

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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ISSUE 425

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

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);**
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Friday 9th February ROBERT HOLDSTOCK

Rob Holdstock was a fan and convention attendee before he started his professional writing career in 1976. His first three novels – *EYE AMONG THE BLIND*, *EARTHWIND* and *WHERE TIME WINDS BLOW* were SF rather than the fantasy he is now famous for. These were followed by horror novel *NECROMANCER* and the *Nighthunter* series (as by ‘Robert Faulcon’) as well as two sword ‘n’ sorcery series, the *Berserker* trilogy as by ‘Chris Carlsen’, and the *Raven* series written with the late Angus Wells under the pseudonym ‘Richard Kirk’. Other projects included movie and TV novelisations, artbooks, editing anthologies, etc.

His fantasy novel *MYTHAGO WOOD* (1984) changed and focused his direction. It won the World Fantasy Award. Several novels followed that were set in the same universe.

With a change in publisher, moving to Simon & Schuster in 2001, he started the *Merlin Codex* trilogy with *CELTIKA*. This was soon followed by volume two, *THE IRON GRAIL* in 2002. But volume three did not appear until 2007. Why? I’m sure Rob will be talking about this at some point.

MARCH 9th 2007 – SF and Fantasy author JUSTINA ROBSON will be making her first visit to the Group...

He has requested that rather than give a formal talk, he would prefer to be prompted by questions from the audience. His output to date is large and varied. So I'm sure there are many questions to be asked.

Rob rarely, if ever, attends conventions these days, so this is a great chance to meet him. Make the most of it. RGP

The meeting will take place in the Lichfield room on the second floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street (entrance in Union Passage almost opposite the Odeon. At the bottom of the ramp from New Street Station, turn right, cross over the road and you'll find Union Passage about 20-30 yards along). It will commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar and be seated in plenty of time.

THE AGM

Unfortunately, I missed the AGM this year due to illness but I'm told that your committee for 2007 is more or less unchanged. Only the Novacon Chairman position has changed. Steve Green now replaces Tony Berry on the BSFG committee. No one came forward to volunteer to edit the monthly newsletter so you're stuck with me for another year. Actually, producing the newsletter is just a crazy pastime for me. It gets printed and stuffed into envelopes but I have a strong feeling that it never gets read by more than a couple of you...

After the AGM Chris Morgan did a great job at the auction raising cash for the Brum Group. Thanks Chris for standing in at such short notice.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF SF - CENSORSHIP

<<A few months ago, I came across an article on the internet written by the author Ray Bradbury which I found fascinating. I had no idea when it was written as the article was undated but I've since placed it to the mid-70s.... I reprint it here, together with the short intro on the website, for your edification as I think it is still pertinent today, especially in light of the madness of 'political correctness'. Just how much of what we read has been watered down by some cranky editor? - RGP>>

FAHRENHEIT 451 is a multimedia age horror story of genius about firemen who are paid to set books ablaze and is more important than ever in our era of 'political correctness' and shallow consumerism. Got an unpleasant reality? BURN IT! Does that hurt your 'self-esteem' or make you uncomfortable? BURN IT!

Below is an addendum where Bradbury scathingly deals with those who have tried to censor his book on censorship (imagine that!).

CODA by Ray Bradbury

About two years ago, a letter arrived from a solemn young Vassar lady telling me how much she enjoyed my experiment in space mythology THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES. But, she added, wouldn't it be a good idea, this late in time, to rewrite the book inserting more women's characters and roles?

A few years before that I got a certain amount of mail concerning the same Martian book complaining that the blacks in the book were Uncle Toms and why didn't I 'do them over'? Along about then came a note from a Southern white suggesting that I was prejudiced in favour of the blacks and the entire story should be dropped.

Two weeks ago my mountain of mail delivered forth a pipsqueak mouse of a letter from a well-known publishing house that wanted to reprint my story "The Fog Horn" in a high-school reader.

In my story, I had described a lighthouse as having, late at night, an illumination coming from it that was a 'God light'. Looking up at it from the viewpoint of any sea-creature one would have felt that one was in 'the Presence'.

The editors had deleted 'God-Light' and 'in the Presence'.

Some five years back, the editors of yet another anthology for school readers put together a volume with some 400 (count 'em) short stories in it. How do you cram 400 short stories by Twain, Irving, Poe, Maupassant and Bierce into one book?

Simplicity itself. Skin, debone, demarrow, scarify, melt, render down and destroy. Every adjective that counted, every verb that moved, every metaphor that weighed more than a mosquito - out! Every simile that would have made a sub-moron's mouth twitch - gone! Any aside that explained the two-bit philosophy of a first-rate writer - lost!

Every story, slenderized, starved, bluepenciled, leeches and bled white, resembled every other story. Twain read like Poe read like Shakespeare read like Dostoevsky read like - in the finale - Edgar Guest. Every word of more than three syllables had been razored. Every image that demanded so much as one instant's attention - shot dead.

Do you begin to get the damned and incredible picture?

How did I react to all of the above?

By 'firing' the whole lot.

By sending rejection slips to each and every one.

By ticketing the assembly of idiots to the far reaches of hell.

The point is obvious. There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches. Every minority, be it Baptist / Unitarian / Irish / Italian / Octogenarian / Zen Buddhist / Zionist / Seventh-day Adventist / Women's Lib / Republican / Mattachine / FourSquareGospel feel it has the will, the right, the duty to douse the kerosene, light the fuse. Every dimwit editor who sees himself as the source of all dreary

blanc-mange plain porridge unleavened literature, licks his guillotine and eyes the neck of any author who dares to speak above a whisper or write above a nursery rhyme.

Fire-Captain Beatty, in my novel FAHRENHEIT 451, described how the books were burned first by the minorities, each ripping a page or a paragraph from the book, until the day came when the books were empty and the minds shut and the library closed forever.

"Shut the door, they're coming through the window, shut the window, they're coming through the door," are the words to an old song. They fit my lifestyle with newly arriving butcher/censors every month. Only six months ago, I discovered that, over the years, some cubby-hole editors at Ballantine Books, fearful of contaminating the young, had, bit by bit, censored some 75 separate sections from the novel. Students, reading the novel which, after all, deals with the censorship and book-burning in the future, wrote to tell me of this exquisite irony. Judy-Lynn Del Rey, one of the new Ballantine editors, is having the entire book reset and republished this summer with all the damns and hells back in place.

A final test for old Job II here: I sent a play, "Leviathan 99", off to a university theatre a month ago. My play is based on the "Moby Dick" mythology, dedicated to Melville, and concerns a rocket crew and a blind space captain who venture forth to encounter a Great White Comet and destroy the destroyer. My drama premieres as an opera in Paris this autumn. But, for now, the university wrote back that they hardly dared to do my play - it had no women in it! And the ERA ladies on campus would descend with baseball bats if the drama department even tried!

Grinding my bicuspid into powder, I suggested that would mean, from now on, no more productions of BOYS IN THE BAND (no women), or THE WOMEN (no men), Or, counting heads, male and female, a good lot of Shakespeare that would never be seen again, especially if you count line and find that all the good stuff went to the males!

I wrote back maybe they should do my play one week, and THE WOMEN the next. They probably thought I was joking, and I'm not sure that I wasn't.

For it is a mad world and it will get madder if we allow the minorities, be they dwarf or giant, orang-utan or dolphin, nuclear-head or water-conversationalist, pro-computerologist or Neo-Luddite, simpleton or sage, to interfere with aesthetics. The real world is the playing ground for each and every group, to make or unmake laws. But the tip of the nose of my book or stories or poems is where their rights and my territorial imperatives begin, run and rule. If Mormons do not like my plays, let them write their own. If the Irish hate my Dublin stories, let them rent typewriters. If teachers and grammar school editors find my jawbreaker sentences shatter their mushmild teeth, let them eat stale cake dunked in weak tea of their own ungodly manufacture. If the Chicano

intellectuals wish to re-cut my "Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" so it shapes "Zoot," may the belt unravel and the pants fall.

For, let's face it, digression is the soul of wit. Take the philosophic asides away from Dante, Milton or Hamlet's father's ghost and what stays is dry bones. Laurence Sterne said it once: Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine, the life, the soul of reading! Take them out and one cold eternal winter would reign in every page. Restore them to the writer - he steps forth like a bridegroom, bids them all-hail, brings in variety and forbids the appetite to fail.

In sum, do not insult me with the beheadings, finger-choppings or the lung-deflations you plan for my works. I need my head to shake or nod, my hand to wave or make into a fist, my lungs to shout or whisper with. I will not go gently onto a shelf, degouted, to become a non-book.

All you umpires, back to the bleachers. Referees, hit the showers. It's my game. I pitch, I hit, I catch. I run the bases. At sunset I've won or lost. At sunrise, I'm out again, giving it the old try.

And no one can help me. Not even you.

Ray Bradbury

THE BRITISH SF AWARDS – THE NOMINATIONS

The nominees for the British Science Fiction Awards have been announced. The winners will be announced at Contemplation, this year's Eastercon, on April 7.

Best Novel

DARKLAND by Liz Williams (Tor)

END OF THE WORLD BLUES by Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Gollancz)

ICARUS by Roger Levy (Gollancz)

THE LAST WITCHFINDER by James Morrow (Weidenfeld)

NOVA SWING by M. John Harrison (Gollancz)

Best Short Fiction

"The Djinn's Wife" by Ian McDonald (*Asimov's* Jun)

"The Highway Men" by Ken MacLeod (Sandstone Press)

"The House Beyond Your Sky" by Benjamin Rosenbaum (STRANGE HORIZONS)

"The Point of Roses" by Margo Lanagan (BLACK JUICE, Gollancz)

"Signal to Noise" by Alastair Reynolds (ZIMA BLUE AND OTHER STORIES - Nightshade Press)

"Sounding" by Elizabeth Bear (STRANGE HORIZONS)

Best Artwork

"Angelbot" by Fangorn (cover of TIME PIECES ed by Ian Whates)

Cover of FARTHING magazine, issue 2, Spring 2006. Credited to 'Vertebrate Graphics'.

"Droid" by Fahrija Velic (cover for INTERZONE 206)

"The Return to Abalakin" by Alexander Preuss

"Ring of the Gods" by William Li (cover of HOLLAND SF 226)

ARTHUR C CLARKE SHORT LIST

The short list for the Arthur C Clarke Award, presented to the best science fiction published in the UK, has been announced. The winner, who will receive a prize of £2007, will be announced on May 2 on the opening night of the Sci-Fi-London Film Festival

END OF THE WORLD BLUES by Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Gollancz)

NOVA SWING by M. John Harrison (Gollancz)

OH PURE AND RADIANT HEART by Lydia Millet (Heinemann)

HAV by Jan Morris (Faber)

GRADISIL by Adam Roberts (Gollancz)

STREAKING by Brian Stableford (PS Publishing)

PHILIP K. DICK AWARD NOMINEES

The nominees for this year's Philip K. Dick Award, presented for best paperback original have been announced. The award will be presented at Norwescon 30 on Friday, April 6, 2007. Norwescon will be held in Seatac, Washington. This year's judges include are Geary Gravel, Anne Harris, Christine Mains (chair), Kristine Smith, Mark Tiedemann. The award is sponsored by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society and the award ceremony is sponsored by the NorthWest Science Fiction Society.

CARNIVAL by Elizabeth Bear

CATALYST by Nina Kiriki Hoffman

IDOLON by Mark Budz

LIVING NEXT DOOR TO THE GOD OF LOVE by Justina Robson

MINDSCAPE by Andrea Hairston

RECURSION by Tony Ballantyne

SPIN CONTROL by Chris Moriarty

THE CHRISTMAS PUZZLE – THE RESULT

If you can remember that far back, the Christmas Puzzle was to find as many SF book titles as possible that featured a real place on Earth. Only two of you submitted lists. And the total in that list was a mere 36 books and included several non-SF books by SF authors which really were not admissible. But even excluding those, it was still the best score, beating the other submission by one title! So the winner is William McCabe.

AND IT CONTINUES...FOR A WHOLE YEAR!

When I conceived this puzzle I thought someone would come in with a three-figure entry. One author alone has over 30 books that qualify. I came up with about 60 titles but I couldn't enter as I set the puzzle. I'm quite sure that with a bit of effort and ingenuity someone can come up with a lot more. So I'm

restarting the puzzle and extending the qualifications to include fantasy books. AND YOU HAVE ALL YEAR TO THINK ABOUT IT. Deadline is midnight on December 29th.

COME ON! Put a little effort to being a Brum Group member....! PLEASE!

FEBRUARY QUIZ by Steve Green

- 1 Name the sword carried by Elric of Melnibone in Michael Moorcock's fantasy series.
- 2 Which film directed by Steven Spielberg links Brian Aldiss, Bob Shaw and Ian Watson?
- 3 In which country is this year's Worldcon being held?
- 4 Name the sequel to Mary Doria Russell's award-winning novel THE SPARROW.
- 5 Which British SF author guested on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* in January?
- 6 Name the New York SF group which included authors Fred Pohl, Don Wollheim, James Blish and Isaac Asimov.
- 7 Anne McCaffrey set her dragon novels on which planet?
- 8 Why did the actor Christopher Reeve make a guest appearance on stage at the 1979 Worldcon in Brighton?
- 9 Name the British SF author and Novacon guest of honour who also produces political essays for *The Morning Star*.
- 10 Which American SF fan, author and music critic is a former editor at *Amazing Stories*, *Fantastic* and *Heavy Metal*?

ANSWERS TO JANUARY QUIZ

Which was set by Steve Green – and I somehow missed including his name in the title. Sorry, Steve!

- 1 THE WASP FACTORY.
- 2 Shakespeare's THE TEMPEST.
- 3 The spacecraft *Anastasia*.
- 4 Jane Gaskell.
- 5 Joe 90.
- 6 INTERZONE.
- 7 The *Foundation* series.
- 8 Edgar Allen Poe, among others.
- 9 Brum Group member Chris Morgan.
- 10 WHEN THE WIND BLOWS (later an animated film).
- 11 Star Fleet captain
- 12 Adolf Hitler.

And the winner is our US member **Wendell Wagner** who got 10 out of 12. Well done Wendell. Please collect your free pint at the next meeting.....!!!

PATTERNS FROM NATURE

**A photographic exhibition by
Chris Morgan**

At Birmingham Nature Centre, Pershore Road



Launch: Thursday 8th February 2007 6.30-8.30pm
Then opens Saturdays and Sundays 10.00am – 4.00pm
And half-term week Mon 12th – Fri 16th Feb 10.00-4.00pm
(Not open Fri 9th Feb or other weekdays)

Exhibition ends Sunday 25th Feb

ALL PHOTOS FOR SALE

Birmingham Nature Centre – 0121 472 7775

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Robert Anton Wilson** died in his home on January 11, 2007, seven days before his 75th birthday. A former editor at PLAYBOY, Wilson was the co-author, with **Robert Shea**, of the *The Illuminatus!* trilogy, which won the 1986 Prometheus Hall of Fame Award. His other writings include the *Schroedinger's Cat* trilogy, the *Cosmic Trigger* trilogy and several nonfiction works such as PROMETHEUS RISING and THE NEW INQUISITION **Publishers Group West**, one of the largest book distributors in the United States, has filed for bankruptcy. PGW's client list includes genre publishers Carroll & Graf, Dark Horse, McSweeney's, North Atlantic Press, Thunder Bay Press, and Underwood Books **DNA Publications**, which publishes SF CHRONICLE, ABSOLUTE MAGNITUDE, DREAMS OF DECADENCE, and other genre publications, is being investigated for consumer fraud following complaints from subscribers to those magazines and the official KISS magazine Our co-President, **Brian Aldiss**, guested on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* on January 28th. It's repeated February 2nd – but you almost certainly won't get this newsletter until after that date. Sorry. I don't own a radio so no use asking me Christopher Evans has sold novel OMEGA to PS Publishing **Disney** is optioning rights to the **Edgar Rice Burroughs** series "John Carter of Mars" as a potential franchise for the studio. Paramount had previously owned the rights to the epic and had set the project up with Jon Favreau directing and Sean Daniel and Jim Jacks producing. But Paramount's option expired and now Disney has jumped aboard and is in talks with Burroughs' estate **The Razzies**, or Anti-Oscars, presented to celebrate the worst Hollywood has to offer, will take place on Oscar eve, Saturday, February 24 at Hollywood's Ivar Theatre. Most of what Hollywood has to offer is pretty appalling so obviously the list is much too long to reproduce here. For a full list go to <http://www.cinematical.com/2007/01/23/its-that-time-again-2007-raspberry-nominations-announced/> Fantasy writer **David Eddings**, 75, said he was using water to flush out the gas tank of his broken-down Excalibur sports car, when some fluid leaked. In a lapse of judgment he readily admitted, Eddings lit a piece of paper and threw into the puddle to test if it was still flammable. The answer came in an orange torrent. The fire raged through the garage and a quarter of the way into the office that occupies the lot next door to his home. His 95-year-old mother-in-law inside the home, came outside to find the juniper trees lining the driveway had gone up in flames, too. Eddings said his intention was to prevent a fire - he was afraid to leave a tank full of gasoline in a car that had gone kaput - but instead he did the opposite. "One word comes to mind," the renowned wordsmith said as he stood in a pajama shirt and slippers. "Dumb"

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

***THE SOMNAMBULIST* by Jonathan Barnes**

Gollancz / 315 pgs / hardcover £16.99; trade pbk £9.99

Reviewed by William McCabe

Star Rating: * * *

There's a borderline between SF and other genre fiction that's often blurred. Think of the spy thrillers where the hero perpetually saves the world from some new technological marvel or the detective with (near) psychic abilities. The plot of the story doesn't really have anything to do with SF but some will claim it is because of these minor frills. This is one of those. There are several characters that belong in a carnival freak-show (including at least one that *is* in one), a device that Dr. Frankenstein would have been jealous of, and a character that has a different view of the passage of time. Despite all this, the plot is an adventure story that isn't so different from John Buchan or Arthur Conan-Doyle.

The setting is London, soon after the death of the Queen. Although it is never said outright, this seems to have been Queen Victoria. This is not some obviously alternate world but it is an obvious fiction.

Once-great amateur detective and stage magician Edward Moon is drawn into a case of bizarre murders that are merely a ruse to get him into something much more sinister. He moves from Scotland Yard to 'The Directorate' (presumably the secret service of the day) to "Love, Love, Love & Love" who have their own (literally) underground organisation before everything explodes into a small war on the streets of the city.

The great feature and most of the mood of the novel, comes from its continuing array of freaks. From Moon's constant companion, "The Somnambulist", who has no problem with people sticking swords through various parts of his torso, through Cribb, who seems to live his life backwards remembering only the things that have yet to happen, to the secret of "Love" that seems to have stepped out of a famous SF/Horror story. For a little added spice there are also assassins, usually freakish, occasionally superhuman and psychopathic.

Although the story reads as easily as any thriller there are a few serious flaws. Too often there are teasers for plot and character points that are never resolved - most obviously the connection between Cribb and "The Somnambulist". Many of the freaks have no reason to be such within their own story. It makes the story feel like it has been built on something much more

ordinary and these extra parts are just stuck on to try to conform to something that doesn't really belong there. WAM

THOSE CRAZY BOOK TITLES – Robert Day

Nominees are beginning to stack up for this year's Diagram Prize, in the annual competition hosted in the pages of "The Bookseller" for the weirdest titles.

Who can forget previous years' winners, such as:

LARGE AND VERY LARGE HOLE DRILLING

SCENES FROM THE HISTORY OF CONCRETE; or

PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW THEY'RE DEAD; HOW THEY ATTACH THEMSELVES TO UNSUSPECTING BYSTANDERS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

How can anyone forget honourable runners-up such as:

RHINO HORN STOCKPILE MANAGEMENT; or

ANCIENT STARCH RESEARCH?

The early front runners so far this year include:

SCOUTS IN BONDAGE

HOW GREEN WERE THE NAZIS?

D DI MASCIO OF COVENTRY; AN ICE CREAM COMPANY OF REPUTE, WITH AN INTERESTING AND VARIED FLEET OF ICE CREAM VANS

BUGS FLYING; GETTING TO KNOW INSECTS BY READING ANCIENT POEMS

THE STRAY SHOPPING CARTS OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA; A GUIDE TO FIELD IDENTIFICATION

Remember, all these are real titles!

RD

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm to 7pm monthly, in GP5 on the 5th Floor at the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, B3 3HQ. It's a small friendly group meeting to discuss SF & fantasy books. Contact person is Pam Gaffney on (0121) 303 3398.

Books to be discussed:-

February 15th – tba March 15th – tba

REDEMPTION 2007 is the multimedia fan convention that will be held at the Hinckley Island Hotel, Hinckley, Leics over the weekend of Feb 23-25. Guests include Mark Ayres, Scott Fredericks and James Swallow. See their website at <http://www.conventions.org.uk/redemption/contact.html>

CONTEMPLATION – the 2007 Eastercon will be held over the Easter weekend (6th to 9th April) in the beautiful, historic Chester - see the website at - <http://contemplation.conventions.org.uk/>

FANTASYCON 2007 will be held over the weekend of September 21-23 at the Britannia Hotel, 1 St James Street, Nottingham. Guests of Honour are Steve Jones and Michael Marshall Smith. Full details from their website <http://www.fantasycon.org.uk/>

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

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses.

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

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

March 9th – SF author **JUSTINA ROBSON**

April 13th – SF author **KEN MacLEOD**

May 11th – SF/Fantasy editor **PETER LAVERY** (tbc)

Aug 10th – Summer Social

Sep 14th – the group of fantasy writers, The Write Fantastic, now numbering eight – **JAMES BARCLAY** and **DEBORAH MILLER** have joined since their last appearance - will be visiting us

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Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

ABOUT US... The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the second Friday of each month. Membership is £16 per year per person (or £21 for two members living at the same address). This includes the 12 free issues of the Newsletter plus reduced entrance fee at each meeting. Cheques should be made payable to “The Birmingham Science Fiction Group” and sent to our Secretary, 5 Greenbank, Barnt Green, Birmingham, B45 8DH