

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

FEBRUARY 2010

ISSUE 461

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

COMMITTEE:

VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);
VICKY STOCK (SECRETARY); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);
DAVE CORBY (PUBLICITY OFFICER); WILLIAM MCCABE (WEBSITE);
NOVACON 40 CHAIRMAN: VERNON BROWN

WEBSITE:

www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/

EMAIL:

bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 12th February ????? THE QUIZ ?????

Once again we have the Annual Quiz with members of the Birmingham University SF Group. It's a Pub Quiz style event with several teams competing for honours and prizes. There's a big change this year in that each team will comprise of members of the Brum Group and the University Group. This will give everyone an even chance of winning – teams made up of us oldtimers with our knowledge of the written form and youngsters with their knowledge of TV and movies will hopefully create formidable teams. Don't worry about the mechanics of this – Vernon has it all worked out with his usual precision. Questions will be from all aspects of the SF world – books, magazines, artwork, films, TV series, plays, authors, editors, artists, actors, etc., so if you have a particular area of weakness, NOW is the time to start revising. Only you know your weak areas – start reading and start watching!

RGP

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of the Old Joint Stock, Temple Street, just off Colmore Row. From the Briar Rose, continue up the hill,

March 14th - Gollancz editor JO FLETCHER returns with more amusing and interesting anecdotes of life in publishing and readings from Manuscripts from Hell.

take first right, first left and it's about 4 or 5 buildings down on the left.

The doors open at 7.30pm and the meeting will commence at 8.00pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar on the ground floor, and be seated in plenty of time. Members' admission is usually £3.00; non-members' is £4.00 but there is no charge for the AGM/Auction.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

There were no surprises at the AGM except possibly that I had decided to restand as Newsletter Editor. All other committee members had previously announced their willingness to restand: all were re-elected. So your committee for 2010 is exactly the same as that for 2009.

Despite my previous pleas, no-one came forward to take over the position of Newsletter Editor. Then just after Christmas Vernon made me an offer I couldn't refuse and I agreed to restand (my arm comes out of plaster in three weeks time).

BUT, just in case there might be someone out there who thought about it but decided not to volunteer for whatever reason, how's this sound...?

You could volunteer this year for the currently vacant committee post and become Assistant Editor. For the next year you could learn the mechanics of putting the newsletter together, how to get material, etc., and possibly take over next year. And I will (hopefully!) still be around to give advice and assistance. My arm won't take another bending so Vernon can't inflict any more pain next year. And with one bound I will be free....

P L E A S E ?

RGP

INTERVIEW WITH ALYSON NOEL by Vicky Stock



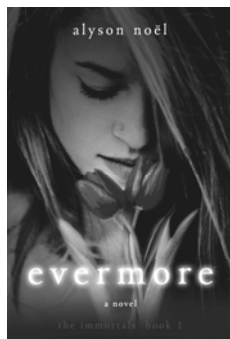
<<Our secretary Vicky Stock recently met up with bestselling US fantasy author Alyson Noel and Alyson agreed to a short interview for our newsletter... - RGP>>

VS: Alyson, I have just read your book *EVERMORE* and really enjoyed it. First of all, what made you decide to write fiction in this genre?

AN: Well, I've been interested in the paranormal since I was a kid - *Casper the Friendly Ghost* was my favourite cartoon - so I'm actually kind of surprised that it wasn't until my eighth book that I decided to give it a try!

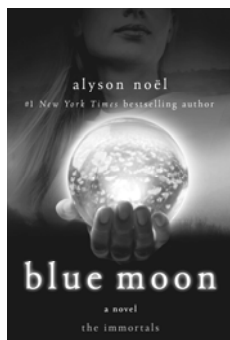
Though it wasn't until a few years ago when I

lost several loved ones in a short succession and then nearly lost my husband to leukaemia (he's in full remission now), that I really started to ponder the 'big' life subjects of life and death, mortality and immortality, the bonds that tie us even after a loved one is gone, and how our youth-loving culture sort of seeks physical immortality by trying to remain youthful looking for as long as we can - and yet,

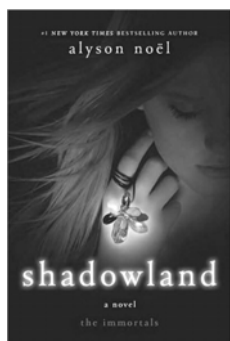


what would happen if we really could achieve it? What would it mean for us, our loved ones or society in general? And since my own life experiences always seem to find their way into my books, Ever and Damen's story was born from there.

VS: This is a popular market at the moment, what with TWILIGHT, etc. I wondered whether this encouraged you or made you worry about your sales, with all the competition? At the BSFG we tend to have older members and often wonder about attracting younger members to the Group, it'd be interesting to hear your thoughts on how to appeal to young people to read your books.



AN: I always write the stories I'm driven to write and try to ignore the market as much as possible since it's ever changing and pretty much impossible to second guess. If anything, because there's such an abundance of fantasy and so much competition, I was really concerned with EVERMORE's ability to stand out. But a great cover from a very talented art department took care of that!



As for attracting younger readers, I think it's important to create characters they can identify with or relate to in some way. And the key to doing that is being able to tap into that time in your life, remembering how it felt, what you experienced, and being able to convey that on the page. On the surface, things seem so different from when I was a teen, but the truth is, it really isn't. Technology changes - rapidly in fact - but people don't. We're still driven by the same collection of needs, and desires that we always were, and adolescence remains a time of remarkable self-discovery and exciting firsts. If you can plug into the glorious, exhilarating, heart-breaking truth of that time - young readers will find you.

VS: A strong theme throughout EVERMORE is to do with psychic abilities and auras. Is this something you yourself have a strong interest in?

AN: I'm fascinated by all things metaphysical, and delved into some heavy research for the series by reading a ton of books on the subject, taking a three-day psychic development course with world-renowned medium, James Van Praagh, as well as undergoing a few past-life regressions with best selling author, Dr. Brian Weiss - all of which was eye-opening and fun!

VS: The characters are well fleshed out - were any of them inspired by your friends and family or even your own personality?

AN: Like Riley I know what it's like to be the annoying little sister who idolizes her older sister, but other than that all of the characters are purely figments of my imagination!



VS: I see from your website that there are two more installments in the *Immortals* series. Is this the total number or is the series an ongoing one?

AN: There will be six books in total. I'm working on the fifth book now, (though I haven't yet settled on a title!), and I'm also working on a spin-off series featuring Riley, Ever's ghostly sister, that's been an absolute blast to write. The first book, *RADIANCE*, will release in the US on September 4, 2010 and I'm really excited about it and those to follow!

VS: Do you find it easy to write or do you have to be strict with yourself, with word limits per day, etc?

AN: My deadlines are pretty crazy, so I try to keep to a strict, daily word count and then try to make up for it should I fall short for some reason. But after years of working at jobs I loathed, I look forward to every moment I now spend at my computer!

VS: What is the best piece of advice you can give our members, if anyone is aspiring to be a writer?

AN: To just sit down and do it - to just allow the story to flow as it will, without judging the content or demanding perfection. Nothing is perfect the first time around, or even the fifth for that matter! But that's okay - you can always fix it later but you can't fix a blank page.

Also, publishing is a really tough business and rejections are guaranteed - everyone gets them. But if you really want it, you just have to pick yourself up and keep going, and remember, it only takes one "Yes!" to get you where you want to go!

VS: Have you always been an author or did you do another job first, and if so what encouraged you to turn to writing

AN: I've had so many jobs. I've been working since I was twelve, but just before I got published I was working as a NYC based flight attendant. And though I talked about writing all the time, I was doing very little of it until 9/11 hit and with the huge pay cut and early morning bomb checks that followed, I figured it was time to stop talking about writing, and start actually writing, and I'm so glad I did!

VS: What is your favourite SF book, and do you tend to read books from bygone days of SF or more modern writers?

AN: Oh, it's impossible to pick a favourite - it just can't be done! Though I recently read Cindy Pon's debut, *SILVER PHOENIX*, and absolutely loved it!

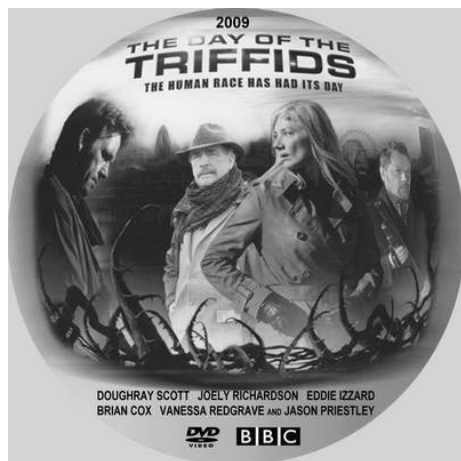
VS: Thanks so much for the interview!!

THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS: TWO VIEWS OF THE TV DRAMA

The Day of the Triffids (2009 TV drama, starring Dougray Scott, Joely Richardson, also featuring Eddie Izzard, Brian Cox).

A SCI-FI HORROR IN TWO PARTS – BAD AND WORSE by Vernon Brown

Last year I wrote a short article for the newsletter in which I gave a couple of examples of dire reinterpretations of classic novels; were I to be writing it now I would have an example worse than the two put together.



BBC TV's new version of *THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS*, shown in two 90 minute programmes at the end of December was a disaster, in modern meaning and in etymology. While it kept Wyndham's basic idea of blinded humanity versus mobile deadly plants and used his character's names, the rest of the production was twisted and distorted to express current fixations about eco-terrorism, global warming, Government lack of compassion, GM crops, Political Correctness and Nature's Revenge,

to mention only a few, and even so they seemed at times to be at odds with one another.

The story starts some 30 years ago with two botanists and their young son researching Triffids in the African jungle. Apparently they don't realise the plants are man-eaters with a poisonous sting that kills on contact because the woman wears no protection and is being killed by one as the first scene opens. Now, the son is a researcher in the UK at a Triffid establishment where Triffids are being bred worldwide to produce an oil that has replaced fossil fuels and saved the world from global warming (a few calculations and assumptions here show that each Triffid must produce at least 10% of its body volume in oil per day, which is quite a feat!). Bill is investigating their increasing intelligence by measuring their reaction time with a handheld gadget although, unlike his parents, he is wearing protective goggles on the basis presumably that because the Triffids aim for the eyes they never hit elsewhere. He is explaining his research to an old friend on the staff when an eco terrorist breaks into the facility and starts to cause mayhem. Things now go from bad to worse for both characters and viewers until the very end when Bill is seen rowing downriver with his friends to safety, all the baddies having been killed off by Triffids.

Wyndham's novel was well structured and not impossible, the 1963 film was amusing in a B-movie way while the 1981 TV serial was low key but reasonably dramatic. This newer version was just annoying and nerve grating, from the factual errors through continuity lapses to specifics such as Susan having metamorphosed into two submachine gun toting little girls (Recoil? What's that? And every girl should know how to use a gun!), no doubt because one cannot have a defenceless young girl alone with a man, even if he is the hero!

When I think of the money that was spent on this tripe and what could have been done with it, I could weep in my beer! VB

THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS by Vicky Stock

This attempt tries to bring the famous story by John Wyndham bang up to date into the modern world. Ben Mason escapes the solar flare which causes worldwide blindness one fateful night due to the Triffid plants which he works with. However, these plants get loose and start causing havoc... The apocalyptic story is a famous one and I won't go into detail here though viewers of the regular TV dramas to do with apocalyptic events will be fairly familiar with the turn of the plot.

My overall impression is that lots of money has been poured into getting a starry cast, possibly leaving not a lot for the effects and script. Action scene followed action scene but not much attention has been given to padding out the characters or indeed observing the sub-plots of Wyndham's story such as the collapse of society and moral values. This is an adaptation with a bit more emphasis given to the Triffids but I wasn't sure they'd thought it all through, which added to a general sense of silliness; for instance people seem to line up to be captured by the Triffids, with no sign of any safety gear.

Unfortunately I did not think the acting was all that fantastic either considering the pedigree of the actors brought onboard. Scott plays Mason as an action hero, not an average sort of chap as in the book; and Izzard seemed uncomfortable in his role as Torrence. In fact Izzard's megalomaniac character



was a bit of a tangent from the main storyline – I think he has been given a bigger role in this than in the original book and I found it hard to comprehend why people would do what he says. His seems a personal mission against Mason and he is portrayed as a two-dimensional bad guy, with no real padding out of why he is doing this. Richardson and Cox put in good

performances as the hero's love interest/dad respectively, but the characters are all changed in some way from the original book.

However, interestingly a member of my family was absolutely enthralled by it – they'd not read the book and found it an exciting piece of TV drama! This goes to show that this will appeal to some, maybe those who enjoy the regular apocalyptic dramas that get churned out, and also recently converted fans of the modern *Doctor Who* may enjoy it too. It was fast paced – I was surprised to realise it was three hours long, as I'd watched it through and it had kept my interest. I would suggest that fans of the book keep an open mind as this is an interpretation and by no means in any way a faithful rendition of the book or Wyndham's original ideas. VS

<<And if anyone out there has their particular viewpoint on THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS or even the appalling THE SURVIVORS, let us have your views.... – RGP>>

BSFA AWARD NOMINEES

The nominees for the British Science Fiction Association Award have been announced. Winners will be announced at this year's Eastercon, Odyssey 2010, the weekend of April 2-5 in Heathrow, London.

Best Novel

ARK by Stephen Baxter

LAVINIA by Ursula K Le Guin

THE CITY & THE CITY by China Mieville

YELLOW BLUE TIBIA by Adam Roberts

Best Short Fiction

“Sinner, Baker, Fabulist, Priest; Red Mask, Black Mask, Gentleman, Beast” by Eugie Foster

THE PUSH by Dave Hutchinson

“Johnnie and Emmie-Lou Get Married” by Kim Lakin-Smith

“Vishnu at the Cat Circus” by Ian McDonald

“The Beloved Time of Their Lives” by Ian Watson and Roberto Quaglia

“The Assistant” by Ian Whates

Best Artwork

Alternate cover art for 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA by Nitzan Klamer

“Emerald” by Stephanie Pui-Mun Law

Cover of DESOLATION ROAD by Ian McDonald by Stephan Martinière, jacket design by Jacqueline Nasso Cooke

Cover of *Interzone* 220, Adam Tredowski

Cover of *Interzone* 224, Adam Tredowski

Cover of *Interzone* 225, Adam Tredowski

Best Non-Fiction

CANARY FEVER by John Clute

“I Didn’t Dream of Dragons” by Deepa D

“Ethics and Enthusiasm” by Hal Duncan

“Mutant Popcorn” by Nick Lowe

A SHORT HISTORY OF FANTASY by Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James

PHILIP K DICK AWARD NOMINEES

The nominees for the annual Philip K. Dick Award for best paperback original work of science fiction have been announced. The winners will be announced on April 2, 2010.

BITTER ANGELS by C. L. Anderson

THE PRISONER by Carlos J. Cortes

THE REPOSSESSION MAMBO by Eric Garcia

THE DEVIL’S ALPHABET by Daryl Gregory

CYBERABAD DAYS by Ian McDonald

CENTURIES AGO AND VERY FAST by Rebecca Ore

PROPHETS by S. Andrew Swann

GOLDEN GLOBE AWARD WINNERS

The Golden Globe winners were announced on January 17 in Hollywood. Categories with winners of genre interest are listed below.

Best Motion Picture, Drama: AVATAR

Best Actor in a Motion Picture, Comedy: Robert Downey, Jr. in SHERLOCK HOLMES

Best Director of a Motion Picture: James Cameron for AVATAR

Best Original Score for a Motion Picture: Michael Giacchino for UP

Best Animated Feature Film: UP

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Bibliographer **Mark Owings** (b.1945) died on December 30 from pancreatic cancer. Owings worked with **Jack Chalker** to publish THE INDEX TO THE SCIENCE-FANTASY PUBLISHERS and THE REVISED H.P. LOVECRAFT BIBLIOGRAPHY. Owings was also the publisher of Croatan House, in conjunction with Chalker and **Ted Pauls**. Owings was a founder of BSFS, served as con chair for Balticon multiple times, and served as the Chair of the Compton Crook Award committee Actress **Jean Simmons** (b.1929) died on January 22. In recent years, Simmons provided voice work for HOWL’S MOVING CASTLE and FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS

WITHIN. She has also appeared in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as Admiral Satie and in the 1990s version of *Dark Shadows*. Simmons was twice nominated for the Academy Award and is perhaps best known for her roles as Sarah Brown in GUYS AND DOLLS and Varinia in SPARTACUS Author **Kage Baker** was diagnosed with uterine cancer in 2009. Initial surgery went well, but on Christmas Eve doctors discovered that the cancer had metastasized to her brain. A tumour was removed, but it has regrown, and there are also tumours in her lungs. Baker's prognosis does not look good. She is currently too weak for phone



calls A new *Gormenghast* novel, which was written by **Mervyn Peake**'s wife based on notes left by the author, is to be published by their son after being discovered in an attic. TITUS AWAKES was written by **Maeve Gilmore** shortly after her husband's death from Parkinson's Disease in 1968. She decided to write the book, which runs to 210 pages, after he left her a page and a half of fragmented notes about how he might have continued the story. The *Gormenghast* series, which is often wrongly called a trilogy but was in fact intended to be a longer series, followed the path of Titus Groan from his birth, as heir to a crumbling medieval castle, to his encounters

in a modern world of skyscrapers and inventions **Ann VanderMeer** has been promoted to the position of Editor-in-Chief of *Weird Tales*. **Stephen Segal** is stepping away from day-to-day operations, but will remain the magazine's senior contributing editor. VanderMeer and Segal shared a best



editor Hugo last year for their work on the magazine It has been announced that Universal's proposed remake of **John Carpenter's** THE THING has received a green light - hardly surprising seeing as it has become common place to remake every classic horror/sci-fi movie from the 70s and 80s. But what is more surprising is that this won't actually be a remake, or a reboot, but a prequel, directly relating to the events of **John Carpenter's** 1982 movie. The film will tell the tale of what happened inside the Norwegian science base which encountered the shape shifting alien before Kurt Russell, Keith David, et al. Carpenter's version of THE THING was itself a remake of **Howard Hawks'** classic THE THING FROM ANOTHER PLANET of 1951, but where the

1982 version triumphed was by inserting a talented filmmaker at the top of his game at the helm. By 1982 Carpenter was one of the current masters of horror (alongside Cronenberg, Romero and Argento) and as such his version of THE THING was a refreshing retelling of **John W Campbell's** book, WHO GOES THERE What was the worst movie of the year? What was the year's best action movie? Based on *Moviefone's* poll, which received 238,000 votes, the answer to both of those questions was the same - TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN. Who was the year's sexiest female star? Which actress gave the worst performance? If you guessed that the winner in both of those categories was



also the same, you'd be right. TRANSFORMERS 2 star **Megan Fox** proved to be as divisive as her film, which somehow grossed \$834 million in worldwide ticket sales even so. As for the best overall film of the year, that turned out to be NEW MOON, which grabbed 41 percent of the votes, beating out both AVATAR and STAR TREK, which turned in relatively anemic results of 14 percent and 11 percent, respectively. (Though in the best action-movie category, the three films weren't quite that

far apart). PARANORMAL ACTIVITY came in as the best horror movie, with 42 percent of the vote, beating out ZOMBIELAND, which only captured 20 percent. The year's sexiest male star? Why, NEW MOON star **Robert Pattinson** with 46 percent of the vote The star, called **T Pyxidis**, is set to self-destruct in an explosion called a supernova with the force of 20 billion billion megatons of TNT. Although the star is thought to be around 3,260 light-years away - a fairly short distance in galactic terms - the blast from the thermonuclear explosion could strip away the Earth's ozone layer, the scientists said. Astronomers from Villanova University, Philadelphia, in the US, said the International Ultraviolet Explorer satellite has shown them that **T Pyxidis** is really two stars, one called a white dwarf that is sucking in gas and steadily growing. When it reaches a critical mass it will blow itself to pieces. It will become as bright as all the other stars in the galaxy put together, they said. The Hubble space telescope has photographed the star preparing for its big bang with a series of smaller blasts or 'burps', called novae. These explosions came regularly about every 20 years from 1890 - but stopped after 1967. So the next blast is nearly 20 years overdue, said scientists **Edward M Sion, Patrick Godon** and **Timothy McClain** at the American Astronomical Society in Washington

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



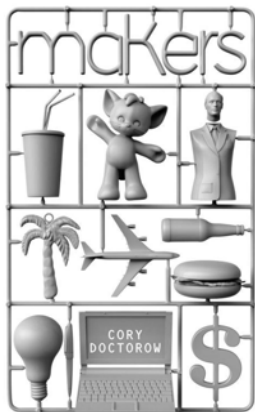
(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

MAKERS by Cory Doctorow

HarperVoyager / 416pgs / £14.99 hardcover ISBN: 9780007325221

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Good science fiction writers are able to take present trends and extrapolate into a plausible near future. All of us can see that if certain companies are unable to innovate, they will disappear from the market place. Digital technology has tolled the death knell for film photography and power sources are moving away from the usage of chemical batteries. In *MAKERS*, Doctorow starts with the merger of Kodak and Duracell to make Kodacell. Landon Kettlewell, the CEO of the new company, calls a press conference not only to announce the new arrangement but also to outline a new method of doing things. Instead of one, unwieldy and vulnerable company, they are looking for innovators with perhaps one product idea that can, with sponsorship and guidance, be made developed into something commercial.



Suzanne Church, a local journalist, is invited to follow the progress of one of these new setups. Her move to Florida is meant to be short-term as she posts all the details of the work of two entrepreneurs, Lester Banks and Perry Gibbons. They are assigned a business manager to help with the financial side of the enterprise. The team is a success but with any new innovation there will be others who will try to copy the designs and flood the market with cheap versions. To keep ahead, new concepts must be developed. Moving a completely different direction, they run into a trademark battle with Disney.

With a near future setting, this is an excellent look at the way that big business conducts itself and the tricks the unscrupulous will get up to. It is also a demonstration of the power of the internet. There are villains, inside and out of the Disney Parks corporation, in particular a nasty, mean-minded journalist whose favourite pastime is to make inflammatory comments on the internet against his opponents. It is a pity that he is about the only English character. There are excellent cameo characters, like the Goth youth who calls himself Death Waits but the main characters tend to escape. They are too busy doing things and driving the plot to be fully fleshed out. On the whole, this is a good example of inventive science fiction. *PM*

WAKE by Robert J Sawyer

Gollancz/ 360pgs/ trade paperback £12.99 ISBN: 9780575094079

Reviewed by Sam Fennell

This is the first book in Robert J. Sawyer's 'WWW' trilogy. It was originally published as a series of instalments in *Analog SF* from November 2008 to March 2009.



The book is set in the present, and Caitlin Decter is a blogging teenager and a maths genius who has been blind since birth. She is invited to test a new visual implant which could give her full sight. However, her visual cortex is so used to navigating paths on-line, that when her 'eye-pod' is implanted, instead of seeing the real world she sees a visual impression of the internet being streamed to her. Slowly, she begins to detect a presence in the background – an intelligence that grows throughout the book naming itself 'Webmind'.

There are two subplots to this book: a captive hybrid chimpanzee that begins to paint representations of his keeper, and a bird 'flu pandemic in China which has caused China to shut itself off from non-Chinese websites. Somewhat frustratingly none of the story arcs join up in this first part of the trilogy, which leaves the reader wondering if the main premise of the second volume will simply be joining up these story arcs, leaving the 'Webmind' plot itself rather lacking.

Overall, the themes of the book are emerging intelligence, consciousness and self-awareness. Caitlin's increasing visual awareness and emergence into the 'seeing' world is mirrored by events in the other plots. Sawyer handles this well and throughout the book there are references to the theory of consciousness to make the story really credible.

The characters are likeable, although Sawyer's portrayal of a teenage girl who has just been gained sight, is not wholly convincing, and the book is a little lacklustre in some places leading me to wonder if this is perhaps a trilogy that would have been a tighter and better paced single, larger novel. Webmind's apparently self-selected Occam's razor logic gives rise to some concerns that the trilogy might contain some all too familiar 'Hal' moments.

I must also echo Pauline's comments from her review of Sawyer's *FLASHFORWARD* in January's *Brum Group News* that when books are set so close to the time of writing the author can get it wrong. *WAKE* already sounds a little out of date, especially in terms of its references to bird 'flu and some of the 'blogspeak' and emoticons used.

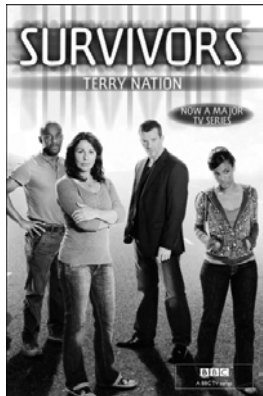
The theme of the book is well presented and the book is a good page turner of a sufficient pace to keep the reader interested. The consciousness and mathematical theories are presented well so as not to alienate anyone not too familiar with those topics and avoid giving the reader that sense of reading a textbook. This book has been compared with SNOWCRASH by Stephenson and some of Gibson's work, and although it has its appeal I don't feel it is in that league. Finally, for me the 'Webmind' plot was not massively attention-grabbing, I was far more interested in the loveable painting chimp... *SF*

SURVIVORS by Terry Nation

Orion / 254pgs / £6.99 paperback ISBN: 9781409102649

Reviewed by Vicky Stock

First written in the '70's by Terry Nation, this story has seen a revival with the recent TV series shown on the BBC, starring Julie Graham, Paterson Joseph



and Max Beesley. I watched the programme before reading the book, and the two are not at all the same although they obviously follow the same basic root storyline. The basic premise is that a mystery virus (never, annoyingly, explained in either medium) spreads scarily quickly and wipes out most of the world's population in a matter of a few days. It starts off slow but then seems to take hold overnight. This part is covered quickly as the main focus of the storyline is, of course, from the title the survivors and how they cope with an almost empty world with all the mod cons still around them. The book and programme star a character called Abby Grant who

has lost her family but thinks her son may be alive still. She gradually meets other survivors, some friendly, some not, and with a small commune of the friendly ones, she learns self sufficiency and eventually forms long term survival plans. This is occasionally interrupted by other groups who try to raid their supplies or form an army to control the surrounding areas.

The book covers more of a timescale than the series - though admittedly another series is in the pipeline which may cover events in the latter part of the book. The characters are also slightly different in the book which meant I had some trouble relating what I'd watched to what I was now reading about. Only Abby and to some extent Greg appeared to match in both book and series. Some set pieces were straight from the novel, others appeared to have been invented completely. I presumed this was done to bring the story a bit more up to date and relevant, though really the only thing I missed in the story was any mention of computers, software and gadgets, though of course, without electricity these would presumably have been useless anyway.

The ending and approach to the book's resolution was a bit different to what I was expecting, and it will be interesting to see if the series takes this line next time. Overall I enjoyed the story, though I might have liked a bit more padding out of the characters. I was trying to rely on my memory from the programme to remember what the characters were like as people, and their individual backgrounds but not a lot of detail is given to bring them to life. A good read anyway, and it moves along at a good pace. The parts which may strike a chord include the initial reactions to the 'flu' (in these days of swine flu breakouts) and the scenes where they are making a new life for themselves out of the remaining rations etc. VS

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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 contact addresses.

Any information about forthcoming SF / Fantasy / Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk

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:-

Future books to be discussed will probably include

3001: FINAL ODYSSEY by Arthur C. Clarke

PAVANE by Keith Roberts

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN by Jon Avid Lindquist

THE CITY AND THE CITY by China Mieville

SOMNAMBULIST by Jonathon Barnes

THE MISFiTs are an informal group of local SF fans who meet regularly at 7pm at the Wagon & Horses, Oldbury on the third Friday of each month. Real ale, good food, great company. Next meeting is on 15th January. More details from Martin Tudor (empties084@btinternet.com).

GHOULS ON FILM! February 20th at The Mixing Bowl Theatre, Birmingham. Starting at 3pm is an hour of short films, including films by Amanda Boyle, Paula Haifley, Faye Jackson, Melanie Light and a brand new short by Maude Michaud – and possibly one or two others still to come! There will be TWO feature films screening for your pleasure: Kate Glover's outback slasher SLAUGHTERED, and the UK PREMIERE of the Soska Sisters' DEAD HOOKER IN A TRUNK! In addition to all this filmic goodness, very special guest Emily Booth will be in attendance and giving us a peek at her brand new

webseries, *Behind the Screams!* Full details of the programme will be made available nearer the time at <http://ghoulsonfilm.blogspot.com>

STEAMPUNK ART - the world premiere exhibition of Steampunk Art is at The Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford until 21st February. For more details and photos of art see <http://www.steampunkmuseumexhibition.blogspot.com/>

CORFLU COBALT, the 27th Corflu, 19th-21st March 2010 at The Winchester Hotel, Winchester, UK For only the second time in its history, Corflu, the convention for SF fanzine fans, is coming to Britain! Attending membership, inclusive of Sunday brunch banquet will cost £50 or \$75. Because we have to finalise the brunch banquet numbers for the hotel, full attending memberships will close on Saturday 13th March 2010. Full details from <http://www.corflu.org/>

ODYSSEY 2010, the 2010 Eastercon, 2 - 5 April 2010 will be held at Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, UK Guests of Honour are **Alastair Reynolds**, **Iain M Banks**, **Liz Williams** and **Mike Carey**. Artist Guest of Honour - **Carlos Ezquerra**. Fan Guests of Honour - **Fran** and **John Dowd**. Full details from <http://www.odyssey2010.org/>

SCI-FI LONDON 9: THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASTIC FILM will be held 28th April to May 3rd Full details from <http://www.sci-fi-london.com/>.

FANTASYCON 2010 will be held over the weekend of September 17–19 at the Britannia Hotel, 1 St James Street, Nottingham. Guests of Honour to be announced. Website is <http://sites.google.com/site/fantasycon2010/>



NOVACON 40 – the Brum Group’s own convention and the longest-running regional convention in the UK, will be once again held at The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG5 2BT. Dates are November 12th to 14th November. Guest of Honour is **Iain M Banks** and Special Guests are our Presidents **Brian Aldiss, O.B.E.** and **Harry Harrison**. Full details at <http://novacon.org.uk/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

March 12th – Gollancz editor JO FLETCHER returns with more amusing and interesting anecdotes of life in publishing

April 9th – tba

May 14th – comic fantasy author JASPER FFORDE

June 11th – tba

July 9th – SF/fantasy author STEVE FEASEY

August 13th – SUMMER SOCIAL – meal at The Black Eagle

September 10th – tba

October 8th – SF, fantasy author and satirist ADAM ROBERTS

November 5th – SF author CHARLES STROSS

December 3rd – Christmas Social

BRUM GROUP NEWS #461 copyright 2010 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk). 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, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG