

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

The Free Monthly Newsletter of the  
**Birmingham Science Fiction Group**

January 2008

Issue 436

Honorary Presidents

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

Committee

Vernon Brown (Chairman), Vicky Cook (Secretary)

Pat Brown (Treasurer), Tim Stock (Publicity), William McCabe

Novacon 37 Chairman - Steve Green

Novacon 38 Chairwoman—Helena Bowles

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Friday 11th January

## Annual General Meeting

It's been an odd year. One meeting had weather so bad that no-one could get in unless they came by train or on foot. Rog Peyton stepped down after one of the longest terms as Newsletter Editor. We had return visits from Rob Holdstock, Ian Watson and The Write Fantastic as well as a first appearance from Andy Remic and all the regular features.

It's also been an expensive year. Most of the regular meetings have made a loss. There will have to be some serious discussion about where we get the money from.

This time we're also going to need some new committee members. At least one of the existing committee can't continue and there are two other vacant posts. Could you produce the newsletter, or other publicity, or run the website? Do you think you could make a better job of it than anyone on the current committee? This is your chance to prove it.

There will also be the usual auction so bring money.

Next Meeting—8<sup>th</sup> February:

At the time of going to press the following will stand for election to the committee. Chairman—Vernon Brown, Treasurer—Pat Brown, Secretary—Vicky Cook. I have not yet decided if I will stand for Newsletter Editor, if not I shall stand as an Ordinary Member again. Tim Stock will not stand for re-election as publicity officer.

These are the duties of the committee members. Some of these jobs have been transferred between different committee members before and may be again. The Membership Secretary duties have been covered by both the Secretary and the Treasurer in previous years. There is no reason for the Website manager job to remain with an ordinary member if another member of the committee wants to do it.

### **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.

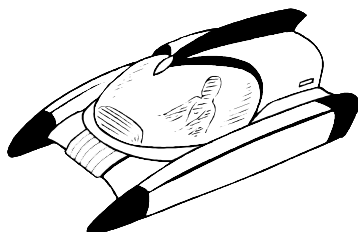
To present a report at Committee meetings.

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.

## ***News***



Chris Weitz, director of “The Golden Compass”, says that the experience has prepared him for his intended film series based on Moorcock’s Elric stories. No dates are set but it looks like it might happen.

Those who have seen “The Golden Compass” and wonder what happened to the ending might be relieved to hear that the last 3 chapters of the book

have been filmed and should form part of the next film in the series ... if it gets made. That will depend on how well the first film does at the box office.

As part of the current US screenwriters strike a group of Horror writers staged an exorcism of Warner Brothers Studios in Burbank. The idea to “get rid of the evil infesting the studios,” came from Scott Kosar who wrote the recent remakes of “The Amityville Horror” and “The Texas Chainsaw Massacre”. Other “themed” strike days included “Star Trek” on 10<sup>th</sup> December

“Worldwide Biggies” a digital studio has bought the rights to Edward

Stratmeyer's "Tom Swift" series. They intend to make animated TV shows and video games based on the material.

Brandon Sanderson has been chosen by Harriet Popham Rigney, Robert Jordan's wife and editor to complete the last volume of The Wheel of Time series "A Memory of Light". Rigney will edit this volume as she has done for all of the others in the series.

Terry Pratchett has been diagnosed with an early onset form of Alzheimer's that may have been related to his stroke last year. He expects to fulfil all of his current commitments. This may include some part in the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the publication of the first Discworld book. Transworld & Random House (the publishers) are planning their biggest ever publicity campaign and Sky TV is producing a TV version of The Colour of Magic for the occasion. Producer Thomas Schuehly has acquired the remake rights to Fritz Lang's classic SF movie Metropolis and is partnering with Mario Kassar on an updated version of the 1927 movie.

Peter Jackson has settled his differences with New Line over his payments for "Lord of the Rings" and will act as executive producer for a two part adaptation of "The Hobbit" which will probably be directed by Sam Raimi

Arthur C Clarke has posted a video on Youtube for his 90th birthday with his birthday wishes. They include a call from an extraterrestrial, an end to man's oil habit and peace in his adoptive Sri Lanka. He has also been talking to the actor Morgan Freeman about plans for a film version of "Rendezvous with Rama".

The Vatican has condemned the film "The Golden Compass" saying "it promotes a cold and hopeless world without God". They also attack it's author with the words "In Pullman's world, hope simply does not exist, because there is no salvation". It's their worst attack on a writer since the DaVinci Code.

Preliminary advertising is starting to appear for the UK transmission of the new TV shows "The Bionic Woman" and "Flash Gordon". Advertising has started to appear on ITV digital channels and the SciFi channel respectively. This probably means the shows will start within a few weeks.

There have been several recent reports on the intelligence of monkeys based on research at Duke and Columbia Universities in the USA. They've been shown as able to add and sequence numbers correctly. If the numbers are small enough they can add up as well as college students.

The asteroid that caused the Tunguska event of 1908 may have been much smaller than was previously thought. A computer analysis of the event suggests that the asteroid exploded in mid-air, the explosion was much less powerful and that most of the damage was caused by the ensuing fireball.

## ***Obituary***

It was reported at the end of November that Colin Kapp had died on 3rd August this year. Kapp was the author of 11 novels and about 35 short stores. All of these works were published in a little over 20 year span, ending in the mid 1980s. Four of his novels were set in the Cage World series, and several of his short stories were collected in The Unorthodox Engineers, which was released in

1970. Kapp's short story "Lambda One" was adapted for the TV series *Out of the Unknown* in 1966.

He was the Guest of Honor at the 1980 British National Science Fiction convention in Glasgow.

## Reviews

**SEVERIAN OF THE GUILD** -The Complete Book of the New Sun By Gene Wolfe, Gollancz, £14.99 Trade paperback., 905 pages

Reviewed by Dave Corby , Star Rating \*\*\*\*\* (5 stars)

The Books of the New Sun (The Shadow of the Torturer, The Claw of the Conciliator, The Sword of the Lictor and The Citadel of the Autarch) here collected as Severian of the Guild, is not an easily approached volume. It comes complete with high recommendations; "established classic", "influential text", "voted... one of the greatest fantasies of all time", etc. Even the most seasoned reader of fantasy must approach such with trepidation, surely?

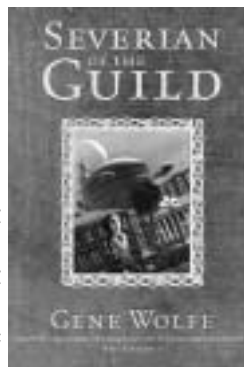
The story itself is told in retrospect by the main protagonist (thus establishing a mode used by other authors since) who can tell the story most accurately by virtue of his eidetic memory. The world of Urth is a science-fantasy, that is to

say, a fantasy using the trappings of science fiction. It is a fantasy of the far future, where one can find the detritus of past scientific achievement scattered amongst the inns and riding beasts, long adapted to other uses by people who view that same science as ancient legend.

Severian himself has been described as an uncomfortable character to be the protagonist. A member of the torturer's guild since before he can remember, he has, like Thomas Covenant of Stephen Donaldson's epics, committed questionable and grotesque actions. However, whereas Thomas Covenant committed heinous acts because he did not believe in the world around him, Severian of the Guild has an altered morality born of his upbringing. To Severian, his actions are the essential services performed by the Guild of Torturers. Therefore I find Severian the more sympathetic character of the two, as he is true to his belief in his place in the world.

The text is quite challenging in its own right. Where many author's fantasy is easy to read, enjoyably light but sometime forgettable, Gene Wolfe is a member of that rare class of authors who could make a shopping list feel like fantasy because of his use of the language. Wolfe's writings would feel contemporary with the works of Tolkien or Peake, such is the texture of his writings.

The books are littered with motifs common to fantasy; growing up, sex, betrayal, murder, exile, battle, monsters, etc., but presented in unusual ways and juxtaposed with each other in original ways that strike the reader as feeling



entirely unique. You may need to put more effort in to read these books than the majority of fantasies, but you are going to remember these books over and above many others also.

If you read these books, I judge you would be unlikely to regret it. All fantasy novels try to show you a different world, succeeding to a lesser or greater extent. The Books of the New Sun sits at the top end of this scale, with very few contemporaries. I believe that this book lived up to my (high) expectations, but not necessarily in the ways I imagined it would. Difficult to describe, hard to imagine prior to reading, and hard to imagine the genre without it afterwards. An established and influential classic indeed.

**HUNTER'S RUN** by George R.R. Martin, Gardner Dozois and Daniel Abrahams,  
Harper Voyager, 394 pages, £18.99 hardback  
Reviewed by Michael Jones

Sao Paulo is a planet – presumably one of many – colonised by humans from Earth who have been transported there by aliens. It is very much a “frontier” planet where the rule of law runs thin. The story begins with maverick prospector and general all-around hoodlum Ramon Espejo, having killed a man in a knife fight, fleeing into the unexplored north and encountering a concealed and hitherto unknown alien outpost. He is captured by these aliens and finds they want to use him for their own purposes, but as he learns more about these purposes he is enmeshed ever further in a web of danger and deceit. There are disturbing discoveries in store for him and his return to human civilisation leads him to re-assess what he wants of life.



An afterword tells how the book was begun in 1976 by Dozois who sought Martin's help to continue: eventually it was finished by Abrahams who is now the same age as they were when they started it! It turns out to be a reasonably successful collaboration; there are no obvious changes in style and the joins are well concealed. Nevertheless I could not escape the feeling that whoever started the book had little or no idea in what direction other hands would take it, although it seems that all were happy enough with the final result.

I found it a well-written story, gripping enough to keep me turning the pages to find out what would happen next although there were times when the grip faltered as a result of a tendency toward the verbose. The character of Ramon was rounded and complete if not very likeable, the aliens were novel and very alien and the “wild frontier” nature of the planet was well realised. The flora and fauna of the world of Sao Paulo were elaborately visualised and portrayed – this in particular leading at times to the excess of wordiness referred to.

Considering its difficult history it undoubtedly works well. However I would not describe it as a great book but rather one poised on an uncertain dividing line between qualified success and heroic failure. It is certainly worth reading but I

would not describe it as special enough to warrant the writers seeking to embark on another collaboration or the reader to seek one out.

EVOLUTION by Stephen Baxter  
Gollancz, 672 pages, £7.99 paperback

There was a time when people wrote stories that made science more appealing by making it into fiction with characters people could identify with and plots that engaged the attention. They were more entertaining than text books and managed to explain some of the science. This isn't like that. Quite the opposite.



Baxter has taken the story of human evolution, some of it speculative, some of it based on history or fossil record, and made it into a series of short stories set at the points where things change. There's the great disaster that started the rise of the mammals, finally coming down from the trees and a few other recognisable events. All this is done in a style reminiscent of the old wildlife documentaries with names based on species and descriptions of every other creature in range—and there are quite a few. He does not attempt the level of anthropomorphism that you'd find in Richard Adams or a lot of the David Attenborough documentaries. Rather than make this accessible he seems to have tried to make this as awkward as possible even to the point of using similes for science geeks—a tipping point is analogised as like dropping a crystal into a supersaturated solution.

The stories improve slightly with the appearance of modern man but even then, the aim is to describe the scenery rather than work in any kind of plot. There's an hundred page section at the end with a view of what humans may become but as they step away from intelligence and identity, they step back into the wildlife documentary background.

I can't help thinking that a properly written text book would have been more accurate, more fun and might even have managed a plot.

### Quiz

#### Last month's Quiz Answers

1. Jacob Marley
2.
  - A. Silent night, Deadly night
  - B. Santa Claus conquers the Martians
  - C. The night they saved Christmas



## 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:-** 17th January— Evolution by Stephen Baxter  
Future dates—21st February, 13th March

21-24 March 2008 ORBITAL (Eastercon), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London. £55 reg; £20 supp or junior (12-17), £5 child (5-11), £1 infant. Contact 8Windmill Close, Epsom, Surrey, KT17 3AL. Credit card bookings: [www.orbital2008.org](http://www.orbital2008.org).

Sep/Oct 2008 FANTASYCON 2008, date/venue TBA: 'mid September to mid October'. £25 reg to 31 Dec ; then £45 (BFS members £40) to 31 Jun 08; then £55 (£50). Supp or day rate £25. Contact 3 Tamworth Close, Lower Earley, Reading, RG6 4EQ.

14-16 November 08 NOVACON 38, Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. GoH Ian R. MacLeod. £36 reg, until Eastercon 2008. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. See [www.novacon38.org.uk](http://www.novacon38.org.uk) for more details

### Future meetings of the BSFG

Although we have no guests confirmed at particular dates so far...

The next few meetings will be on 8<sup>th</sup> February, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 11<sup>th</sup> April and 9<sup>th</sup> May  
And we have approached the following possible guests : - Michael Scott Rohan, Ian MacLeod, Andy Sawyer, and Roy Gray from Interzone

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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