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From **David Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU, UK. Web: [news.ansible.uk](http://news.ansible.uk). ISSN 0265-9816 (print); 1740-924X (e). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Photograph of Brian Aldiss (1925-2017) at Novacon 40 in 2010 kindly supplied by **Rob Jackson**.

## Remembering Brian Aldiss

This is a selection of personal *in memoriam* posts, mainly from Facebook and the Fictionmags list, that I thought deserved wider exposure. Thanks to all contributors for their permission (and in several cases additions or improvements). The *SF Encyclopedia* news report of this death at <http://sf-encyclopedia.com/news/brian-aldiss-%281925-2017%29/> links to some public obituaries. – *David Langford*

**John Boston.** Yes, a giant hole in the world. My first Aldiss was 'Let's Be Frank' in the 1958 Judith Merrill anthology, sharply imaginative and completely orthogonal to anything else I was reading at age 9 or 10 (even in the Merrill anthologies). This was followed in 1959 by *No Time Like Tomorrow*, his first US collection, full of stories I grew up with and on: notably 'The Failed Men', a story that as a dutiful march-of-progress young SFer I initially hated (well, so did John Carnell, even though he bought it) but grew to appreciate as I got older. I see in the queue, or midden, that I still have some Aldiss left to read – *Comfort Zone* (2013) and *Jocasta* (2004 or so), also *White Mars* has been sitting there for many years, and I never got a copy of *Finches of Mars* (not his best, I gather). Also, looking at his web site, I see *Super-State*, which seems to have escaped my notice. One of the many impressive things about him was not just how good he was but for how long: *Walcot* (2009, it says), which I believe he signalled was sort of a summation for him, was an enormous pleasure, and his other later books (the ones I didn't miss) were never less than enjoyably readable. Well, to twist Faulkner, dead but by no means past. *Fictionmags list, 21 August 2017*

**Damien Broderick.** My attitude to the possibilities of sf changed when I first read Brian's 'A Kind of Artistry', which it was.

And of course three stories that John of Boston and I, or I by myself, included in several anthologies: 'Let's Be Frank' in *The Daymakers* and 'The Circulation of the Blood' in *Perchance to Wake*, and 'The Failed Men' in *Earth Is But a Star*. It was so satisfying to be able to do that.

I'd met Brian at a convention or maybe two in Australia, but finding him established at the IAFA conference in Florida in 2005, where I gave an address as an invited critical theorist, was especially delightful. I stood to give my somewhat whimsical oration, and was abruptly seized by a fit of nervousness. 'Don't worry,' one of my tablemates told me. 'Do as [guest X] did last year. When you need to modify the mood, cry out sternly "Wake up, Brian!" It works like a charm.'

After a time I did so, and Brian uttered a wonderful lurching choking cry as of one snatched from deep and well-earned slumbers. The room broke up in fits of glee. What a great man, that Aldiss!

*Fictionmags list, 21 August 2017*

**Bill Burns.** Brian always seemed to be having such a good time hanging out with fans – he was one at heart himself, of course. Makes me smile whenever I see photos of him, bringing back happy memories of hanging out with him at conventions.

At the 1973 Bristol Eastercon, Mary and I (and a few other hardy fans) stayed in the bar with him on the Sunday night until breakfast on Monday morning, and he regaled us with bawdy songs. After breakfast we drove to London – I don't think we could survive that now!

*InTheBar list, 22 August 2017*

**John Clute.** Like so many of us, there are personal memories of Brian, often roaring and giving you his boisterous evil eye, that fill the memory, fill the memories for me at any rate from the 1960s. Others can remember him I think from as early as the mid-1950s. Perhaps most vividly remember him at the ICFA (International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts) in Florida, where he had a Permanent Gig for decades, performed plays (his own work usually), acted up, sat sometimes solemn as a louche owl. You needed insect eyes to catch him whole for a second. *Fictionmags list, 21 August 2017*

**Bruce Gillespie.** It's very hard to imagine life in a world without Brian Aldiss. I hadn't read anything much I'd liked of his when I first met Lee Harding and John Bangsund in late 1967, but Lee pointed me toward the *Saliva Tree* collection and the new edition of *Hothouse*. Both, of course, made me a lifelong fan of Brian's writing immediately. Then came the Colin Charteris stories in the new quarto-sized *New Worlds*, eventually appearing as *Barefoot in the Head*. And *An Age*, and even onward, especially *The Malacia Tapestry* and *Frankenstein Unbound*, even while I was seeking out all of Brian's earlier work, especially *Greybeard* and the great early short stories. *Hothouse* remains my favourite SF ovel, reread several times in order to write reviews (most recently for Damien Broderick's *Earth Is But a Star* collection).

When I began *SF Commentary* in 1969, I got in touch with Brian, and he sent a wonderful letter of comment. He kept sending them, every few years, until about 10 years ago.

In January 1974, when I was visiting London, I was invited to a dinner he had organized for Clive, his son from his first marriage, at an Indian restaurant. That was very enjoyable. On my last day in England, the last day of my five-month pilgrimage, he rang the home of Chris Priest, where I was staying for a few days. 'Is Bruce still there?' said Brian. 'Well, bring him up to Oxford for the day!' And off we went in Chris' mini-Cooper to Brian and Margaret's famous Heath House near Oxford. We transferred to Brian's somewhat larger car, then went on a pilgrimage to Stonehenge, via several pubs on the way. It was dry when we set out, but as we wandered around Stonehenge, as you were allowed to do in those days, a magnificent storm blew in, so we went back to Oxford, to a wonderful meal prepared by Margaret (the only time I met her), then back to London. One of the very best days of my life.

The next (and last) time we met was at the 1978 Melbourne Eastercon, in much more awkward circumstances. The convention organizers had managed to invite both Brian Aldiss and Roger Zelazny as guests of honour to the same convention. They barely spoke to each other, and I suspect each was equally annoyed with the convention committee. However, we did all go off to King Wah on the Sunday morning for the first dim sum brunch I had ever been to, and Brian gave a magnificent guest of honour speech. In the middle he began throwing out sheets from his script, as if he were sparing his audience unnecessary verbiage. When we picked up the sheets from the floor, they were, of course, empty.

It would have been wonderful to be in London for the celebration of Brian's 89th birthday at the 2014 Worldcon, but meanwhile (thanks mainly to John Litchen) I've been able to read all of Brian's later novels, many of which are very good. *Walcot* seems to have been published by Britain's tiniest, most obscure publisher, but a copy did reach Australia. *The Cretan Teat* was a return by Aldiss to his most exuberant style, but his two last SF novels, especially *Finches of Mars*, were preachy and tedious. I was looking forward to Brian's proposed Tolstoyan novel, especially as I had rediscovered Tolstoy only the year before he announced this project.

What a wonderful way to go, and how pure Brian Aldiss! Enjoyed his 92nd birthday, then just disappeared from this world. Who's going to cheer us up now? *Facebook, 23 August 2017*

**Simon R. Green.** And still the list of our honoured dead keeps lengthening. Brian Aldiss always struck me as a writer whose career split neatly in two; the earlier audience-friendly work of the Sixties and Seventies, and everything after that. I loved books like *Hothouse* and *The Saliva Tree*, but by the time I reached *Barefoot in the Head*, Aldiss had become an author I admired rather than enjoyed. *Letter, 28 August 2017*  
*A little simplistic? Brian tried new techniques all through his long career; his most controversial experiments, Report on Probability A and Barefoot in the Head, appeared in 1968 and 1969 respectively, while there's plenty of approachable post-1970s work. – Ed.*

**John-Henri Holmberg.** What to say?

I met Brian first in 1969 or so, when my much older friend Göran

Bengson, then head of culture at the Swedish radio network, brought him to my parents' house where I still lived and wanted to introduce me as what he laughably called the foremost Swedish sf expert. Brian brought along and gave me an inscribed copy of *Earthworks*. Later, he inscribed my copy of *Billion Year Spree*, 'To John-Henri, who knows all of this much better than / Brian'. That certainly never was true. But I and Mats Linder had him over as Guest of Honour at the 1974 Swedish sf convention which we chaired, I knew him well for many years, enjoyed meeting him in Sweden as well as in England, met him and Margaret on one of the Greek isles in 1997, shortly before Margaret's death, and saw him last three years ago at the London worldcon. Brian was very much aware of the stupid adversity between Sam J. Lundwall and myself, and in his book *Bodily Functions*, addressed to Sam on his fiftieth birthday in 1991, even suggested that a 'Fifties man ... with John-Henri Holmberg shakes hands'. The first novel I ever contracted for publication was Brian's *Greybeard*, one of the finest sf novels I have ever read. Much later, I also contracted to publish his wonderful mainstream novel *Forgotten Life*, though left the company I was then with before it had been put in production, with the sad consequence that it's still never been published in Sweden. I thought many of his stories and some of his novels great, and virtually all of them challenging and impressive; he was a sometimes too cerebral and 'cold' writer, but at his best an unsurpassable one.

Again, what to say? Our world has suffered an irreparable loss.

*Fictionmags list, 20 August 2017*

**Paul Kincaid.** Not sure what I can say about Brian Aldiss. He was a raconteur of the first order, and there are any number of occasions I remember him holding court at conventions and other events. When I visited him once to conduct an interview he was a kind and generous host, and also one of the easiest people to interview. Yet he could also be prickly. If I reviewed one of his books in less than glowing terms I got a postcard taking me to task. When I questioned his notion of the cosy catastrophe, I got another postcard. And so it went. Our relationship was not exactly contentious, but it could be awkward. He wrote a lot of very bad books and stories; but he wrote more that were vital and exciting and absolutely essential. A lot of what he said about the history and the definition of science fiction is, I believe, absolutely wrong (no, *Frankenstein* was not the first sf novel; no science fiction should not get back in the gutter where it belongs); but would we really be arguing now about the history of sf if he hadn't gone before and led the way? We truly have lost a giant.

*Facebook, 21 August 2017*

**Michael Moorcock.** Neatly done, Brian. A generous friend I've known since 1957. Sixty years a king. I remember many kindnesses, many arguments and a couple of quarrels, but nothing that ever stopped us talking. He and I were close and affectionate friends and I was able to pay a bit of a tribute to him in my recent introduction to *Frankenstein Unbound*. The world really is a little darker for his passing. A massive talent, a genial presence, a complicated lust for life.

*Facebook, 21 August 2017*

**Charles Platt.** Brian was fortunate to start writing when he did. What a wonderful time for a very talented man to start a career in eloquently written science fiction!

He was always an inclusivist. He tried to build bridges between science fiction and the British literary establishment (he was one of the judges for a Booker Award, as I recall, and of course secured an Arts Council Grant for *New Worlds* magazine, which seemed incredible at the time). He cofounded World SF, trying to connect Russian, European, Japanese, and probably other nationalities of science fiction with the western world. He traveled widely, believing that anyone who writes about alien worlds should gain some experience of this one. He also participated actively in academia. His lack of prejudices was quite exceptional.

At the same time, he didn't build bridges by being endlessly diplomatic. He was not afraid to disparage some writers (Brunner and Delany come to mind). He was generally suspicious of writers and artists who receive grants ('They don't work very hard, you know,' he once remarked). His critical faculties were sharp and targeted.

But he was sensitive to reviews of his own work. I discovered this after I reviewed *Earthworks*. Fortunately he could excuse my critique on the grounds that I was very young, gauche, and provincial. Actually he only excused me after a well-documented episode where he locked me in a wardrobe at a science-fiction convention. But after that, I avoided

reviewing his books, and we remained friends on an uninterrupted basis. He used to visit me when he came to New York. Our communication lapsed when I moved to Arizona in the 1990s.

Most of all, he was unafraid to be innovative. Maybe I should have said that at the beginning. He was an innovator who never stopped trying to reach the widest possible audience. Very few writers (especially now) manage to do that, even briefly.

I always admired him, as he had traits and abilities that I lacked myself. I never knew why he seemed willing to put up with my company. Maybe because I was unafraid to speak my mind, and he enjoyed that. Or maybe he just felt he should educate me. And I was willing to listen.

Long ago I complained to him that obituaries are dishonest, because ostensibly they are dedicated to the person who has died, but really they can only benefit people who are still alive. Worse, they can be self-serving and self-indulgent – just another way for the person who writes the obituary to remind everyone that *he* is still active and looking for an audience. I think I felt sour on the subject as I had just read a particularly egregious example written by a Los Angeles short-story writer ('As I write this, my tears fall onto the paper in my typewriter,' etc etc).

Brian didn't accept my outlook. He said that a worthy obituary justifies itself as an expression of love for the person who has died. So, as usual, he took the positive point of view, and as usual, I shall respect it. I loved your company very much, Brian Aldiss, and am deeply sad that you are gone.

*Facebook, 25 August 2017*

**Chris Priest.** 'Here it began, here it ends.' *Blog, 21 August 2017*  
<<https://christopher-priest.co.uk/here-it-began-here-it-ends>>

**Robert Silverberg.** He had a birthmark on his forehead. The only time I ever saw him nonplussed was at some con fifteen or twenty years ago when I said it had been on the other side of his forehead two hours before, and accused him of moving it around. For a tenth of a second he took me seriously and stared at me, utterly baffled. But then he laughed and said he would never do any such dastardly thing.

*Fictionmags list, 21 August 2017*

**Steve Sneyd.** Real shock to hear Brian Aldiss now offplanet. Shouldn't have been, given his age, but I'd somehow convinced myself he'd be the first SF giant to make the 100, and another 5 books. Perhaps unconsciously because the one time I met him (as distinct from intermittent correspondence re his poetry etc), when he kindly headed the bill for an SF poets' reading I organized in Oxford back in '04, he was so dynamic/lively he seemed far younger than his then calendar age: futuresight = youthfulness in his case.

*Letter, 28 August 2017*

**Gordon Van Gelder.** I have many good memories of Brian – including a day in 1995 when Brian and Margaret hosted my wife and me at their Oxford home – but I think my favorite evening was when he was presented the SFWA Grand Master Award in '99. Brian might have had a drink or two and he ... well, after the award presentation, he got himself thrown out of the hotel for misbehaving. So several of us joined Brian in continuing the celebration at a bar or restaurant across the street. As I recall, it was Warren Lapine, Sam Lundwall, Sam's daughter, and someone else at the fringes of my memory. Indeed, my memory of the evening is not very clear, but the glow about it is most pleasant.

Brian always made me feel like we were co-conspirators in some mad plot. For the US edition of *The Secret of This Book*, he altered one word in the collection and said, 'There, that's our secret of this book.' (No, I'm not going to say what the word was.)

No doubt the skies themselves will darken today to mark his passing.

*Fictionmags list, 21 August 2017*

**Martin Morse Wooster.** This is the headline for the obituary of Brian Aldiss that appeared in today's *Washington Post*.

#### SCIENCE FICTION WRITER HELPED ELEVATE GENRE CRITICS DISMISSED

*Fictionmags list, 24 August 2017*

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