

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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ISSUE 465

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& **HARRY HARRISON**

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Friday 11th June

PAT CADIGAN

Pat Cadigan is a New Yorker who was first published in 1980. Early success with short stories persuaded her to write full time in 1987. That year saw the publication of her first SF novel, *MIND-PLAYERS*, which was followed in 1989 by her short story collection *PATTERNS*. Her second novel, *SYNNERS*, became an Arthur C Clarke Award winner in 1992, a feat she repeated in 1995 with her third novel, *FOOLS*. Perhaps this was what prompted her to move to the UK in 1996.

The vast majority of her writing has been classed as 'cyberpunk' and her work can be seen in a further three collections – *LETTERS FROM HOME* (1991), *DIRTY WORK* and *HOME BY THE SEA* (both 1993) and just two novels – *TEA FROM AN EMPTY CUP* (1998) and *DERVISH IS DIGITAL*

July 9th – young-adult author STEVE FEASEY will be our speaker and hopefully we might discover the secrets to attracting young/younger audiences

(2001). The last dozen or so years have seen her writing several TV novelisations, from LOST IN SPACE to JASON X.

A new novel, REALITY USED TO BE A FRIEND OF MINE, was due to be published in January this year but to date it has not appeared. We're sure that Pat will explain why this has been delayed.

I said last month that this would be Pat's first visit to the Group. WRONG! As soon as I saw the printed newsletter I remembered that Pat had spoken to the Group back in the late '90s – September 1998 to be exact.

So - welcome back Pat!

RGP

****WE'RE BACK AT THE BRIAR ROSE THIS MONTH!****

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, off New Street.

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. The entrance fee for this meeting is £3 for members, £4 for non-members

THE JASPER FFORDE MEETING by Vicky Stock

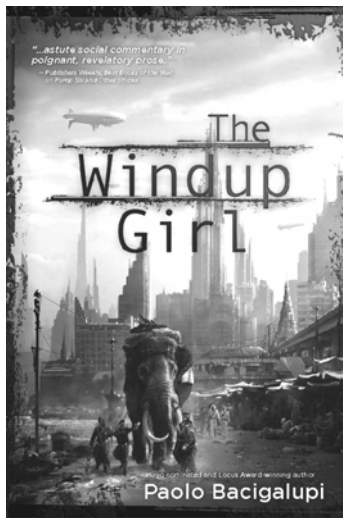
At our last meeting we had invited author Jasper Fforde along to speak to the Group. This was an event which we organised slightly differently to normal, as we were aware that audiences for Jasper have numbered in the hundreds! So we set up a pre-payment system using PayPal and booked the Old Joint Stock which had a much bigger room, charging a pound extra to cover the extra cost. In the end we didn't attract hundreds but the room was fairly well filled, and all seemed to enjoy themselves.

He started by relating how he tailors his talks to adults or children. He likes questions and telling anecdotes. After discovering only three in the room had read his latest book, *Shades of Grey* (published January 2010 with the paperback due out in December), he started the main part of his talk by relating how he had started writing - by setting himself narrative 'dares' – which he then had to write his way out of. The most popular example he used of this for the audience was about a man turning into a banana! He went on to explain how his stories tend to use famous fictional characters, such as Dorian Grey as a used car salesman, but his most recent book is different because it doesn't do this. The dare here is all about colours and how they are the product of the mind.

Questions were asked about the town settings and why Swindon (why not? was his response, and he went on to give a funny anecdote about being made mayor of the town for 5 minutes, in which time he made it an independent city state, allowed self-setting of tax rates and changed the language to Welsh!). He was also questioned about the banana story, and whether there were tours of

Swindon (there is a bus tour planned, and streets have been named after his characters). He said he usually manages to write himself out of his 'dares'. He has been planning to work on a sitcom idea but just has too much on at the moment.

All in all he was well received and the meeting seemed to be enjoyed by all. He came across as a personable speaker, with lots of ideas and a quick intelligence, to whom little details matter in his writing. I haven't managed to read one of his stories yet but would like to be introduced to his writing now. VS



THE 2010 NEBULA AWARD WINNERS

The following awards were announced and presented May 15

Novel: THE WINDUP GIRL by Paolo Bacigalupi (Nightshade Books, US & UK)

Novella: "The Women of Nell Gwynne's" by Kage Baker

Novellette: "Sinner, Baker, Fabulist, Priest; Red Mask, Black Mask, Gentleman, Beast" by Eugie Foster

Short Story: "Spar" by Kij Johnson

Damon Knight Grand Master: Joe W. Haldeman

...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 rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk >>

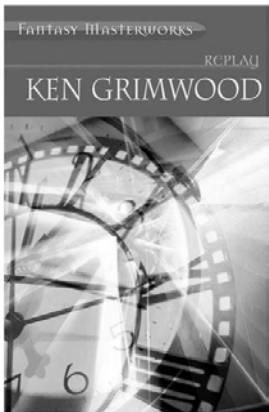
Member Dave Hardy writes:- "I was surprised to see you asking 'What is Science Fiction?', because you've always rather derided this question. I remember at one of my very first Brum Group meetings (speaker Harry Harrison) I said that it could be condensed into two words: 'What if?' Harry promptly came up with several 'what ifs' that had nothing to do with SF! But even so, it is true, isn't it, that if you ask 'What if the Nazis had won World War II?' or 'What if that asteroid hadn't wiped out the dinosaurs' (as Harry did in WEST OF EDEN) you can get yourself started on an SF story.

"Which is my answer to your (no doubt Devil's Advocate, knowing you) answer: 'Science fiction is a fictional vision of a scientifically possible future.' I don't believe that you really mean that, because you're very fond of 'alternative reality' and time-based stories, and these (need) have nothing to do with your definition. They can, for instance, take place in the past. There are lots of SF

themes that have nothing to do with the future, scientifically possible or not. So to your ‘No?’ I answer a definite ‘No!’.

“As for my own definition, that’s more difficult. Possibly something like: ‘Fiction is which some application of science plays an intrinsic part?’”

<<Well, Dave, you obviously don’t know me as well as you thought! Or you’re getting me confused with Vernon who likes alternate reality stories but prefers to call them by a strange name that no-one else understands and can’t remember (and probably don’t care about either). Me? I definitely dislike many alternate world stories, thanks to the likes of authors like Harry Turtledove who wrote a whole series of novels about aliens landing in the middle of World War I. Silly or what? There are many very good alternate worlds novels but they are all fantasy, not SF. There is no valid scientific theory for alternate worlds. Neither – and you may be very surprised by this – are time travel stories SF. I’ve always had a fondness for time travel stories, possibly because my favourite kind of story is where the lead character finds himself/herself in a totally different world/time/landscape to that which is their norm. But time travel is impossible and therefore fantasy. Robert Heinlein’s “By His Bootstraps” and Robert Silverberg’s UP THE LINE have sadly proven to me that time travel could never happen. None of the above stops me from loving books like Ken Grimwood’s REPLAY or Jerry Yulsman’s ELLEANDER MORNING. But they *are* fantasy.



Your theories about ‘What If?’ stories just do not make sense. You can say ‘What If?’ to anything – ‘What if I’d learned to swim?’, ‘What if my cup of coffee got spilt?’, “What if I’d married two women instead of one?” or any other number of trivialities. Yes, it is thought-provoking to imagine what our world would be like if a major occurrence had been different, but simply using those two words doesn’t make anything SF. The two words standing alone are meaningless.

I’m intrigued by your statement that there are ‘lots of SF themes that have nothing to do with the future’. Care to name some? Offhand, I can’t think of any. I can think of time-travel stories where the action takes place in the past but the ‘invention’ that got the characters there comes from our future.

Sorry, but your own definition of SF is wrong. A vast majority of modern crime novels have scientific applications as an intrinsic part of the plot, but you wouldn’t claim that they were SF, would you? - RGP>>

Member Robert Day writes:- “There's an easy answer as to ‘what is SF?’, though I suspect you won't necessarily like it. That answer is; ‘whatever SF fans read’. We generally have an interest in, or fascination with, the fantastic, whether the fantastic elements are things that are not yet, or things that could be, or things that underlie the ordinary, or just things that are unknown to us personally. So that covers hard SF (things that are not yet, or that could be), soft SF and fantasy (things that underlie the ordinary, whether it's the truths of how the observed world works, and how that could be experienced directly or changed or manipulated - this covers everything from biology to sociology to nanotech - or the more metaphorical underlying truths, such as time, the powers of the mind, or myth and legend - so this covers time travel, stories about psi powers, the experience of the alien, or the broad sweep of fantasy in all its forms).

“That creates an easily-identified canon of literature which the publishers' staff you wrote about would recognise. On the periphery of that canon are works which fall into the SF category for those of us who read SF, where the writer has employed the fantastic without knowing what it is that they are doing - and this is where you get the Margaret Atwoods and Paul Theroux's and Doris Lessing's and George Orwells of this world. They don't see themselves as SF writers, and are horrified (mostly) when they are claimed as such by us. (Doris Lessing is an obvious exception, of course). You yourself have experienced books like that: I remember a convention where you were raving about this strange but excellent new book by a previously unknown writer - something called THE WASP FACTORY by someone called Iain Banks. Do you know whatever became of him? <<No idea, but his brother Menzies I Banks is doing quite well with a series about *The Culture*, I believe – RGP>>

“And then there are books which you only realise are SF, or have a lot in common with SF, long after the event. I remember back in the 1970s when James Clavell's SHOGUN came out. In those days, I was living on Tyneside and hobnobbing with the Gannets. A couple of them were raving about SHOGUN and had declared it to be a science fiction novel, because it was about a man from what was recognisably our society (albeit in an earlier era) who was encountering a completely alien civilisation; and in the 16th/17th Centuries, Japan was truly alien in terms of its accomplishments, its customs, its beliefs and its society. We would never claim SHOGUN as SF in any recognisable sense, but it nonetheless contained sufficient elements of the fantastic to be relevant and satisfying to SF fans. The same could be said of Jim Ballard's EMPIRE OF THE SUN, for example.”

<<Robert – I'm surprised and horrified by that ‘whatever SF fans read’ comment. You're right, I don't like it. It's a lazy cop-out that I thought you, of all people, would rise above. Go to the back of the class! I do agree with most of the subjects you mention that pertain to SF but most definitely not myth or legend – they are pure fantasy and play no part in SF. My whole

purpose of writing that short piece on ‘What is Science Fiction’ was precisely to try to separate SF from Fantasy from Alternate Worlds so that even outsiders could recognise what was what. At the moment we have the ridiculous situation of what is supposed to be the BBC’s top SF series *Doctor Who* having vampires in the plot! The whole range of SF, fantasy, myth, supernatural, horror – all are now lumped together as sci-fi and it ain’t right! Your story about me raving over *THE WASP FACTORY* is quite true but I always stated that it wasn’t SF though the kind of book an SF fan would probably like. At the time I knew he was about to start publishing SF and it seemed a good time to introduce Banksie’s work to lovers of ‘good’ books. And Clavell’s *SHOGUN* was stocked in Andromeda, not because it was SF (it isn’t), but, again, being a ‘first contact’ novel, I thought it was the kind of book that an SF fan would appreciate. I still rate it as one of the best books I’ve ever read, and possibly *the* best. But, because I think a particular book will be appreciated by an SF fan, does not make that book SF. Neither does your comment that *SHOGUN* has ‘a lot in common with SF’. – RGP>>>

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .



.... Artist Frank Frazetta (b.1928) died on May 10. Frazetta, whose wife, Ellie, died in July 2009, is perhaps best known for his paintings of *Conan the Barbarian* and artwork for other books by Robert E. Howard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Frazetta had a career spanning more than forty years. He was a Hugo Award winner, a member of the Will Eisner Hall of Fame, the Jack Kirby Hall of Fame, and was named Spectrum Grand Master of Fantastic Art UK comics writer and author Peter O'Donnell (b.1920) died May 3. He is of particular SF interest for *Modesty Blaise*, a newspaper strip which ran in the *London Evening Standard* from 13 May 1963 until 11 April 2001, when he retired, and for a number of notable scripts from 1953 to 1966 for the comic strip *Garth*. He also wrote 13 novels featuring *Modesty Blaise* Author Sharon Webb (b.1936) died on April 29 from

a heart attack. Webb began publishing SF in 1963. Many of her stories were collected in the fix-up novel THE ADVENTURES OF TERRA TARKINGTON and she also wrote the *Earth Song* trilogy Author Norman Spinrad is recuperating from surgery performed on May 20 at Sloan-Kettering in relation to his stomach cancer Random House has announced plans to merge the Ballantine and Bantam/Dell divisions into a single group to be called Ballantine Bantam Dell, combining the two independent editorial departments into one Neil Barrett Jr has been named 2010 Author Emeritus by the Science Fiction Writers of America Margaret Atwood received a 2010 Dan David Prize which includes a \$1 million shared with Amitav Ghosh, her co-winner in the 'Literature: Rendition of the 20th Century' category *Asimov's SF* has become the first of the 'Big Three' fiction magazines to accept electronic submissions. *Asimov's* has started using the system developed by *Clarkesworld* to allow author to send and track submissions and receive responses WAKE by Robert Sawyer was the winner of the Canadian Prix Aurora for Best Novel in English The Baltimore Science Fiction Society has announced that Paolo Bacigalupi is the winner of the 2010 Compton Crook/Stephen Tall Award for THE WINDUP GIRL METROPOLIS fans will be very interested in the latest news on the 'complete' version (25 additional minutes) – lost for over 80 years and now showing in the USA with a DVD due later this year. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/05/movies/05metropolis.html?ref=arts> where there's also a 2 minute video clip of the restored version Tom Welling has revealed that Season 10 will be the last for SMALLVILLE RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



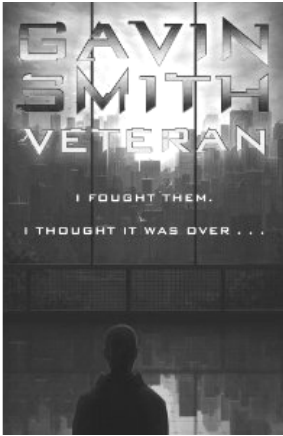
(REVIEWERS please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

***VETERAN* by Gavin Smith**

Gollancz / 416pgs / hardcover £18.99 ISBN: 978-0575094093 / trade paperback £12.99 ISBN: 978-0575094100

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

Violent from the start, but not excessively so, this is the author's debut novel and is set approximately 250 years after the Final Human Conflict which is referred to throughout the book as FHC (the author regularly uses acronyms, one or two of which were unclear). It is a badly damaged world in which sea levels have significantly risen part drowning coastal cities and, in addition, there are some large radioactive areas. Some cities are completely controlled by criminal gangs.



The main character, Jakob Douglas, is a special services (augmented) veteran of the war against Them, the genocidal aliens locked in a 60-year-old conflict with humanity. He is forcibly reactivated by Major Rolleston, his former boss on Dog (Sirius) 4, whom he hates, to investigate and resolve a code eleven xenomorphic infiltration. Tracking the injured and dying alien, Jakob finds out that it calls itself Ambassador and is possibly on a peace mission. Chased by Rolleston and his pet assassin extraordinaire, Josephine Bram, aka the Grey Lady, Jakob flees with a teenage hooker turned hacker.

During his travels he meets and teams up with a hacker trying to create God in the internet, a cyborg pirate king metamorphosed into a sea demon, and various special services veterans some of whom are old friends. On the way he learns that a friend who he last saw on Dog 4 is still alive and is a captive of Rolleston. The rescue mission takes him and his team to the bottom of the sea and the top of the sky, then beyond.

An interesting cameo is the battle and subsequent destruction of a space warship 'Warchilde' that bears a resemblance to that of 'Thunderchilde' in H G Wells's WAR OF THE WORLDS.

This is an enjoyable SF tale featuring well developed and, yes, likable (but damaged) cast of characters and is highly recommended. The only downside, if it is one, is that the book does not resolve Jakob's mission. It would be a shame if the author did not write a sequel, especially as Rolleston and the Grey Lady are still at large.

JTP

STONE SPRING by Stephen Baxter

Gollancz / 501pgs / Hardcover £18.99 ISBN 978-0575089181 / Trade paperback £12.99 ISBN 978-0575089198

Reviewed by Michael Jones

'Doggerland' is the name semi-officially given to a stretch of land which once linked northern Britain to what is now the Netherlands. About 6-8000 years ago, it was inundated by rising sea levels, which may or may not have resulted in part from a comet impact, and it now lies beneath the North Sea. It is this land that Stephen Baxter has chosen as the setting for his latest book, the first volume of the *Northland* trilogy.

He draws a picture of a fertile land, largely forested, with plentiful game to be found both on land and in the sea, ideal to support a population of hunter-gatherers. The story is told mainly from the point of view of a group living on the north coast of Doggerland, showing signs of a nascent civilisation but one without domesticated animals or any form of agriculture. This first volume of the series shows them building defences against rising water levels and reclaiming land from the sea, using the kind of methods probably employed in the Netherlands before Roman times and employing solely human labour.



It is a well-told story of people leading a happy, uncomplicated existence, worshipping spirits but hardly slaves to superstition. Occasional inter-personal and inter-tribal rivalries sometimes have to be resolved by outbreaks of extreme violence, but their lives are otherwise peaceful, although short, and at times physically arduous - as one would expect. Nevertheless they are shown as employing fairly advanced language skills and an ability to grapple with abstract concepts, although one wonders if this part of the picture is entirely convincing.

It seems that in recent years Stephen Baxter is becoming increasingly inclined to explore past history as a source of inspiration. In this case, the result is a book almost totally devoid of science and technology as we now know them: he has hinted elsewhere that future volumes in the series may show the development of a different kind of advanced civilisation but the implication is that it may be non-technical. To some extent it may be interesting to explore a different kind of world in this way, but the idea that the series explores an 'alternate history' is a slender justification for calling it Science Fiction. If you are looking for SF don't look for it here.

MJ

***BLACK MAGIC SANCTION* by Kim Harrison**

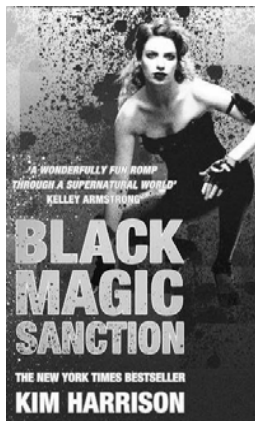
HarperCollins / 487pgs / paperback £6.99 ISBN: 978-0007321964

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

This is the latest episode in the continuing saga of Rachel Morgan who is feisty, totally loyal to friends, honourable and merciful to enemies.... and is a witch. As with the previous novels in the series, this book is full of fast-paced, non-stop action from start to finish.

At the close of the previous book she was 'shunned' by the witch community for allegedly being a black witch and dealing with demons. In this story she is under attack by the *coven of moral and ethical standards*, the group who legalized her shunning (they also use 'legal' lethal white magic). This tale also chronicles her running battle with Trent Kalamack, a closet elf and mega rich

businessman/ criminal/politician and the demon Algaliarept. An ex-boyfriend turned thief is also involved.



After a number of kidnap and arrest attempts the coven is successful and she is sentenced without trial to imprisonment in Alcatraz (a good prison for witches as it is surrounded by salt water which destroys spells). Here, prisoners are drugged to prevent them attempting to cast spells with the more dangerous ones being lobotomized. Rachel is also threatened with genetic slavery as coven members covet the magic potential of her unborn children. Fortunately for her she has very good friends to rescue her quickly.

As with all the previous books in this series **BLACK MAGIC SANCTION** is highly readable with well defined and enjoyable characters and can be enjoyed if read out of sequence. That said, it would be better to read it in chronological order as this will provide useful background information and further flesh out all of the characters. I eagerly look forward to the next episode.

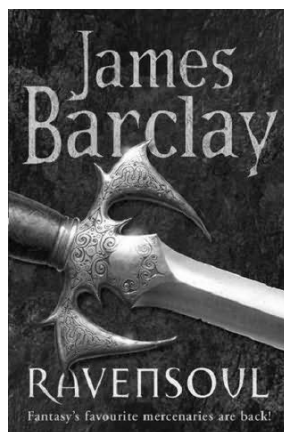
JTP

***RAVENSOUL* by James Barclay**

Gollancz / 448pgs / paperback £7.99 ISBN: 978-0575084865

Reviewed by Vicky Stock

The Raven are back! The band of mercenaries for hire were last seen in **DEMONSTORM** and appeared to have fought for the last time, but Barclay resurrects them for this one last battle. The star of the show is the ‘Unknown Warrior’, also known as Sol, who is one of the last remaining members of the Raven left alive after the events of the last book. He is paid an unexpected visit one night after several years spent grieving for his lost friends, and has to overcome his disbelief to help reform the band and fight against the latest invaders, who appear to be even more dangerous than the demons from before. It becomes apparent that he must make the ultimate sacrifice to save the world as he knows it...



As far as the plot of this book goes, from what we know of what has gone before, all the characters sacrificed themselves so the re-appearance in this book seems to take away some of the impact of this sacrifice somewhat. However, one can really imagine the fans cheering as their heroes come back one by one, and

reunite to face even bigger, better bad guys! The author has an obvious fondness for his characters which is appealing when reading the book. At the same time he does not lose complete sight of the plot and the reader is drawn along with this. Barclay writes well, so non-regular readers of his work will find the humour entertaining and the sufficiently fast pace will keep them interested, even if it all starts getting a bit metaphysical and surreal towards the end.

I enjoyed the book but it is one for fans really. Those who, unlike me, have read some of the others in the series will get the references to what has gone before, but this is a bit of a problem for newer readers. Maybe a list of Raven members and a summary of what has gone before might have been more helpful. It is worth a read though and tempted me to read some of the earlier books in the series. VS

DEAD IN THE FAMILY* by *Charlaine Harris

Gollancz / 304 pgs / hardcover £14.99 ISBN: 978-0575089327

Reviewed by Jim Pearce



This is the tenth novel in the *Sookie Stackhouse* series and follows on directly from the events chronicled in the previous book *DEAD AND GONE*. In *DEAD IN THE FAMILY* Sookie is still recovering from being tortured during the Fairy War when her home arrangements are disrupted by her housemates leaving. No sooner have they left than she succumbs to a request from her surviving fairy cousin who then moves in. As if that was not enough her lover's vampire sire arrives out of the blue with a major problem in tow.

Further complicating the situation is an unforeseen outcome of her granting a favour for the Shreveport werewolf pack and the local ramifications of the two natured (werewolves, etc) revealing their existence to the 'normal' human population.

On the positive side her brother Jason seems to be growing up at last and acting responsibly.

The book is a good, straightforward, enjoyable read covering the complicated life of a likable heroine whose helpful good nature, determination and occasional pragmatism sees her and those she loves through the difficulties depicted in this book. It certainly will not disappoint fans of the series and should encourage those who have not read any of the previous books to try them. *JTP*

😊😊😊😊 **FILM ROUND-UP** 😞😞😞😞

BY VICKY COOK

***STAR TREK* (2009) dir. JJ Abrams; starring Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Leonard Nimoy**

Having grown up with the *Star Trek* franchise and various films, there's always a little sense of excitement, rather like with a new Bond film, when they release another movie, and this looked to be a real refresh of the franchise.

It features the beginning of the story of the characters from the original *Star Trek* series - Kirk, Spock, Bones et al - how they met and ended up doing what they do. The film kicks off with the birth of Kirk set against the demise of his father, and then shows him entering Starfleet twenty years later and being known as a trouble maker. At this point he is under Spock's command, and they are not on friendly terms, but as disaster strikes on Vulcan the film starts pulling itself together, with the help of a familiar face from the future.

The plotline was ok. I've read a few reports about gaping plot holes here, bad science there, but this *is* Star Trek, so who expects anything to be perfectly explained? What I liked about this film is the reimagining of the characters. I felt the young actors who played the famous roles (especially Chris Pine as Kirk, and Zachary Quinto as Spock) were outstanding. The movie's visuals and CGI effects were well done, which was to be expected considering the rather huge budget – a big step away from the effects used for the original series (it does look odd when the SF bits look more futuristic in their younger years than when they are established). Abrams, the director, had a tough job on his hands having to please the hardcore fans, general public and the studio, but I think he has done well here with what is a watchable, even appealing film with well drawn characters and good performances from the young actors, and plenty of visuals and action scenes to be getting along with.

***DISTRICT 9* (2009) dir. Neill Blomkamp and Peter Robert Gerber; starring Sharlto Copley, Jason Cope, Nathalie Boltz**

An interesting film that is about a race of aliens who appear over South Africa and get forced to live in slum-like conditions. Many years later the munitions corporation, Multi-National United, is contracted to forcibly evict the population. The person in charge of this, Wikus van der Merwe is then exposed to a strange alien chemical. The film is gritty and realistic, and none of the actors particularly famous, which makes a refreshing change.

I remember the advertising being comprehensive for this film – posters all over the place, such as on phone boxes, and a rather good trailer, thus leading to quite a lot of hype. I expected a bigger budget film but this has been done on a relative 'shoestring' compared to most modern movies. The aliens are very realistic and believable with no bad CGI in sight. It starts off being shot as a

documentary-style film then becomes more conventional later as the plot and action picks up. Wikus is a believable pathetic character as he is forced by circumstances to change his view towards the aliens and even come to rely on them.

Be warned, this is a gritty film which doesn't shy away from violence, but it is nonetheless a very good film which leaves a strong impression in terms of the way it is filmed and the strong themes present throughout. Recommended. VS

😊😊😊😊 DVD REVIEW 😞😞😞😞 BY ROG PEYTON

FORBIDDEN PLANET: 50TH ANNIVERSARY TWO DISC SPECIAL EDITION starring Walter Pidgeon, Anne Francis, Leslie Nielsen and Robbie the Robot (Warner Z1 66912 – 2007)



Sometimes in life you see bargains and pass them by, later regretting your error, and sometimes there are bargains that you just *cannot* pass by and you go for. Seeing the DVD of the 1956 classic FORBIDDEN PLANET - one of my all-time favourite SF movies (there are only a handful of SF movies worth watching once let alone twice) - advertised on Amazon for the ridiculously low price of £3.97 post free was such a time. The 50th Anniversary two disc version with extras including 'lost' scenes cut from the released version! How could I resist? My VHS tape was looking very grainy and faded so a couple of clicks later I sat back, having ordered it and looked forward to sitting down in a few days time to rewatch a great movie though I

puzzled somewhat over what was going to fill 2 discs.

The disc duly arrived 3 or 4 days later and I sat down about midnight with a bottle of Shiraz looking forward to enjoying the movie once more. Ah! Problem! Which disc has the movie and which one has the extras? Well, let's just start with one of them. A black and white clip started off the disc – excerpts from THE INVISIBLE BOY, a movie made a year or so after FORBIDDEN PLANET that I'd heard of because they'd used Robbie the Robot in it. Oh, well, worth watching the bits with Robbie in it I suppose.... But, no, it was the complete movie based on a story by Edmund Cooper!!!. I hadn't switched it off in

disgust so it couldn't have been that bad. To be perfectly honest, there were a few excruciatingly embarrassing bits. Next up was something called "Watch the Skies" which turned out to be a TCM Special on SF movies featuring George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron to name just three, talking about SF movies – surprisingly very sensibly!. A fascinating documentary that lasted an hour. Oops, still more 'extras' but it was now nearly 3am and time for sleep. And I still hadn't seen FORBIDDEN PLANET!

Evening two, Shiraz 2 and disc 2 – good old Will Shakespeare's only SF movie! Well, no, he didn't actually write it – Irving Block and Allen Adler wrote the story but Will sometimes gets unwarranted credit for it despite the fact that he didn't even know what a robot was.

Although the sound was mono, it is now remastered into 5.1 Dolby Digital and the picture was 2.40 widescreen – almost the way it was shown in cinemas (originally 2.55). Superb picture and how glad I was to throw out my VHS tape! One slight disappointment – the version originally shown in cinemas was 98 minutes long according to Imdb – this DVD is 94 minutes. What's missing?

My third session at this DVD revealed a complete episode from the TV series THE THIN MAN. This episode, "Robot Client" from February 1958 also features our old friend Robbie the Robot but plotwise it was transparent and the whole thing was very dated. But it was nice to see it. Other extras were THE MGM PARADE TV series, "Exploring the Far Reaches of FORBIDDEN PLANET" plus several cinema trailers of THE TIME MACHINE and other SF movies of the 50s. And don't forget the 'lost' scenes and extra footage!

All this for £3.97????? Go buy!!!

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 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.

Future books to be discussed will provisionally be...

June 24th - FATHERLAND by Robert Harris

July 22nd - FLASHFORWARD by Robert J. Sawyer

Forthcoming:- COALESCENT by Stephen Baxter; DIVERGENCE by Tony Ballantyne; LET THE RIGHT ONE IN by Jon Avide Lindquist; HUNTER'S RUN by Martin, Dozois & Abrahams.

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 and great company. More details from Martin Tudor - (empties084@btinternet.com).

ALT.FICTION 2010 - Derby's annual science-fiction, fantasy and horror writing event,. Alt.Fiction brings together some of the biggest names in the genre from around the UK for a fantastic day of panels, workshops, launches and readings which are sure to interest both readers and writers. We are also pleased to announce new additions to the programme this year in our Alt.Fiction auction, giving you the chance to buy some rare items, as well as a late-night film screening, comedy improv session and a full dealers' room with a great range of books to buy on the day. Leading authors confirmed for this year's event include Tony Ballantyne, Ramsey Campbell, Mike Carey, Mark Chadbourn, Paul Cornell, Graham Joyce and Rob Shearman as well as a range of agents, editors and publishers to complete a superb line-up. Alt.Fiction 2010 takes place on the 12th June from 10am to midnight at Derby Quad, Derby's new multimedia arts centre, and tickets cost just £25 for full access to all the day's events. We are happy to offer group rates to the event for groups of 10 or larger. For information about the day visit either <http://altfiction.co.uk/> or <http://www.derbyquad.co.uk/> or for tickets call the QUAD Box Office 01332 290 606.

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

DOCTOR WHO LIVE! BBC Worldwide has announced a series of arena dates for the very first production of DOCTOR WHO LIVE which is coming to The NIA, Birmingham, 18 - 20 October 2010. Tickets range from £25 to £38.50 each. The new stage show, based upon the BBC's smash-hit, award-winning series *Doctor Who*, promises to deliver a spectacular audio/visual experience featuring live music, special effects and appearances from the show's most popular monsters. Full details from The Ticket Factory – phone 0844 338 0388 or see their website www.theticketfactory.com

ILLUSTRIOUS is the 2011 Eastercon to be held at the Hilton Metropole Hotel, the NEC, Birmingham over the Easter weekend 22-25 April. Guests of Honour are US author David Weber and UK author Peter F Hamilton. Artist GoH is none other than our own David A Hardy! Fan GoH is Vince Doherty. More info: <http://www.illustrious.org.uk/>



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. Guests of Honour are **Iain M Banks** and our Co-President **Brian Aldiss, O.B.E.** Regretfully, Harry Harrison has had to cancel due to a recent fall. Full details at <http://novacon.org.uk/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

July 9th – SF/fantasy author STEVE FEASEY

August 13th – Summer Social – meal at The Black Eagle

September 10th – Science Fiction Fandom in the 50s and 60s in London and Birmingham – an interactive talk by STAN NICHOLLS and PETER WESTON

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

November 5th – SF author CHARLES STROSS

December 3rd – Christmas Social

Jan 2011 – Annual General Meeting and Auction

Feb – QUIZ with University SF Society

BRUM GROUP NEWS #465 (June 2010) 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 \[at\] hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rogpeyton[at]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