

It will commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar and be seated in plenty of time. Please note that there is no entrance charge for the AGM and non-members MAY attend but they will NOT be eligible to vote.

An Auction will follow.

RGP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP
AGENDA: 9th January 2004

Meeting to be Chaired by Tim Stannard, Group Legal Officer

1. Apologies.
2. Adoption of last year's AGM Minutes (Proposer & Seconder required)
3. Group Chairman's Remarks.
4. Group Treasurer's Report.
5. Group Publicity Officer's Report.
6. Newsletter Editor's Report
7. Novacon 33 Representative's Report.
8. Adoption of reports (Items 4-7 above). Proposers & Secondors required).
9. The 2003 Committee will stand down.
10. Election of Group Chairman (current Chairman stands for re-election)
11. Election of Committee Members:
 - a) Secretary (stands for re-election).
 - b) Treasurer (stands for re-election).
 - c) Newsletter Editor (stands for re-election).
 - d) Publicity Officer (Tim Stock has been nominated)
 - e) Ordinary Members (both stand for re-election)
12. Confirmation of Novacon 34 Chairman.
13. Novacon Chairman's Report on the Progress of Novacon 34.
14. Review of subscription rate.
15. Appointment of Legal Officer.
16. Any Other Business.
17. Vote of Thanks to Our Presidents.
18. The 2004 Annual General Meeting will be concluded.

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Committee posts that you can stand for, despite there already being nominations (a healthy bit of competition is always good) are:-

Chairman - needs to be a strong personality to keep the committee meetings in order; has to introduce guest speakers at each meeting, so should be articulate; has to make sure that other members of the committee do the jobs asked of them and if they fail to do so, ask (with the rest of the committee's approval), for their resignation and appoint a new person to that post.

Secretary - needs to be able to take the minutes of all committee meetings and type up in a presentable manner, sending copies to all other committee members; write to guest speakers as required.

Treasurer - needs to be good with figures; be at every meeting to take entrance fees; keep check on all members whose membership lapses and write to them asking to renew; organise the monthly raffles and produce the annual accounts.

Newsletter Editor - has to produce a newsletter every month (without fail!). Including the preparation of masters, printing, distribution, etc. Ideally should have access to a computer, be able to spell (or know how and when to use a Spell Checker); be able to find and correlate any pieces of news; distribute review books and obtain reviews of those books for insertion in the newsletter.

Ordinary Committee Members - two required. These members have no specific duties but are there to help out when necessary. One of the members will be responsible for the Group's website so needs to have Internet access and a working knowledge of either HTML, a site design / management program, or both. Some skill with computer graphics and a reference to details of future guests would be an advantage.

Novacon Chairman - this final committee post is NOT one elected at the AGM. This post is approved by the 'current' committee each year for the following year's Novacon. This year Martin Tudor has volunteered to chair NOVACON 34 to be held in November 2004. The committee have already approved this post.

(Note: Anyone wishing to chair NOVACON 35 in two year's time should approach the committee before September 2004).

In addition - all committee members undertake to do the jobs they've volunteered for; be able to attend committee meetings throughout the year; to assist in ideas for programme and be willing to ensure that the Group runs smoothly and profitably throughout the year.

This may be only a hobby without any remuneration but by volunteering YOU are responsible to the whole membership. Failure to do the job you've volunteered for is letting down every single member of the Group. So unless you're committed to doing the job properly, please don't stand for election.

Anyone wishing to stand for election to any of the above posts should get a Group member to propose them and a another member to second that proposal. This may be done at the AGM itself.

It's Auction Time....

The formal part of the AGM will be followed (time allowing) by an AUCTION. So bring along any old books, magazines videos, cards, artwork, records (anything from shellac through to CDs!) etc., that you no longer require. SF/fantasy/horror items are preferred but if you've got any other items that you think we can have fun with, raise a few smiles (and, lawdy, we all need a few more of those!) and more importantly, raise some money for the Group funds.

If every member brings at least one additional surprise item we can have FUN!

THE 3RD LONDON SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FILM FESTIVAL

January 30th - February 1st, 2004

Louis Savy, the Festival Director has asked us to publicise SCI-FI-LONDON, the UK's only dedicated science fiction and fantasy film festival...

Over the last two years SCI-FI-LONDON has hosted two World premieres, including Ken Russell's THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER, and over 30 UK and European premieres including Mamoru Oshii's AVALON, Mark Pellington's MOTHMAN PROPHECIES and Andrej Sekula's HYPERCUBE: CUBE 2. The Festival includes an international SF short film programme, rounding up the best SF shorts from the UK and around the world... and we are still looking for submissions!

SCI-FI-LONDON 3: THE THIRD SCI-FI-LONDON FILM FESTIVAL will be held at the Curzon SOHO and The Other Cinema and runs from Thursday 29 January to Sunday 1 February 2004. We will include over 25 new movies to the UK as well as rare classics. There will be two all-nighter programmes and this year we also include a raft of sideshow events including Talkaoke, film-making workshops, live debates and a new online film competition in conjunction with the 2000AD comic.

Classic movies include: THE DARK CRYSTAL, ANDROID and FORBIDDEN PLANET. New releases confirmed and invited include: STARSHIP TROOPERS 2 (to be confirmed) (the only good bug is a dead bug!), SPECTRES (starring Marina Sirtis and Dean Haglund), FULL METAL YAKUZA (ROBOCOP meets ICHI THE KILLER - gross), SIRENS OF THE 23RD CENTURY (FLASH GORDON meets ROCKY HORROR in drag!), ROBOT STORIES (winner of 18 awards), 2009: LOST MEMORIES (amazing Japanese/Korean movie), NATURAL CITY (BLADERUNNER all-action Korean style), LUMINAL (two 18yr old hookers in a futuristic Paris), INVASION ANIMÉ (its Trekkers for anime fans!), NADESICO THE MOVIE (nuff said!).

SCI-FI-LONDON, 22 Hanbury Street, London, E1 6QR, UK. Tel: 77537 46621

THE BBC BIG READ - THE WINNERS

The winners of the BBC "Big Read" poll has been announced. Over 750,000 were cast. The top 5 most popular books read by the British public were:-

- 1 **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** - J R R Tolkien (23% of total votes!)
- 2 **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE** - Jane Austen (18.1% of total votes)
- 3 **HIS DARK MATERIALS** - Philip Pullman (8.4% of total votes)
- 4 **THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY** - Douglas Adams
- 5 **HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE** - J K Rowling

"Oh, what the hell...we all know what the winner will be...." was my comment last month. Were ANY of us surprised? Well, we hear that Jane Austen is a little peeved and disappointed. She looked at the other final four titles and hadn't even heard of any of them! Apart from the Pullman trilogy, all the others have not only been bestsellers but have also had movie or TV adaptations. Obviously Ms Austen doesn't watch TV or go to the cinema either! Poor cow. Would her boring little book have received so many votes had it not been dramatised for TV recently? I think not - and I'd like to wager that a good percentage of votes came from people who watched it on TV rather than having read the book. For anyone wishing to see the TOP 200 titles - visit

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top200.shtml>

If I've read 10% of this lot I'd be surprised. Never heard of a good one-third of them. Interesting (and disappointing) to see that my all-time favourite book came in at #119. And my all-time favourite SF book doesn't even show....

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Marguerite ("Maggie") McClure Bradbury (b 1922), wife of Ray Bradbury, passed away on November 24 The December issue of LOCUS (available from me at £4.99 at the AGM) has listings of US and UK new books through September 2004 J K Rowling has been awarded £35,000 in Spain 'for having helped children of all races and cultures to discover the joy of reading'. No doubt that she has done that - I hope that with all her millions she donates it to some worthwhile charity Brian Aldiss has sold a new SF novel, SANITY AND THE LADY, to Peter Crowther at PS publishing Jonathan Carroll has sold GLASS SOUP, the sequel to WHITE APPLES to Tor in the USA *The Foundation Trilogy* by Isaac Asimov (but YOU knew THAT!) is moving forward as a movie - to be split into two parts, we hear, titled FOUNDATION and SECOND FOUNDATION This week sees the publication of the new Robert

Jordan novel - "Is this it!" you ask, "The final book, finally!?" No, sorry, it's a prequel to Book 1 in the series! The only prequel? I very much doubt it! Ace and Roc, the two SF/Fantasy imprints of the Penguin Group in the USA are to be merged THE DISAPPEARED by **Kristine Kathryn Rusch** and LION'S BLOOD by **Steven Barnes** were joint winners of this year's Endeavour Award presented November 14th The **Terry Pratchett** short story "Troll Bridge" is to be made into a movie In an on-line poll conducted by 'Yahoo! My Movies' website, the 2000 film BATTLEFIELD EARTH was named the "Top Turkey of All Time", beating out non-genre fare including GIGLI, FROM JUSTIN TO KELLY and GLITTER. HALLOWEEN 3: SEASON OF THE WITCH also ranked in the worst five. More than 1.2 million votes were cast 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

DARKER THAN YOU THINK by **Jack Williamson**

Gollancz / 266pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by **Pauline Morgan**

Rating: * * *

Originally published in 1948, this is one of the *Fantasy Masterworks* series. Williamson deserves his reputation as a Master in the field and for the time, this was probably regarded as an outstanding book. It should be read as an example of what was achievable 55 years ago. Unfortunately, time has caught up with some of the ideas.

Will Barbee meets April Bell while he is waiting for the plane of an archaeological expedition to touch down. He is a reporter and she also claims to be one. He is attracted to her, and wary. Her behaviour seems strange, she seems too expensively dressed for a cub reporter and she is a rival. The returning expedition claims to want to make an announcement of enormous import before they leave the field, but their leader dies on the tarmac before anything vital is said. Barbee suspects April had a hand in the death, though he is not sure how. He is torn between his fascination for this woman, and the fact that the archaeologists are all friends from his college days.

April then reveals that she is a shape shifter, and informs Barbee that he is also, and the thing that the archaeologists brought back with them is a weapon against 'their' race. At first he believes himself to be a victim of hallucinations, but is gradually convinced. In the rest of the novel they have to destroy the contents of the chest the artefact is in, even if it means killing Barbee's friends.

It is not a surprise that Barbee is a member of this 'other' race and much of the novel is a fast-paced action adventure with sinister overtones. What might have been cutting edge once, isn't any longer. It is worth reading but only for light entertainment and to see how good SF/Fantasy was before many of us were old enough to read. PM

THE COURT OF THE MIDNIGHT KING by Freda Warrington

Pocket / 575pgs / £7.99 / paperback (ISBN 0-7434-1567-1)

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Rating: * * * * *

Freda Warrington is a talented British writer who has yet to gain notice in the USA. This is a pity as, at her best, she can rival the most acclaimed fantasy writers. This book is one of her best.

Currently, there is a vogue for historically-based fantasy or crime. Here we are taken back to an alternate fifteenth century. In the 1460s the country was unsettled, wars between the Yorkists and Lancastrians dominated politics, each insisting that their candidate was the rightful king of England. Katherine, visiting York with her mother is caught up in one of the changes of supremacy. Although her family is relatively unscathed, her new friend, Rafael, loses his father and later his home and (he believes) the rest of his family. For there is another conflict going on – between the male dominated Christian church and the female dominated pagan worship of Earth as mother. At the moment, the church is winning.

The novel follows the lives of both Rafael and Katherine, who, from their positions of minor nobles are able to observe the politics of the age which are leading, inevitably, towards the death of Richard the Third on the battlefield. Richard himself moves in and out of their lives. Richard is portrayed as a good and charismatic character.

This is not a straightforward retelling of the times with a fantasy element tacked on. It is a subtle interplay between the politics of the time, the struggle of church against paganism and the hints that everything is not as inevitable as it seems.

This book is a delight to read.

PM

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...

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

February - astronomer Andy Lound - illustrated talk

March - SF artist Dominic Harman - interviewed by Stan Nicholls (with slides)

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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

NEW! ----The email address is bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk ---- NEW!

Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

Apologies for the lateness of this newsletter - a rogue copying machine is responsible. Tim Stannard's office didn't re-open after the Christmas/New Year break until Monday 5th Jan. And the copying machine immediately broke down. As I write this - Tuesday the 6th - the machine is just about up and running, though new bearings have to be obtained (from Scandinavia!) and those won't arrive until Thursday. In the meantime, I'm told the machine MIGHT hold together long enough for me to print this newsletter....

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 Laues, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH