

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

OCTOBER 2008

ISSUE 445

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

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VICKY COOK (SECRETARY); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);
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Friday 10th October

JO FLETCHER

For those members who attend conventions Jo will need little introduction as she is always at fantasy conventions and also at many of the annual Eastercons. She is an Editorial Director at Gollancz where she is responsible for much of the fantasy and some of the SF they publish. As Gollancz is the biggest publisher of SF and Fantasy in the UK, here is the perfect chance for you to have your say, ask questions and find out **why** SF is selling so badly here in the UK.

Jo has one published book of poems – SHADOWS OF LIGHT AND DARK – which was published in a limited edition hardcover (250 copies only) in

November 7th – one of the Brum Group's favourite speakers, GRAHAM JOYCE, will again be visiting us.

1998. She has also co-edited several anthologies with Steve Jones.

Jo is a huge presence in the SF/Fantasy publishing world and we are certain that Jo will give a fascinating talk. Be there!
RGP

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak, where we have once again hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00pm until 11.00pm on Friday 5th December. To get there take a 45 or 47 bus from Corporation Street. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - its about 15 minutes ride. PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE FROM OUR USUAL SECOND FRIDAY.

Tickets are £10 each which covers the cost of the skittle alley and the food but not your drinks (we have our own bar). There will be prizes for individual games – you don't have to know how to play skittles because we have our own variants of the game, designed to give everyone a chance, none of which would be allowed at competition or any other level. There will be a free half hourly raffle and, to judge from past comments, a good time to be had by all.

The meal will be a buffet of a selection of sandwiches, sausage rolls, quiche, chicken wings, pizza, salads etc., plus a separate selection for vegetarians, provided that this requirement is clearly stated when you order your ticket.

With this Newsletter there should be an application form for one or two tickets. Please complete it as indicated and hand it to Pat, with the necessary payment, at the October or November Group Meeting. Or send it to Vicky Cook, together with a cheque/postal order for the appropriate amount, at the address on the back page of this Newsletter. THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS MONDAY 24TH NOVEMBER because the Tavern needs food numbers that week. However, by that time NOVACON will have happened and there may not be any tickets left – numbers are restricted for safety reasons and we have reached that number every year previously and had to refuse latecomers.

REMEMBER THAT TICKETS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT – GET THEM NOW!
VB

THE BROKEN COMPUTER....

Once again, apologies for the slightly truncated newsletter last month. Error messages were flying all over my computer and Microsoft were rebooting it every hour or so. I just had to stop and print off what I had. The problem was a corrupted hard drive. A new 240GB hard drive was fitted in a few days but then I couldn't connect to the internet or broadband for a further two weeks. Everyone assumed that I'd reconnected my computer and live box incorrectly. But no, the reason was found to be a broken BT cable 200 yards away!!! So everything is now running smoothly. Fingers crossed!!!!
RGP

THE FIRST MUMMY: OR THE TALE OF A LOCAL AUTHOR by Vernon Brown

Coincidences happen!

A couple of months ago Royal Mail issued a set of stamps depicting film posters, one of which advertised *THE MUMMY*. Being curious as to when the film was first made I looked in one of my encyclopaedias to find two entries under that heading, the other one being *THE MUMMY: OR A TALE OF THE*

TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY published in 1827 and written by one Jane Webb about a mummy reanimated by scientists of that era. Apparently the book described a future society in sufficient detail to be classed as SF but as I was never likely to read it I mentally filed and forgot it.

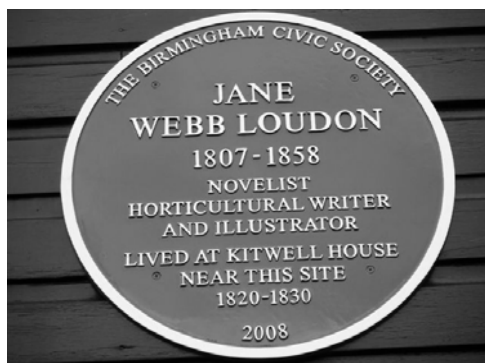


However, in mid-July Pat happened to buy a copy of the *Birmingham Mail* containing a half page article about the unveiling of a Blue Plaque in Birmingham in commemoration of ‘an early pioneer of science fiction who was way ahead of her time’ called Jane Webb Loudon. She was, of course, the Jane Webb of my encyclopaedia. Blue Plaques are erected by Civic Societies at places associated with eminent persons such as Charles Darwin or Samuel Johnson, which meant that Jane had been a person of some note. The article said that she is better known for writing the first gardening manuals and for her marriage to John Loudon, who designed Birmingham’s Botanical Gardens, but the wordage devoted to her SF was

more than that to her gardening so I thought I'd investigate further.

Googling her name threw up thousands of entries, mainly for her gardening books, for which she painted the original colour plates and which sell for thousands of pounds, but there was also information on her life and her SF. Born in 1807 to a prosperous family in Edgbaston, Birmingham, she moved with her family in 1820 to Kitwell House in Bartley Green, not too far from where that famous auctioneer and bookseller Rog Peyton now lives. Her mother having already died, she found herself in straitened circumstances after her father died in 1824 and she had to support herself, so she decided to write a book in which she would 'attempt to predict the state of improvement to which this country could possibly arrive'.

Set in 2126 Jane Loudon's novel was surprisingly prophetic considering that the only artificial power source known at the time of writing was the steam engine; electricity was a laboratory curiosity while the basic theories behind the internal combustion engine and atomic power had yet to be dreamed of, although interestingly the mummy of the title was revived by means of electricity so Jane must have been quite well read. Her future England was Catholic with fashionable ladies wearing trousers and no stays while movable houses had air conditioning, the internet and espresso machines. With weather control, mechanical milking machines and steam ploughs (actually invented some thirty years later) farmers could produce a sufficiency of food while each village had its post delivered by means of cannon balls shot into a large net, a system which is, in principle, better than that some villages now enjoy! Although space travel is mentioned the somewhat melodramatic action takes place in England as the Mummy of Cheops conspires with a politically minded priest to influence the choice of the next Queen.



The novel was well received although for Jane its most important role was to bring her together with John Loudon, who, as a respected designer of Gardens and Parks was most interested in her farming 'predictions' and arranged with mutual friends to meet her. Love, as they say, blossomed. They married seven months later in 1830 and she sold Kitwell House.

From her husband she learnt gardening and, combining this knowledge with her writing skills, she wrote a number of non-technical books on horticulture to become an authority on such matters as well as a devoted mother.

All this made Jane sound an interesting person so I rang the school that now occupies the site of Kitwell House and arranged for Pat and myself to visit and take a photograph of the plaque. Kitwell Primary School is pleasantly

situated, set back from the road amid playing fields and greenery, with the plaque just visible from the pavement. The Reception Staff were very friendly and introduced us to the Head teacher, Mrs P J Cooke, who spent some time with us discussing Jane Loudon before showing us the excellent display about her that the pupils had put together. Apparently Kitwell House had been demolished somewhere around 1960 and its actual site was no longer to be found although the remains of a path gave some indication of where it had been and one photograph has been found showing it just before demolition. Then it was time to take our photos and depart.

As someone with an interest in the history of SF I consider myself lucky to have had this link, no matter how tenuous, with an author from the very beginning of the genre. In fact she is only the third author in the SF Timeline given in *THE VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION* after de Grainville (1805) and Shelley (1818), or the second author if you consider *FRANKENSTEIN* to be the first true SF. And if I were a horror fan I would be interested to know that Jane's novel is the first ever 'Mummy' story and in fact gave rise to the legend of the Mummy's Curse that was supposed to kill any despoilers of Tutankhamen's tomb. So all I now need is a first edition in pristine condition!

With thanks to Mrs P J Cooke for giving permission for the photographs.

VB

DAN DARE and the BIRTH OF HI-TECH BRITAIN ***By Vernon Brown***

Pat recently came across a reference to a Dan Dare Exhibition at the Science Museum, London and further investigation showed that there was to be an Adults Only (no children allowed, not what you may have thought!) 'Late Evening' linked to it. We went down to London and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. The evening itself was a 'one off' and may not be repeated, but the 'Dan Dare and the Birth of Hi-Tech Britain' Exhibition is well worth visiting on its own.



As Dan Dare fans know, Dan and the *EAGLE* comic were the inspiration of many of Britain's scientists and innovators of the 60s and 70s; this exhibition juxtaposes examples of high tech from 1945 through the 50s and 60s with scenes from the DD comic strip. There's everything from an airborne A-bomb to a washing machine plus cabinets of original Hampson artwork and *EAGLE* toys. As the blurb on a postcard says 'This special Science Museum exhibition uncovers a surprising lost world of British design and invention'.

So if you are interested in Dan Dare and/or science and technology its well worth visiting the exhibition before it closes on October 25th and looking around the rest of the museum at the same time. Entrance is free. Check their website for details - sciencemuseum.org.uk VB

...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 >>

From member **ROBERT DAY**:- I was interested by the comments you made about the replica *Star Trek* Captain's Chair. A (rich) fan might find such a thing of interest; after all, if it was the original prop, I can think of quite a few people who, given the space to house it and the money, would snap it up. The problem is the inclusion of the gimmicks. Without the sound effects, it's an iconic artefact; but with them, it's a toy - and a damned expensive one at that. (And something of an exercise in exploitation).

But here's a funny thing. Those who have seen the gentle, touching and funny French film *AMELIE* may recollect that the lead character had a number



of eccentric prints on the walls of her apartment, as well as a humorous bedside lamp which consisted of a pig in a dressing gown holding a lamp standard. (In a fantasy element of the film, the pig engages in conversation with one of the prints before switching himself off.) The prints and lamp were designed by Michel Sobel, a noted (if slightly whimsical) Continental graphic designer. These prints and the lamp are actually available to buy through a number of Continental outlets, including a quite big-time distributor of fine art prints in Munich. They are regarded as an integral part of the designer's work and as such are respected; and I don't think it's the lack of

the cultural cringe associated with SF that we have come to know and love, because *AMELIE* has something of a cult status on the Continent.

All I know is that most people would probably form a different opinion of someone who had a Jim Kirk chair in their home to someone who had an AMELIE lamp.

<<Thank you Robert. I hadn't seen the movie AMELIE so did a Google search to find what this lamp looked like and found several, the one above showing up best. I find nothing sad about buying and owning one of these lamps. In fact, I really liked it. But Captain Kirk's chair!!! How can you compare the two? – RGP>>

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Geoffrey Perkins**, 55, former BBC TV head of comedy who worked for many years for BBC Radio, was killed in a road accident August 29th. He produced THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, one of the most successful radio shows ever made Actor, writer and man of experimental theatre **Ken Campbell** died suddenly at the age of 66 on September 1st. He set up the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool in 1976, which put on a series of spectacular shows, including THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, the eight-hour ILLUMINATUS!, and the 22-hour THE WARP. He visited the Brum Group when he appeared with Brian Aldiss in Brian's play SCIENCE FICTION BLUES The **David Gemmell** Legend Award will be presented for the very first time in 2009 for the best Fantasy novel of 2008. The award will be given to a work written in the 'spirit' of the late, great David



Gemmell, a true Master of Heroic Fantasy **Christopher Priest's** publishing venture, Grim Grin Studio, is now up and running with THE MAGIC out in hardcover and paperback, REAL-TIME WORLD again available in hardcover and a brand-new collection, ERSATZ WINE due mid-October After being 'lost' for over 30 years, **Roger Zelazny's** crime novel THE DEAD MAN'S BROTHER will finally be published in paperback in January by Hard-Case Crime **Harlan Ellison** is again suing CBS-Paramount over royalties for his Star Trek Series 1 classic episode "City on the Edge of Forever". They apparently are refusing to pay royalties after allowing Simon & Schuster to commission and publish 3 novels by David R George III using the plot of "City..."



BOOK REVIEWS

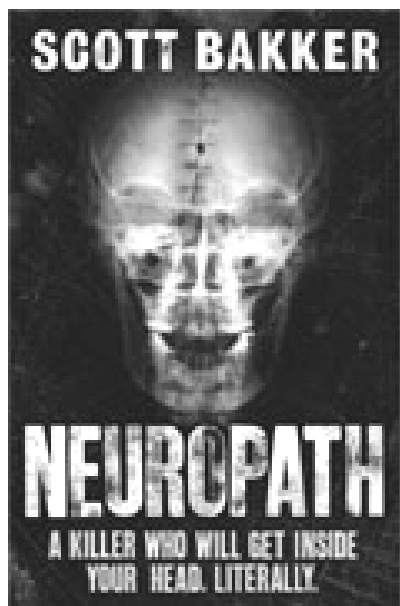


(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

NEUROPATH by Scott Bakker

Orion / 306pgs / hardcover / £18.99 / ISBN: 978-0752891507 / trade paperback / £12.99 / ISBN: 978-0752891514

Reviewed by William McCabe



This is the writer known as R. Scott Bakker but to show the change of style, he's dropped the 'R'. This is more likely to sell as a crime thriller rather than SF. There are a couple of elements here that would put it into the SF market but the overall style is one that would work best as a straight thriller. The least of the SF bits is that it is set in the near future after the effects of climate change have wrought havoc throughout Europe (including large parts of Russia) and consequently USA internal security has gained an even greater hold than it does now. The second element is that there is a secret project that applies electric charges to people's brains in order to change their personalities.

The real story is that Neil Cassidy, an employee of this secret project, has taken it upon himself to reveal its existence to the world by applying it to various people in sickeningly creative ways and posting the video on the internet. There's the ex porn star that he turns into a pain junkie until she slices herself to death; the multi-millionaire that can no longer remember faces and is now scared by his closest friends and family who all appear to be strangers; a politician forced to abuse children and a church minister who is given a divine revelation.

Since Cassidy isn't killing so many people and someone else is, the FBI have decided to recruit Thomas Bible, his old friend from college, in an attempt to capture him. There are complications in that several characters aren't what they seem and the odd bloodbath results.

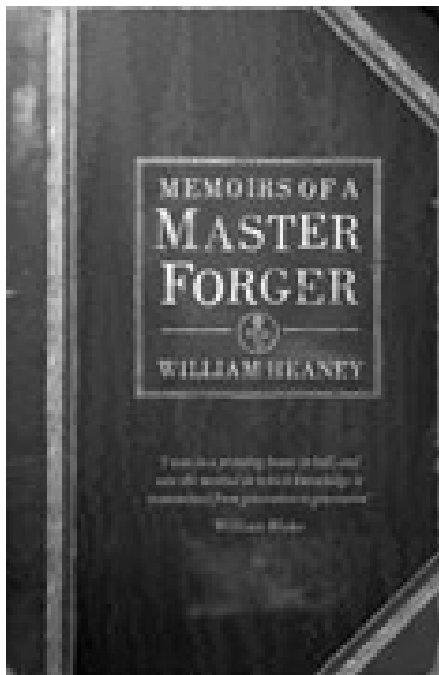
Bakker is trying to use this as an expose on a certain kind of psychosurgery that may be used for various military/intelligence purposes. On occasions this is really shocking, over explanatory and misjudged.

This is definitely not for the squeamish and, towards the end, it seems to overdo the shock element - if you can't take the torture of small children, don't touch this. WAM

***MEMOIRS OF A MASTER FORGER* by William Heaney**

Gollancz / 337pgs / hardcover / £9.99 / ISBN: 978 0575082977

Reviewed by William McCabe



There are occasions when I wonder where people think SF/fantasy stops and the mainstream begins. This is a case in point. If there's a genre here, I'd say it was soap opera. There's nothing here that you wouldn't see on soaps or chat shows. There are even suggestions that this is to be published as autobiography. That is taking it a bit too far as this is obviously written as fiction. There is a fantasy element here but it doesn't really make any impact on the plot.

The central character and at least two others see demons. One of these is a severe alcoholic, another is a veteran of the first Gulf War and has been in contact with 'depleted uranium' weapons, and the third has just written a book about the subject. You might think that this puts the book well into the fantasy bracket

although there's nothing else here that would. So you have to ask yourself, "Is this really mainstream fiction?"

So on to the plot. The main character, William Heaney, is one of those people who finds funding for various charities either from public agencies or private donors. Sometimes he will even contribute himself. He is also a second-hand book dealer. He also has a friend who forges first edition classic novels. At the time of this novel he is working on a copy of a Jane Austen novel. Actually he's working on two copies since he damaged the original. One of these will be sold for a 6 figure sum. There is a delay on this because the forger's girlfriend has just walked out on him. Heaney has already spent his part of this money on a local shelter for the homeless which means that money is going to be a little tight

for a while. This doesn't please Heaney's son who, possibly because of this, is being sent to a state school rather than his usual public school. There's also a poet who's just been exposed as a fraud by the papers, an ex-wife who's living with a TV chef, and a daughter who's got a new boyfriend with pierced bits that Heaney doesn't want to think about.

The real oddity is in the promotion of the book. So much is slightly false and not properly thought out. There's an internet diary at <http://butforthegrape.livejournal.com> that is supposedly written this year but, from the character of the writer, seems to be set before the beginning of the book which is set at the end of last year. There's the fact that the central character is supposedly the author of the book and this is his autobiography yet this seems to be written as a novel (incidents that should have been in newspapers don't have dates, celebrities don't have names). If nothing else, the 'Master Forger' of the title isn't even a forger.

The writing is fairly good and occasionally very visual. Though there are too many characters to get any real feel of any one of them. WAM

<<'William Heaney' is in fact a pseudonym of our November speaker, Graham Joyce. It will be interesting to hear his views on William's review!!! – RGP>>

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 rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.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 dates— 16th October, 20th November, 18th December

NEWCON 4 will be held at The Fishmarket, Northampton, NN1 2HL on Saturday October 11th & Sunday October 12th. Convention Chairman is Ian Watson and the Guests of Honour are Iain M Banks, Storm Constantine and Ken MacLeod. More details from their website...

<http://www.newcon4.com/newcon/main/default.aspx>

THE 19TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE SOCIETY OF FANTASTIC FILMS will be held at the Day's Hotel, Sackville St.,

Manchester (The Manchester Conference Centre). Dates are 17th to 19th October. Full details from their website... <http://fantastic-films.com/festival/>

OCTOCON will be held at the Royal Dublin Hotel, Dublin over the weekend of 18th and 19th October. Ken MacLeod is Guest of Honour. More details from... <http://2008.octocon.com/>

Halloween Silent Movie Special NOSFERATU (Cert 12) on Friday 31 October - 7.30pm at the Town Hall Birmingham. Not strictly SF but if you are interested in early films and/or special effects this film may be for you.



One of the earliest film adaptations of DRACULA, which caused, I think, copyright problems, NOSFERATU (1922) is now recognised as a masterpiece. For its time the special effects were quite advanced and, combined with the acting of Max Schreck, they produced a film that spawned a legion of other horror movies. It's a silent film with Nigel Ogden accompanying on the organ. This time though the film is to be shown in the newly reopened Town Hall so it should be even better. Running time approx 90 minutes (No Interval) Tickets £5 - £20 (60+ reductions) Box Office 0121 780 3333 See website www.thsh.co.uk <<Thanks to Vernon for this piece of news.>>



NOVACON 38 will be held at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, over the weekend of 14-16 November 2008; the guests are science fiction author Ian R MacLeod and the Brum Group's own Vernon Brown, who chaired the first Novacon back in 1971. Membership costs £38.00, payable to "Novacon 38" at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ; registration forms can be downloaded from the convention website, www.novacon38.org.uk, along with the first two progress reports.

LX2009 – the 2009 Eastercon. April 10-13, 2009 – Cedar Court Hotel, Bradford. Guests of Honour: Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Dirk Maggs, Tim Powers, David Lloyd. Fan Guests of Honour: Mary and Bill Burns. Website is www.LX2009.com

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

7th November – fantasy author and Brum Group favourite **GRAHAM JOYCE** returns... (**NOTE: One week earlier than usual**)

6th December – Christmas Social – Skittles and buffet at the Selly Park Tavern. Tickets will be on sale in September.

January 2009 – Annual General Meeting and Auction

February – Quiz against Birmingham University SF Group

March - tbc

BRUM GROUP NEWS #445 copyright 2008 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.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