

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

FEBRUARY 2004

ISSUE 389

*HONORARY PRESIDENTS:* BRIAN W ALDISS & HARRY HARRISON

*COMMITTEE:* VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);  
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TIM STOCK (PUBLICITY); STEVE JONES & WILLIAM MCCABE;  
NOVACON 34 CHAIRMAN: MARTIN TUDOR

Friday February 13th

## ANDY LOUND - MARS

Andrew 'Andy' Lound - the regional co-ordinator of the Planetary Society - presents a history (with slides show) of the Red Planet in astronomy and science fiction. Since 1978 he has participated in over 1500 public events promoting space science and astronomy. He appears regularly on "The Late Show" on BBC Radio WM & Nottingham.

He has also presented lectures on the history of spaceflight, Astronomy, and the *Titanic*.

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. RGP

### ***THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING***

No surprises at this year's AGM - all last year's committee were re-elected and with the single addition of Tim Stock who has taken over as Publicity Officer from Vicky. Vicky, you may remember, was holding both the Secretary and the

.....

#### ***MARCH MEETING - 12th March***

Our March meeting will feature top SF artist Dominic Harman who will be interviewed by Stan Nicholls and the evening will also feature a selection of his artwork.

.....

Publicity Officer's positions. The re-elected committee would like to thank each and every one of you for putting your faith in us once again. But....YOUR turn next year! OK?

Unfortunately, due to the poor attendance figures (we only just made the quorum!) and with half of those who did attend having to leave early halfway through the Auction, the Auction had to be disbanded. We did raise just over £60 but still have enough material to run an auction at some other time. RGP

## **ROB GRANT - INTERVIEWED**

### **by Lesley Mazey**

*Lesley Mazey caught up with RED DWARF author Rob Grant at a recent signing in Leicester for Rob's new book INCOMPETENCE....*

LM: INCOMPETENCE features Courgette Shoes. Where did the idea for these originate, and does the lead character's finding himself often lacking for shoes reflect on any personal experiences?

RG: It just evolved, really. Sometimes, you genuinely don't know where stuff comes from. It started out as a neat gag about nanny state-ism, and worked itself up into a *liet motif*. One day, I fondly hope, people will write theses on the use of shoelessness in INCOMPETENCE.

LM: How did you feel your approach changes when you stopped writing in collaboration on RED DWARF and began penning solo novels?

RG: In any kind of partnership, there has to be an element of compromise, if you're ever going to get anything done. Writing for TV is a kind of gigantic partnership, where you have to accommodate compromises all over the place: you make compromises to the budget, to the realities of what's achievable in the time available, and you have to give the other creatives involved, the actors, the set designers and so on, their own space to manoeuvre, Novels are the only medium where you don't have those constraints: the budget's unlimited, the actors turn up on time and know their lines, and the world looks exactly as you want it to look.

LM: Did you find the intense performance emphasis of Chetham's School for Music affected your move to behind the scenes as a writer for TV?

RG: The school morphed into a music school in the middle of my incarceration there, so it didn't have the same emphasis on performance for us non-music inductees. Frankly, I wasn't very gifted, musically. I enjoyed it: I just wasn't very good at it. However, I was in a couple of orchestras and choirs, but I tried to keep my voice down, and mimed whenever possible.

LM: My first instrument at Chetham's was clarinet, what was yours?

RG: Trumpet. I wanted to play the trombone, but I didn't have the ear for it. A blessing, really: I would have hated lugging a trombone on the 67 bus all the time.

I always felt sorry for Cellists in that regard.

LM: Does the positive discrimination in favour of incompetent people in INCOMPETENCE have any basis in experiences you have had?

RG: Good grief, yes. It's the only possible explanation for the world I encounter daily. In fact, a friend suggested INCOMPETENCE should get the George Orwell Award for Predicting the Present. How else do you account for the fact that 24 record companies turned the Beatles down? Why else did Coca Cola withdraw the most popular drink in the known universe and replace it with New Coke?

LM: Are you planning to write for TV/Screen again?

RG: Absolutely. I love it. I think people who sit at home just writing novels run the risk of going completely insane. If you don't believe me, ask that purple aardvark who keeps appearing in my wall and speaking to me in Urdu. I'm at contract stage for an animated SF TV series with a major animation studio. I'm trying not to get too excited about it. Urg. Oh my God, I failed. I'll clean that up later.

LM: How do you feel the final on-screen characters and situations of RED DWARF matched your original concept for the show?

RG: Not even close. We had it in mind to cast straight actors (Alan Rickman was an early option for Lister) and we wound up with an impressionist, a dancer, a comedian and a stand up poet. And we made those casting decisions ourselves. And we suggested to the then set designer that a submarine kind of look might be a good starting place. When we first arrived on set, everything, and I do mean everything, was grey. Even the props were grey. There were grey pictures on the grey walls and grey plants in the grey plant pots. We had to race around just desperately trying to get a bit of colour in there somewhere. But these things happen. A script is basically just a battle plan, and, to paraphrase Napoleon: no battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy.

LM: Do you intend to write a novel with more than one word in the title?

RG: Ha! I'm not obsessive about that. I hope. I like a one-word title: it sort of focuses the book, for me. It gives the illusion the book knows what it's about. But, no, I'm thinking of progressing onto two word titles, though I might start with something simple like a 'The \*\*\*\*\*' so as not to get too radical. I must say, though, I like the way they look all lined up on the bookshelf together, all strident and confident and one-wordy.

LM: Comedy can be a little hit or miss, although you seem to have hit home so, who makes you laugh?

RG: I love laughing. I love laughing so much, I'm thinking of becoming a super villain, because they get to laugh all the time. I sort of got into comedy via the early films of Woody Allen: SLEEPER and LOVE AND DEATH and, particularly PLAY IT AGAIN SAM, but revisiting them again doesn't produce the same laugh

response in me. Maybe it's because I've seen them all 759 times each, or maybe they haven't aged well. I absolutely believe that laughter is not only good for you, it's as necessary as food. It's like the best drug you could possibly imagine. Unfortunately, it's also the hardest drug in the world to get hold of. If I want a guaranteed laugh these days, I watch Bill Murray in WHAT ABOUT BOB? or GROUNDHOG DAY. Or THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY. I love Billy Connolly and Eddie Izzard. Will Smith is a funny guy. I've been re-watching some old Laurel and Hardy and Chaplin stuff recently, and they can still get big time laughs, even from my kids, which is quite something. Oh, the list is endless, really.

LM: What are you currently working on?

RG: I have this animation series in the pipeline, a new novel on the go and a screenplay.

LM: Is there a book or story you wish you had written?

RG: Lots. SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE, if you put a gun to my head.

LM: Who is your favourite author?

RG: Again, I have lots of favourites. Authors I buy in hardback because I can't wait for the paperback: Michael Crichton, Martin Amis, Stephen King, Harry Harrison. Again, if you put a gun to my head, Arthur C. Clarke, I guess. Though my favourite book is Robert Graves' I, CLAUDIUS.

LM: Are you a music fan? If so, what?

RG: I love music. Mainly rock. Springsteen. But I have eclectic tastes: from Country and Western to French hip-hop. There's not much I actually hate, apart from the Eagles, of course, though if I hear Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street" one more time, I'm afraid I'll have to blow my brains out.

LM: SF, Skiffy or Sci-Fi? What is the correct shortening of Science Fiction and does it matter?

RG: It used to bother me. I spent a long time championing 'SF', because 'Sky-fie' has these terrible connotations of ray-guns and thinly veiled space westerns and dreadful, gaudy cover illustrations of large breasted women clad in bacofoil, and it puts off a lot of people who would probably like the genre if they could be bothered to look past the packaging. But, frankly, it's a lost cause. Banging on about it just made me sound even more of a marginalist pedantic idiot. Like people who are called 'Deborah', but hate it if you call them 'Deb', though 'Debs' is all right, but for God's sake, not 'Debbie', on pain of death. Who cares?

LM: Do you have a favourite place to write?

RG: I don't care, so long as it's on my G4 powerbook.

LM: Do you enjoy book signings/conventions?

RG: Yes and no. I'm terrified of public appearances, but it's great to meet people who like your work. It's especially nice to meet women who want you to sign exotic body parts, especially if those body parts are still attached to them.

LM: Why do you like SF/F/H?

RG: I like it most because the currency is ideas. You get a brain bang out of great SF you can't get from anywhere else.

LM: What book are you reading at the moment?

RG: I've got a couple going at the moment: Stephen Baxter's brilliant new one: COALESCENT. He's a stable mate at Gollancz, and I got to know him before I was familiar with his work. He's a nice guy and a superb writer, so, naturally, I hate him. I'm listening to Douglas Adams' THE SALMON OF DOUBT on my iPod, too.

LM: Is there anything else that can be done with Alien Invasion, Time Travel or Robots?

RG: Of course. Naturally, there's a lot of stuff that comes out covering those themes which is now hackneyed and witless, but the seams are still rich. There's still gold in them thar hills.

LM: Do you prefer writing about the near future or the far distant future?

RG: I like both. The big grind about the far future is that you have to create the entire universe, which is daunting, but that's also the thrill of it. Being a kind of a mini god.

LM: As a reader do you prefer Science Fiction, Fantasy or Horror?

RG: I love Science Fiction, obviously, but I'm a big Horror fan, too. I used to love reading, as a kid, the old PAN BOOK OF HORRORS, which were often almost pornographically violent. I think there's a thin line that exists between comedy and horror. Sometimes, Hitchcock say, can be so terrifying, it's almost funny. People getting hurt is funny. I don't know why. Some of the funniest bits in THE SIMPSONS are Itchy and Scratchy. I hurt people a lot in my writing. I'd hate to be the hero in one of my books - the things I put them through. Fantasy is pretty hit and miss with me. I loved DUNE but the sequels left me cold. I know I'm on deadly ground, here, but THE LORD OF THE RINGS, for me, was a bit of a waste of time: it had its moments, of course, it just didn't seem to connect in any way to any reality I'm aware of. At the end of THE RETURN OF THE KING, I couldn't help wondering where the Elves were sailing away to. Presumably, they were heading for the North Pole to help Santa.

LM: Do you always know a story's ending when you begin writing?

RG: I usually have a pretty good idea where it's all going. When you haven't got a clue where it's going to wind up, that's a fine recipe for getting hopelessly stuck. Sometimes, though, you can't afford to hang around waiting for anything as fancy

as actual inspiration: you just have to write and pray for an ending, otherwise you wind up staring at a blank screen with your brain bleeding and your self-belief dribbling out of your shoes. I used to have my computer start up with the greeting message: 'It doesn't matter if it's crap'. There are those who might say this explains a lot of my writing. The truth is, though, it's infinitely better to have something to rewrite, even if it sucks, than a blank screen. Anything is better than a blank screen. Even the sax solo in Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street".

LM: Why do you think SF gets a bad press?

RG: Well, because most of it is crap. In the words of Theodore Sturgeon: "Sure, 90% of Science Fiction is crud. That's because 90% of everything is crud". Of course the unquoted corollary is: "the rest is worth dying for". I also think that a lot of people just don't like science, and, so, naturally science fiction leaves them cold, or worse still, makes them feel dumb. Fair enough. I don't like gardening. I wouldn't read gardening fiction. I know people who don't read fiction at all, poor sods.

LM: Is there something you are particularly proud of?

RG: Yes. Always, it's the last thing I've done. Largely because I still can recall so vividly how close I came to not finishing it.

LM: Many thanks Rob!

LM

## **A COMMONWEALTH OF SCIENCE FICTION**

**Liverpool Foresight Centre, Liverpool, UK**

**(Thursday 5 to Sunday 8 August 2004)**

**Guests of Honour: Damien Broderick, Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Nalo Hopkinson  
(An Event Organised By the Science Fiction Foundation)**

By the end of the twentieth century, science fiction had come to be dominated by American books and magazines produced by writers in the Gernsbackian-Campbellian tradition. Equally television, films and comics have been dominated by agendas and conventions established in Hollywood and New York. But this is not the only kind of science fiction available to writers and readers, producers and consumers. At the moment there is a boom in British SF, in recent years there has been a boom in Australian SF, and Canadian SF continues to thrive. Sometimes challenging the US tradition, sometimes appropriating it, sometimes entirely separate, there is a whole Commonwealth of Science Fiction.

Building on the success of the '2001: A Celebration of British Science Fiction' event, we wish to bring scholars, critics, researchers, academics, librarians and readers together to consider that Commonwealth and the commonweal: the Empire writing back, centres and margins, national histories of SF, national identity and science fiction, dialects and idiolects, hybrid identities, post-imperial melancholy, international and local markets, the 'Special Relationship', the Pacific

Rim vs. the North Atlantic, and discoveries and rediscoveries, evaluations and re-evaluations of science fiction in any media, written or visual, from Commonwealth countries.

## **A DRABBLE - 1st in an irregular series...**

*Want to write a drabble? Each one must be exactly 100 words long (excluding the title)... Go on, you can do it! Brum Group members are invited to try their luck. There might even be a prize at the end of the year for the best one...!*

### **CATS!** by Jinnie Cracknell

Since the article about toxoplasmosis, a disease spread by cats that affected mouse behaviour if they caught it to the point where they would go towards the smell of cat urine rather than away from it as normal, Professor Green had been studying the effects of this disease on humans.

"I conclude", he was saying to his colleagues, "that it has no discernable effect on humans". Just then, a 'meow' was heard from the laboratory's pet cat, and the scientists immediately went to get cat food, saucers of milk, toys, and other such necessities.

The cat merely smiled to itself.

JC

## **NEWS IN BRIEF**

.... author **Jack Cady** died Jan 14th. He was 71. In his career he had won the Nebula, the Philip K Dick Award, the Bram Stoker Award and the World Fantasy Award .... British children's fantasist **Joan Aiken** (b.1924) died January 4. **Aiken** sold her first story "The Dreamers" when she was 18. She is best known for her series of children's books which began with THE WOLVES OF WILLOUGHBY CHASE .... nominees for the Philip K Dick Award are ALTERED CARBON by **Richard Morgan**; CLADE by **Mark Budz**; DANTE'S EQUATION by **Jane Jensen**; HYPERTHOUGHT by **M M Buckner**; SPIN STATE by **Chris Moriarty** and STEEL HELIX by **Ann Tonsor Zeddies** .... **Forrest J Ackerman** surprised the American Cinematheque with a \$153,000 donation, which allows **Ackerman** to name 153 seats at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood. In 1925, **Ackerman** first saw THE LOST WORLD at the Egyptian .... **Dave Langford's** 'serious' collection, DIFFERENT KINDS OF DARKNESS has finally appeared from Cosmos books in the US, in both hardcover and trade paperback editions. It collects 36 of his SF/Fantasy/Horror stories, none of which appear in his other collections. I'll be getting copies in the next couple of weeks (order from me NOW!) .... Coming soon from specialty publisher Haffner Press in the USA is STARK AND THE STAR KINGS - a massive hardcover collection including **Edmond Hamilton's** THE STAR KINGS and RETURN TO THE STARS plus **Leigh Brackett's** three novelettes featuring Eric John Stark. It includes the

never-before-published story of the meeting of both authors' signature characters .... The city of Bristol is distributing 7' high models of triffids to promote a city wide reading of **John Wyndham's** novel THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. The Bristol Cultural Development Partnership is providing more than 4,000 free copies of the book to promote literacy in a city where 25% of the adult population has a reading level below that of an eleven-year-old .... Speaking of which - **George Bush** is preparing a policy statement in which he calls for the United States not only to establish a permanent base on the Moon, but also to land humans on Mars by 2019. That's a long way to go to look for Saddam's WMD, surely? .... **The Clarke Award**, which has been presented at the London Science Museum since 1996 is looking for a new home after the museum upped the rental from £1,000. From 1996 through 2002, the museum provided the space for free. The Clarke Award Administrators are currently looking for a new venue and plan to present the award in May .... Two and a half million returned copies of Mills & Boon romances were used to produce a 16-mile stretch of the M6 toll road. Shredded into paste and added to a mixture of asphalt and tarmac, this apparently prevents the surface from splitting. That's 92,000 books per mile. Gosh! They found a use for them at last! .... At the other end of the price scale a first edition (1995) of **Philip Pullman's** NORTHERN LIGHTS sold in auction for £4950.00 in December. I sold 30 of them at the time through Andromeda for £12.99 each, kept one myself, read it, didn't like it so sold it on for £8.00 Sob! At the same auction a first edition of **J K Rowling's** first *Harry Potter* book sold for £19,480.00!!! Four years ago, Ken Slater offered me three copies at £50 each. As I couldn't shift *Harry Potter* books at all in the shop, I turned them down. Most definitely the worst decision I ever made!!! .... SF Mag **BEYOND** is coming back in Spring 2004 after a 10 year break. The format will change from 64 A4 pages to 96 A5 pages with colour covers. SF, Fantasy or Horror stories (max 4000 words) are wanted for the 4th and future issues. Send your submissions to: Linden and David, Beyond Magazine, c/o Riley Books, 130 Union Road, Oswaldtwistle, Accrington, Lancashire BB5 3DR .... **BATTLEFIELD EARTH** has been voted the worst movie of all time - oops, I did that last month. Oh, well, always worth repeating great news .... **Robert Heinlein's** FOR US THE LIVING appeared in the USA in January from Scribners at \$25 .... **Spider Robinson** has been authorized by the **Robert A. Heinlein** Trust to write a novel, "ROBERT A. HEINLEIN'S VARIABLE STAR", based on a detailed outline and notes completed by Heinlein in 1955 and recently rediscovered .... the BBC has confirmed that it will air a radio drama based on the last three books of the 'increasingly inaccurately named' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy. **Simon Jones** (Arthur), **Geoffrey McGivern** (Ford), **Mark Wing-Davey** (Zaphod Beeblebrox) and **Susan Sheridan** (Trillian) will reprise their roles from the original series, and **William Franklyn** will take over for **Peter Jones** as the voice of the book .... And now for some really sad news, I'm afraid - Sci Fi wire reports that LOST IN SPACE is coming back to TV. "The new TV Lost in Space will return the show to its roots as a

family drama, which is what Irwin Allen intended when he penned the original pilot," the trade paper reported. "The project will be set about 100 years in the future and will feature a relatable, contemporary family at its core." Sad news indeed...really sad!

RGP



## BOOK REVIEWS



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

RGP

*(To start off this month's batch of reviews we have a novel by a new author who is from - would you believe - Birmingham! It is hoped to get Martin along to the Group in the near future)*

### ***THE AFFINITY TRAP* by Martin Sketchley**

**Simon & Schuster / 306pgs / trade pbk**

**Reviewed by Steve Mazej. Rating: \* \* \* \***

The Earth of this 24th Century is a military dictatorship, with a General William Myson at its head. Alexander Delgado is a man whose accomplishments are long behind him. As a member of the Military Intelligence he was respected by all his peers, but his star has faded since Myson's rise to power. But things look as though they are about to change as General Myson himself selects Delgado to undertake a special mission.

Vournilass Lycern is a Seriatt, a member of an alien race. After long diplomacy she is to bear the child of William Myson. This however does not quite meet with her wishes and she absconds to The Affinity Group - an almost religious and deeply mysterious society. This is Delgado's mission, to retrieve the Seriatt, Lycern, and return her to Myson so she can bear his child. The problem is that Seriatt females exude a pheromone that is intensely addictive to humans, and so Delgado faces a difficult choice - complete his mission or...

This story is most definitely entrenched in the land of science fiction. It takes place in the 24th Century; it includes alien life forms; Delgado is augmented by means of nano-technology.

In some ways it reads like a cyberpunk novel crossed with a military-SF plot. And it benefits from both as far as I'm concerned - most especially as these are sub-genres of which I am not the greatest fan, but here Martin Sketchley includes just enough of each to allow him to tell his own story.

There is a level of sexual content in this book. But it is not overplayed, it certainly doesn't get to the point of holding up the flow of the plot as can be the case when sex scenes are introduced almost as a cheap thrill diversion before getting back to the plot and showing what happened when the sweat dried off. In this novel there has to be a certain level of sex for the plot to hold together,

hinging somewhat as it does on the addictive quality of the Seriat pheromones. But it is the effect of this pheromonal addiction that is particularly well handled. Sketchley has characters suffer withdrawal symptoms as though going cold turkey from a drugs habit.

When I read first novels by authors there are a couple of ways I feel that they can go. There are authors that right from the start have the most perfect prose, the most believable characters and dialogue, and exquisite turns of phrase. These are not common. Then there are authors that have ideas. This type to me would seem the most interesting to watch. Prose can be sharpened with practice, but if an author doesn't have the spark of ideas then all the descriptive excellence will not produce an exciting read.

Sketchley does not have the most beautiful prose, but it is prose that allows the story to be read - it doesn't clog things up with unnecessary flowery imagery. His ideas look as though they are worth watching.

This is an enjoyable, intriguing universe Martin Sketchley has begun to show us. I know there are going to be many, many more tales set in his 24th Century awaiting us. SM

### ***ALL MY SINS REMEMBERED* by Joe Haldeman**

**Gollancz / 184 pages / £9.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones. Rating \* \* \***

This is a reissue - a fix-up of three previously-published tales of the exploits of an interplanetary secret agent, embedded in an added background story describing his recruitment, his subsequent disillusionment and his progress to an eventual early retirement.

The last (and last-published) of the three possesses elements of novelty and points of interest but the other two are quite undistinguished. The best parts of the book are the added material used to link these stories into a fairly cohesive whole, although more could have been made of this. The overall story shows the turning of a fundamentally decent and idealistic young man by advanced techniques of brainwashing, deep mental conditioning and personality overlay into an amoral operative performing multiple assassinations as required by his political masters, followed by his eventual mental and physical destruction. This, of course, has been seen elsewhere, although I would be reluctant to stick my neck out and say that Haldeman was (or was not) among the first to write about this kind of thing.

Thus the overall story is the oft-heard theme of the subjugation of honesty, decency and the rights of the individual to political expediency as far as the power and ability to do it are available. It might have been a better book if it had been reconstructed to make more of this aspect, de-emphasising the actual 'adventures'. As it is, it adds up to something no more than ordinary; well and competently written but displaying no especial distinction. MJ

## *1610: A SUNDIAL IN A GRAVE* by *Mary Gentle*

Gollancz / 594 pages / £12.99 / trade pb

Reviewed by Michael Jones. Rating \* \* \* \*

Told from the viewpoint of Valentin Rochefort, swordsman and spy, this is in fact little more than a historical novel, set in the opening decades of the seventeenth century. Following his unwilling involvement in the assassination of King Henri IV of France in 1610, Rochefort flees to England where he is caught up in a series of events which will shape the destiny of the world for centuries to come. As the story develops he is gradually revealed as a complex and flawed character, forced into a role requiring him to assess his place in the world and his own part in influencing its history. He emerges as a man of principle, honest and true according to his own lights.

Like Mary Gentle's previous *ASH*, her work here reflects her fascination with, and exhaustive knowledge of, historical times. No detail of dress, manners, or, most especially, fighting is overlooked and this attention to the minutiae of life conveys a very convincing authenticity so that the reader is easily carried away into a world of the imagination. However, although there is a fair amount of action the book as a whole is rather long, drawn out at times to the point of becoming somewhat tedious.

The historical novel is overlaid with a veneer of science fantasy personified by one Doctor Robert Fludd who has learned how to predict the future by mathematical calculation. Early in the book his power is amply demonstrated and it becomes apparent that he is seeking to shape a future in which the most undesirable of his predictions can be averted. However, his plans are brought to naught by individuals - chiefly Rochefort - who, having been made aware of his calculated predictions, exert what freedom of choice is allowed to them in ways which invalidate those calculations. Thus the underlying theme becomes an illustration of the fundamental argument between destiny and free will. At the same time the reader is left to work out whether the book has been written in a 'today' which is not our own or in our own 'today' which has been changed from what might have been were it not for Fludd's involvement. In fact, publishers Gollancz would have us take this as a novel of alternate history.

On whatever basis it is to be judged, this can only be described as an impressive piece of work, well written and impressively researched. It will however appeal more to readers of fantasy in general and sword-and-sorcery in particular than to SF enthusiasts. *MJ*

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.30pm 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 meetings to be announced...

**Peter F Hamilton** has a new book out on 20th February - PANDORA'S STAR (Macmillan hardcover £17.99) for which there are the following local events ...

**Wednesday 25th Feb 1.30 - 2.30pm** at Waterstones, Unit 95/96, Merry Hill Centre, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 1SJ. Signing. For further details Tel: 01384 75155

**Wednesday 25th Feb 7.00pm** Waterstones, 128 New Street, Birmingham B2 4DB

A Talk, Q&A, signing. Tickets: £3.00 redeemable against purchase of the book on the night. For further details Tel: 0121 631 4333

**CONCOURSE** - the 55th National SF Convention (Eastercon) will be held at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool from the 9th to 12th of April 2004. Guests of Honour are Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Sue Mason, Christopher Priest and Philip Pullman. Contact address is 479 Newmarket Road, Cambridge, CB5 8JJ. Tel: 07092 221701. email enquiries: [concourse@eastercon.com](mailto:concourse@eastercon.com)

website: <http://www.eastercon.com/concourse>

*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](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)*

## **FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG**

**April 16th** - PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MONTH'S MEETING WILL BE ON THE THIRD FRIDAY

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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 from which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

The **BRUM GROUP Website** address is [www.bsfg.freesevers.com](http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com)

**NEW!** ---The email address is [bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk) ---- **NEW!**

Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

**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 Treasurer, Pat Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH