. Oz itself is generally missing too. A description of the film begins in detail and becomes more vague as it develops finishing entirely before the party reaches the city. Maybe this has to do with the common burden of the principal characters but they somehow seem to be deliberate gaps. Ryman seems to delight in his historical accuracy and deliberately avoid anything that would be taken as genre Fantasy here. There are details of his



research into 19th Century Kansas, books on the film and even a book about the original novel. If it was anyone else, this would be listed as Historical Fiction. It's well done but it's not a genre that really belongs in these pages.

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD BACKWARDS—a TV series written by and starring Rob Newman

Newman has been looked on as a second-string comedian for some time. Most of this comes from appearing with David Baddiel for so long. This is his new sketch show. If you thought he was funny before, you might think this is funny as well. But that's not why I'm writing this review.

The show starts with an odd concept.

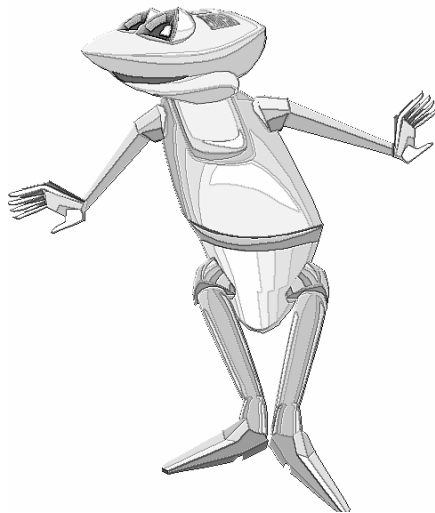
Imagine the history of the world backwards. People are born and die in the same way as they usually do but the events of the world progress in reverse. Watson & Crick are the last people to forget DNA. Emmeline Pankhurst chains herself to railings instead of her bike to prove that women are no longer worthy of the vote. An African country out-sources its government to the British Empire. Medieval bards tell stories that, centuries previously, featured on "Eastenders".

There is no real progression in the show. Some characters and situations recur in every show but the concept is interesting and the ideas are worth a look. The series has been running on BBC3 only so far which could mean it will transfer to a network channel sometime soon.

MASTERS OF SCIENCE FICTION—a short TV series

After a lot of fuss over the US transmission of this series—they have still shown only 4 episodes from 6—it was interesting to see what would happen with this show. The idea was to take SF classics or works by classic authors and turn them in to 1 hour (45 minutes plus ads) TV shows with well-known actors. This followed the success of "Masters of Horror" months before.

The results so far have been mixed at best. Only half of the stories are from well known SF writers (Heinlein, Ellison, Sheckley) and most aren't necessarily the best or best-known. Because some of the material is "classic" it can feel dated even though the story is updated. "The Awakening" (from Howard Fast's "The general zapped ...") feels like a cold-war story even with the Iraq update that has been tacked on. The Heinlein story "Jerry was a man" still feels like it belongs in the 40s or 50s along with the B movies of the period. It should probably have been a better comedy too. John Kessel's "A Clean Escape" doesn't really try to disguise its cold-war roots—it just ignores them—and is all the better for it. Ellison's "The Discarded" suffers least from period but isn't that great a story. It



does prove that Harlan's still working—it's his adaptation and he has a bit-part in it. Sheckley's "Watchbird" is the best of the series so far. It actually does well in the near-future setting by playing up the US heightened security. It's only flaw is that the ending seems a little abrupt. The first run of the series will end on 29th November with Walter Mosley's "Little Brother".

Quiz

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. What seasonal role connects Leo G Carroll, Michael Hordern, Jamie Farr and Alec Guinness | Last month's Quiz Answers |
| 2. In which films did the following play Santa? | 1. What do you get if you multiply six by nine (it works in base 13!) |
| A. Robert Brian Wilson | 2. Dead Last |
| B. John Call | 3. Jerry Cornelius |
| C. Art Carney | 4. The Riddler |

YOUR COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU

The AGM is coming and with it the election of a new committee.
We are going to need some new blood.

Do you think you have what it takes to be the new Secretary, Treasurer, Publicity Officer, Newsletter Editor or even Chairman?

If so, write to Vicky at the email address on the front cover.

If you're not up to any of those jobs, there are a couple of Ordinary Member's posts up for grabs.

For those of you that need to remind yourselves of what the committee members do, there's a sheet with the job descriptions included with this newsletter

FUTURE 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:- 13th December— Icarus by Roger Levy
Future dates—17th January, 21st February, 13th March

Future meetings of the BSFG

11th January 2008 : A G M & Auction

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Thank you to all the named contributors.

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