

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2004

ISSUE 394

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 JULY 9TH

DR JACK COHEN

Jack Cohen is virtually our own resident scientist. He has spoken to the Group on many occasions and always on a scientific subject allied to SF. This time, however, Jack is coming to talk to us as a published science fiction author. (Actually, Jack confesses to have written short stories for ANALOG under a pseudonym - or pseudonyms - that he refuses to reveal).

His first novel, WHEELERS, written with Ian Stewart, appeared a couple of years ago. Their second novel together, HEAVEN, appeared in the US in May from Warner Aspect.

Dr Jack Cohen is an extremely entertaining speaker and you will be guaranteed a really worthwhile evening. This is definitely a meeting NOT TO MISS!

RGP

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

.....
: AUGUST MEETING - Summer Social - a meal out at 'The Black Eagle' :
: in Handsworth. ONE ticket left! :
:
:

First Private Manned Mission to Space is a success

Scaled Composites launched the first private manned vehicle beyond the Earth's atmosphere on Monday morning, June 21, 2004. The successful launch demonstrated that the final frontier is now open to private enterprise.

Under the command of test pilot Mike Melvill, SpaceShipOne reached a record breaking altitude of 328,491 feet (approximately 62 miles or 100 km), making Melvill the first civilian to fly a spaceship out of the atmosphere and the first private pilot to earn astronaut wings.

"This flight begins an exciting new era in space travel," said Paul G Allen, sole sponsor in the SpaceShipOne program. "Burt Rutan and his team at Scaled Composites are part of a new generation of explorers who are sparking the imagination of a huge number of people worldwide and ushering in the birth of a new industry of privately funded manned space flight."

The historic flight also marks the first time an aerospace program has successfully completed a manned mission without government sponsorship. "Today's flight marks a critical turning point in the history of aerospace," said Scaled Composites founder and CEO Burt Rutan. "We have redefined space travel as we know it."

BRAM STOKER AWARDS

Winners of this year's Bram Stoker Awards for Superior Achievement were announced on June 5. The Stoker Awards are given annually by the Horror Writers Association to recognise excellence in the genre.

Novel: LOST BOY LOST GIRL by Peter Straub

First Novel: THE RISING by Brian Keene

Long Fiction: "Closing Time" by Jack Ketchum

Short Fiction: "Duty," by Gary A. Braunbeck

Fiction Collection: PEACEABLE KINGDOM by Jack Ketchum

Anthology: BORDERLANDS 5 edited by Elizabeth & Thomas Monteleone

Non-Fiction: THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS ITALIAN ASSOCIATION by Thomas F. Monteleone

Illustrated Narrative: THE SANDMAN: ENDLESS NIGHTS by Neil Gaiman

Screenplay: BUBBA HO-TEP by Don Coscarelli

Work For Younger Readers: HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX by J. K. Rowling

Poetry Collection: Pitchblende by Bruce Boston

Alternative Forms: THE GORELETS by Michael Arzen

Life Achievement: Anne Rice and Martin H. Greenberg

SIDELINE AWARDS FOR ALTERNATE HISTORY

The short list for this Award has been released for 2003. Winners will be announced in Boston, on the weekend of September 4-5, 2004.

Short-Form Alternate History

Ricard De la Casa and Pedro Jorge Romero "The Day We Went Through the Transition" Originally "El día que hicimos la Transición" Translated from the Spanish by Yolanda Molina-Gavilán. Cosmos Latinos

Geoffrey Landis "The Eyes of America." Posted on-line at SciFiction

Robert L. O'Connell "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Second Holocaust" What Ifs? of American History

Chris Roberson "O One" LIVE WITHOUT A NET

Robert Silverberg "The Reign of Terror" Asimov's SF

Long-Form Alternate History

Murray Davies COLLABORATOR

Mitchell Freedman DISTURBANCE OF FATE

Larry Kirwan LIVERPOOL FANTASY

S M Stirling. CONQUISTADOR

CHESLEY AWARDS FINAL BALLOT

The final ballot for the 19th annual ASFA awards, the Chesleys, has been released. The awards, named for the great astronomical artist Chesley Bonestell, are given by the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists. This year's ballot recognizes works and achievements from 2003. Winners will be announced during this year's World Science Fiction Convention, NOREASCON 4, in Boston, Sept. 2-6, 2004.

Cover Illustration - Hardcover

Donato Giancola, cover of CITY by Clifford D Simak (SF Book Club)

Don Maitz, cover of THE FAIRY REBEL by Lynne Reid Banks (Delacort)

Stephen Youll, cover of LORD OF SNOW AND SHADOWS by Sarah Ash (Bantam Spectra)

David Bowers, cover of PALADIN OF SOULS by Lois McMaster Bujold (Eos)

Todd Lockwood, cover of TRANSITIONS: THE ARTWORK OF TODD LOCKWOOD (Collins & Brown)

Kinuko Y. Craft, cover of WOLFSKIN by Juliet Marillier (Tor)

Cover Illustration - Paperback

Peter de Sève, cover of CALLING ON DRAGONS by Patricia C. Wrede (Magic Carpet Books)

Jean Pierre Targete, cover of DRAGON BLOOD by Patricia Briggs (Ace)

John Jude Palencar, cover of **HIDDEN WARRIOR** by Lynn Flewelling (Bantam Spectra)

Brom, cover of **THE MOONS OF MIRRODIN** by Will McDermott (Wizards of the Coast)

Mark Harrison, cover of **PAPER MAGE** by Leah R. Cutter (Roc)

Jody Lee, cover of **THE RIVEN SHIELD** by Michelle West (DAW)

Todd Lockwood, cover of **TANGLED WEBS** by Elaine Cunningham (Wizards of the Coast)

Cover Illustration - Magazine

Stephen Daniele, cover of **Dungeon #98**, May 2003

Bob Eggleton, cover of **F&SF** Jul 2003

Donato Giancola, cover of **Dragon #307**, May 2003

Stephen Hickman, cover of **Weird Tales #330**

Gahan Wilson, cover of **Realms of Fantasy** Aug 2003

PRESS RELEASE

**JOHN JARROLD LITERARY AGENCY
ANNOUNCES FIRST AUTHOR**

John Jarrold, ex-publisher of SF and fantasy imprints at Time Warner, Random House and Simon & Schuster, has taken on his first author client as a literary agent: Stephen Hunt.

Stephen Hunt's first fantasy novel, **FOR THE CROWN AND THE DRAGON**, was published by W H Smith's, having won their New Talent initiative in the 90s. It received excellent reviews from many sources in both the UK and the US, including the **GUARDIAN**, the leading SF magazine **INTERZONE** and **LOCUS**, and sold well over 10,000 paperbacks through WHS alone. He has several other novels in the pipeline, set up the website **SF Crowsnest** - which Google now ranks as the second most-popular SF site in the world - and works as an Associate Director for an international investment banking house.

'I read and enjoyed Stephen's first novel when it appeared,' said Jarrold. 'I feel he has everything it takes to become a major genre author; above all he's a great, imaginative storyteller, and now is the time to break him into mainstream publishing - and not just in the UK. It is one of the most exciting times in SF and fantasy in the last thirty years, and Stephen is set fair to be a major player. You could honestly say that I am dead chuffed to be his literary agent!'

Hunt added. 'In his long career, John has been responsible for publishing just about all of my favourite science fiction and fantasy authors, from Iain M Banks and Michael Moorcock, through to Tad Williams and Terry Brooks. With that kind of track record for developing and spotting talent - unsurpassed in the genre - I feel honoured to have him representing my literary interests too.'

Jarrold will be representing authors in the SF, fantasy, thriller, crime and historical fiction fields. He also represents SCi Games, a leading UK computer games company. 'I'll be continuing my script doctor activities,' he said. 'And working as a freelance editor for various publishers.' He can be contacted by e-mail on: or by phone on 01424 440652.

NEWS IN BRIEF

... The **Cassini** space craft, which is expected to go into orbit around Saturn on June 30, ending a seven year voyage and beginning a four year research mission, will make its first contact with the Saturnian system on Friday, June 11, when it passes within 1,240 miles of Saturn's outermost known moon, Phoebe. Cassini is expected to perform about 50 moon flybys during its Saturn mission, as well as dropping the Huygens probe on Titan in December ... The first fossil of a **pterosaur embryo** has been discovered in China. The 121 million year old fossil is the first embryo of a flying reptile to be discovered. The embryo, discovered in an almost complete egg, was found in the sediment of a lake in Liaoning, well known for its fossil troves. The embryo had a wingspan of 27 cm and experts believe it would have been close to hatching ... The Heinlein Society announced yesterday that the **2004 Robert A. Heinlein Award** will go to **Sir Arthur C Clarke**. The Award will be presented at the Society's annual dinner, which will coincide with the World Science Fiction Convention in Boston in early September. Clarke, who in recent years has rarely left his home in Sri Lanka, is expected to attend if possible via real-time video. This is the second year for the award for outstanding published work in hard science fiction or technical writings inspiring the human exploration of space ... AOL and author **Harlan Ellison** announced a settlement of their four-year old copyright dispute on June 8. Ellison sued AOL after discovering some of his works had been posted to Usenet. In 2002, AOL received a summary dismissal, but Ellison appealed the decision and it was partially reversed earlier this year. Details of the settlement have not been released ... **Lisanne Norman** has won an Ursa Major Award for the Best Anthropomorphic Novel - **BETWEEN DARKNESS AND LIGHT** ... **Larry Niven's** **RINGWORLD** is due to become a 4 hour miniseries on the SCI-FI Channel. He also has a new collection of fact, fiction and wit out in paperback - **SCATTERBRAIN** - from Tor ... **Ray Bradbury** has expressed his displeasure with the title of **Michael Moore's** new documentary, **FAHRENHEIT 9/11**. Bradbury contends that Moore's film, which won the 'Palme d'Or' at Cannes, trades on the title of Bradbury's novel **FAHRENHEIT 451**, about censorship. Bradbury, who is a registered independent, has noted that he first contacted Moore about the title more than six months ago and only recently heard from the filmmaker ... In the face of increasingly malevolent virii, **Warren Lapine** has announced that DNA Publications will no longer be accepting e-mail and has closed down all its public e-mail addresses. All future correspondence should be

sent via snail mail ... After years of denying her literary roots, **Margaret Atwood** publicly acknowledged that she wrote science fiction. Lo and behold, her publisher takes a full-page advert out in the June LOCUS (They do call it 'Visionary Fiction' though!) ... August will see the publication of **RGK: THE ART OF ROY G KRENKEL** from Vanguard Productions in the USA ... **ISFiC** (Illinois Science Fiction in Chicago), has announced the launch of a small press. Their first book will be a guest of honor book to be released at Windycon 31 the weekend of November 11. It will be a collection of short stories and essays by Canadian author **Robert J. Sawyer** ... **TREK TODAY** reports that in a recent post made to the **BABYLON 5** usenet group, series creator **J. Michael Straczynski** surprised his fans by revealing that he and **DARK SKIES** creator **Bryce Zabel** wrote a treatment earlier this year for a new **STAR TREK** television series. Straczynski felt that the new premise "...would restore the series in a big way. I actually think it could be a hell of a show. Whether that ever goes anywhere with Paramount, who knows?" ...

RGP

DRABBLE #5

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

by Jinnie Cracknell

"Okay girls, just like we rehearsed, but this time with the wands, okay?" said the first fairy godmother *sotto voce* to the other two as they stepped forward towards the sleeping form of the baby Princess Amelia Margaret Elizabeth. As they stepped towards the tiny bundle wrapped in soft blankets in her mother's arms they got their wands out and began to grant the traditional three wishes.

"We grant you health," said the first fairy godmother. "HIC!" went the third fairy godmother, from sheer nerves.

"Wealth" said the second fairy godmother. "HIC!" went the third fairy godmother.

"And HIC! ppenis"

JC



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

LORE BRINGER by Miller Lau

Pocket Books, £6.99, 469pp,

reviewed by Anne Gay

Rating: * * * * *

The third in Miller Lau's *The Last Clansman* series, this is a

multi-dimensional joyride. The first book was great, the second fair, but **LORE BRINGER** is world-class fantasy. The central cast remains the same: Talisker, a 20th Century Scot accused of murder, his Glaswegian pal Malky who just happens to be a ghost, and the part-Italian Sandro must once again return to Sutra, the Otherworld of Celtic legend. But don't think this is standard haggis-bashing fare. Navajos from Arizona, a bulimic teenager and a whole cast of beings from different Otherworld races combine to battle an army of demons who threaten to skin and devour every last being on Earth and Sutra.

LORE BRINGER has its share of tension and gore but it also raises questions of death, life and purpose. Carefully plotted, intricate and action-packed, **LORE BRINGER** is a must for every fantasy fan. To get the best out of it, read the first two as soon as you can so you can plunge into this compelling novel without delay.

AG

INCOMPETENCE by Rob Grant

Victor Gollancz / 291pgs / £9.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Jinnie Cracknell

Rating: * * * * ½

Rob Grant is, of course, best known for his work with Doug Naylor on **RED DWARF**. They have written for both the TV and book markets, but he has also written several books on his own, including a **RED DWARF** book, and a couple of science fiction novels entitled **COLONY** and **COLONY II**.

The basic premise of **INCOMPETENCE** is that the EU have issued a directive that makes it illegal for anyone to be sacked from their job for incompetence. In the middle of all the chaos this causes, one detective has to solve a series of murders committed by a chillingly competent serial murderer.

Along the way he has to deal with such occurrences as planes landing at the wrong airport, hotel rooms with no bed, and shoes made out of vegetables, as leather is rather scarce. He meets many interesting characters, including a police officer with an extreme anger management problem, a male octogenarian bunny girl, and a woman whose husband is hiding from the authorities, as he has been declared officially dead, and no matter how many times he has tried to prove that he is alive it has done no good.

When the story begins, our hero, Harry Salt, is on his way to meet a friend and colleague by the name of Dick Klingferm. When he gets to where he is supposed to meet him, he discovers that what looks like a freak accident has occurred. One of the neo-classical external glass elevators crashed through the roof and then, as all things that go up must do, it came down again. There were seven people in the lift, including Klingferm.

When Harry goes to look at one of the other lifts, he discovers that although the building has seventeen floors, there are thirty-three buttons. Normally, buttons eighteen to thirty-three would not be wired up, but upon

examination of the elevator cars, the thirty-third floor has been wired up to try and go to a non-existent thirty-third floor, thus causing the crash. This, of course, looks like perfectly ordinary human incompetence, some repair work done badly by a clumsy repairman. Harry knows that it is murder, however, and realises that he will have a very hard time proving that it is murder.

This book is very clever and extremely funny, but then again you wouldn't expect any less from a man who is half of the team who brought you RED DWARF. It gets four-and-a-half out of five, it would have got full marks were there a few more laugh-out-loud moments as opposed to grinning maniacally moments.

One of the things I especially liked was that despite being a humorous detective-novel-come-near-future-science-fiction it is realistic in the sense that the book is not entirely full of things going hilariously wrong. As a contrast things sometimes go well for Harry, as when the woman with the aforementioned officially dead husband takes him in and gives him aid and succour in the shape of a bowl of soup and some fairly miraculous herbal poultices to help heal the many scrapes and bruises he has picked up by this point in the narrative.

Another scene that particularly stuck in my mind was when he tries to catch a train from a station that unfortunately, trains don't stop at. Ever. And so he performs a James Bond-style leap between two carriages, so he can hold on to them. Now, if James Bond performed this stunt he would succeed with only a couple of smudges of dirt and possibly a slight amount of hair mussing. However, in this book the sheer difficulty of the stunt is emphasised. The hero gets bumped and bruised and nearly sliced in two and all sorts of things.

In conclusion, this is a very funny book, and if you are a fan of detective stories, near-future stories, or humorous science fiction, I sincerely recommend it.

JC

STONE by Adam Roberts

Gollancz / 260pgs / £9.99 / trade paperback

Reviewed by Jinnie Cracknell and Steve Jones

Rating: * * * *

Adam Roberts is the author of several novels and novellas. STONE is the third of his novels. This is very good indeed, and the ideas and plot are excellent, but we feel that it is let down a little by some dubious science.

In this book, a criminal called Ae is imprisoned inside a star for the crime of being the only psychotic killer in an otherwise perfect, pleasure-seeking society called the t'T. The entire story is told as a series of flashbacks, which are in the form of Ae talking to a stone, hence the title.

As the story starts he is back in his prison again, having got out once already. He starts by giving the stone and therefore us, the readers, a little bit of background into his society. The t'T are hedonistic and carefree, with all disease

and illness being eradicated by the use of nanobots called Dot Tech. The space that the t'T society lives in is bordered by the Palmetto and the Wheah, the former being mysterious and the latter fervently religious.

The story begins properly when Ae is contacted by some mysterious benefactors, who have promised to spring him out of prison, and give him riches beyond his imagining, if he will do one task for them. This task is to perform genocide on a grand scale: kill an entire planet with a population of millions. At first he thinks he is hallucinating, but then he realises that somebody on the outside has, in fact, contacted him.

He agrees and his mysterious patrons are true to their word: he is sprung out of prison. That is one of the parts that we both found interesting, as having set up a supposedly inescapable prison the author then comes up with an incredibly ingenious way to get him out of it. The next part of the book is very interesting, as he ends up being both killer and detective. He is trying to figure out exactly who it is that has asked him to do this job, whether Palmetto, Wheah, t'T or some as yet unknown alien race. When you eventually find out who it is, you'll be surprised as it is a very interesting and unique twist. He ends up back in prison where he starts talking to a stone and narrating what has happened, which brings us neatly back to the beginning.

This is an excellent book, but the only thing that spoiled it for us was the rather weak science behind faster than light travel in this universe. It involves being smothered in foam and travelling through the cosmos as a sort of mummy, with your Dot Tech putting you into a trance so you don't notice the passage of time. The actual method of propulsion involves electrons being excited up into high-energy shells and then back down again, and supposedly you move millions and millions and millions of times a second, but each time only moving one electron shell further forwards. However, although FTL is possible in this universe there are limits. One is a size limit, which immediately rules out the classic science fiction giant spaceships. Another is that the slower your processing power, the fewer trillions of shifts forward you can compute a second and thus the slower you go. The final limitation is that different areas of space have different properties, supposedly to do with the atomic weak force. Large amounts of matter disrupt it, as do other factors that are not very well known. The t'T live in the portion of space where you can travel at a few thousand c. The portion of space that limits travel to a maximum of around $3c$ is populated by the Wheah, and finally there is slow space where FTL is impossible. There is also some rather 'lies to children' style quantum mechanics, which unfortunately we cannot discuss in any detail as it would spoil the ending, which is very good. Other than those couple of gripes, we both recommend this book.

JC/SJ

RENDEROSITY: DIGITAL ART FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

edited by John Grant and Audre Vysniauskas

AAPPL / 160pgs / £19.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Steve Mazey

DIGITAL ART FOR THE 21ST CENTURY is a collection of work from a variety of artists all exploring the boundaries of digital art. The artists exhibit a wide range of styles and influences from classical countryside scenes to imaginative fantasy images. The artists have come to explore the world of digital art via a variety of different routes. All the styles will not necessarily appeal to all readers but there is bound to be something here for any reader.

Marcel Barthel has produced a series of traditional fantasy/science fiction images: spaceships and imaginative buildings. The work has a clarity that gives the images a feeling of reality. The level of detail and the use of light and colour add to the overall impression.

Adam Benton presents a collection of vivid pictures that range from those based on STAR WARS to graphics created for the advertising industry. Although a number of his pictures portray imaginative worlds and scenes some have a realism that forces you to look twice before you realise that they are not photographs.

Bernard Dumaine's style is very different to those preceding him. Turning the pages you are presented with a series of metamorphic, strangely organic pictures that are reminiscent of twisted roots of molten candle-wax. As you look into each image there are areas of realism that contrast strikingly with the sinuous textures.

With Matt Hansel it is time to change again. The range of styles is what strikes you first of all. The various pictures go from classic science-fiction imagery (robots, spaceships and strange mechanical backgrounds) to the kind of images you expect from digital art - a series of unrelated sections layered using some sort of computer graphics software to create the final work.

David Ho's work exhibits yet another new style. His pictures are moody, the use of sepia tones giving the images an ethereal feeling. More so than the previous artists, Ho's pictures have a kind of texture, a true sensation of having actually been painted - only using a mouse rather than a paintbrush. Most of the scenes portrayed are dark and vaguely disturbing causing you to look further and further into the picture.

Michael Komark gives us classic fantasy art. Dragons battle leviathans. A hero rides an enormous bird above a golden castle; a full-breasted woman stands majestically over the body of a slain monster. This is the stuff of Dungeons and Dragons, Elric and Conan.

Vod Land's exhibits a series of strange pictures that seem to become more and more disturbing as you progress through the pages. In the majority of the images eyes seem to demand attention. Even within some of the more abstract

pictures the eyes dominate.

James Lee has provided a series of superb science-fiction images. The majority portray elements of a story about Claude, a mouse, and his adventures as he travels with his young female companion. The pictures are detailed and you find yourself looking for the mouse in every one.

Elizabeth Leggett's pictures immediately reminded me of the greetings cards you sometimes find in New Age gift shops. Beautiful, flawless women surrounded by leaves and swirls. Although the overall context may change from picture to picture in the majority of cases the main aspect of the image is a woman's face.

Duncan Long has used the freedom of digital art to combine the real and the fantastic. A photograph of a sunlit lake combines seamlessly with a skeleton on a push-bike and a robot stands against a cloudy sky. You cannot deny the skill and artistic ability behind the images.

Ron Miller exhibits very different styles in his pictures. Some are exquisitely crafted landscapes that could be mistaken for a photograph but others are, once again, the kind of pictures you expect from the world of digital art. Photographs of naked women are superimposed over pictures of birds and leaves giving a final result rather reminiscent of a collage.

Socar Myles' work takes us back to fantasy. Sepia tinted pictures that have a delicacy and level of detail that make for a series of enchanting scenes. Beautiful, wistful women stare out from the pages.

Tina Oloyede has an apparent love affair with the fractal. It is stunning how the simple fractal can be portrayed in so many different ways; a writhing tendril of smoke; feathers; shells. All resulting in delicate, fragile images that grab the eye and refuse to let go.

John Picacio has taken a series of digital photographs and manipulated them to provide the basis for his pictures. It is testament to his skill with the mouse that, even when he has told you (in the introductory section) what the original subjects of the photos were you can find no real evidence of them in the finished article.

Kees Roobol has used the flexibility of digital art in two different styles. One is the creation of classic, beautiful landscapes and buildings and the other is the inclusion of a naked female form in an otherwise normal landscape.

Chuck Siebuhr exhibits a series of stunning images. Framed in black the pictures are glorious fantasy scenes in rich autumn colours, reminding me of the kind of covers you find on dark fantasy novels. The use of colour and texture has given the images a richness that you don't often find in digital art.

Andy Simmons's collection are all landscapes. The first few pictures are beautiful delicate pictures that have the detail and texture of water-colours. The use of light gives them an almost dreamlike quality. As you turn the next page the landscapes become those of science fiction and fantasy worlds.

Audre Vysniauskas' work is vivid and compelling. The colours leap out

at you from the page, vivid gold and neon-pink. The detail is superb. The further you look into each picture the more you see. In particular, in the image "Minster Hill" it is easy to miss the presence of figures at the foot of the tree unless you look very closely.

Thomas Weiss is a more traditional fantasy artist. His work includes warriors, amazons and fantastic landscapes where dragons roam and spaceships clash. The quality of the pictures is unmistakable and would easily find a home on the cover of a paperback book.

Christina Yoder has provided a collection of truly unusual images. Ranging from a Metropolis-inspired robot to Chinese dragons and a coat of arms no two pictures are alike.

Marcin Zemczak loves the female form. Whether is naked, except for a dramatic tattoo, or clad in steel undergarments all the bodies are realistic and beautifully created. So realistic you could be forgiven for believing them to be staged photographs rather than glorious unique art works.

When I first received this collection I was a little nervous. I honestly didn't know what to expect. Previously the majority of the digital art I had experienced was of the "collage-style" where the artist takes totally unrelated photographs and images and then uses the computer to electronically glue them together to form a jarring image. RENDEROSITY is so much more than that. Within this book you can experience the whole gamut of possibility in digital art. Some of the images are clearly digital but others could easily be mistaken for more classical art. What is very clear is that you should never underestimate the range of techniques available to the digital artist.

If anyone thinks that digital artists are not "proper" artists they should look at this collection. I challenge anyone not to find at least one picture that appeals. Stunning!

SM

😊😊😊😊 **FILM ROUND-UP** 😞😞😞😞 BY VICKY COOK

There really hasn't been a lot of choice just recently at the cinema, what with TROY, DAY AFTER TOMORROW and then HARRY POTTER monopolising most of the screens. TROY isn't as good as it thinks it is, while DAY AFTER TOMORROW, while predictable, surprisingly exceeded my expectations. So this was turning out to be a rather short report, until I realised just how many SF or SF genre-related films are coming out quite soon. As the following list shows, there is something for (almost) everyone.

Not sure if it's worth a look, this one: CATWOMAN comes out on July 13th, with Halle Berry not wearing a lot. Might be worth waiting for next year's BATMAN BEGINS.

July 15th sees the release of SPIDERMAN 2, possibly the biggest (if not necessarily best) blockbuster of the year. Reports say it is very similar to the first one in terms of action and violence and sweeping shots of Spidey covering the city, but the baddie is better! Spiderman himself has been tweaked, and looks and moves better than before.

Thunderbirds are go! The new live-action film comes out on July 23rd.

On July 30th watch out for SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW, a (not intentionally?) tongue-in-cheek look at robots laying waste to 1930's New York. Starring Jude Law as Sky Captain, and Gwyneth Paltrow as the intrepid reporter Polly Perkins, the starry cast seems to put the film beyond its *film noir* pretensions.

In the same week KING ARTHUR is released, with the respected Clive Owen in the title role. Pictures so far indicate a gritty, 'realism-inspired' take on the tale, with Guinevere as a native warrior woman. The romance of former versions seems to have been discarded in this one, so it could be interesting. Especially as it's Disney's first adult film.

Into August and the most interesting offering here seems to be I, ROBOT. Yes, it is taken from Isaac Asimov's book, but even the director admits they took the robot laws, and the title, and then got in Will Smith and changed everything else! Not sure that this will make it a good film, and reports suggest the film is uneasy with its status, whether it is a gritty *tech-noir*, a full blown robot war film, or a Will Smith vehicle, or all and more?

Also out in August is THE VILLAGE, the latest from M. Night Shymalan. In this spooky tale, a remote close-knit village lives in fear of mythical creatures living in the woods nearby... From his previous track record, this could be a cracker...

And on September 3rd, we have HELLBOY, adapted from the comic book tale of a demon born into evil but raised by the powers of good, so he ends up investigating the paranormal for the government. Not starring any big names, and not having such a famous character as certain other films out this year, this could yet be a bit of a dark horse. It has done very well indeed in the States, and is reported as being refreshing and entertaining – a bit of MEN IN BLACK meets X-MEN.

That's it for this summer. Other films to watch out for later this year, and into next year, include:

ALIEN V PREDATOR. Not my sort of thing, but fans are anticipating it eagerly, raving that the alien is more like the original Ridley Scott monster.

THE FORGOTTEN, starring Julianne Moore, features a woman seeking grief counselling after her son disappears in an air crash, only to be told he is a figment of her imagination. Out Nov 12th.

CONSTANTINE. With Keanu Reeves and Rachel Weisz, this is as it sounds, a film version of the cult comic HELLBLAZER, with Reeves as a supernatural PI alongside Weisz' cop. Out March 2005.

BATMAN BEGINS. A bit of a prequel to the Batman films, this stars the excellent Christian Bale. Not sure if this will get irritating and detract from the flow of the film, but reportedly this will have lots of scientific, practical reason for being and doing. Unless you've been thoroughly disillusioned by the franchise, this could be worth going to see. Out July 05. VC

THE RAFFLE

Raffle tickets are available as soon as you get to the meeting. You do NOT have to wait until the break when someone twists your arm - do it voluntarily - it's far less painful! The Group needs your cash to pay visiting authors' expenses, the salubrious surroundings of our regular meeting room, etc. It's just a quid - not even the price of half a pint! And you could WIN this month's prize... it could be a book or if you're really lucky it could be a bottle of wine!

SELLING YOUR WARES...

And don't forget that YOU can bring along your unwanted books, magazines, videos, etc., and sell them to other members - NO CHARGE, NO COMMISSION. Start rummaging through your collections - you KNOW you'll never read some of that stuff again. BRING YOUR GOODIES! Lay them out on one of the tables provided and wait for people to start throwing money at you.

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...

15th July - THE ALIEN YEARS - Robert Silverberg

19th August

9th September

Borders Book Shop in Birmingham's Bull Ring and the British Fantasy Society have invited Simon Clark, Ramsey Campbell and Mark Morris to do readings from their latest books on Thursday 29th July at 6pm. Ramsey Campbell will be reading from THE OVERNIGHT, Mark Morris from NOWHERE NEAR AN ANGEL and Simon Clark from EXORCISING ANGELS. Free entry. Contact Dave Massey on dmassey@bordersstores.com phone (0121) 616 1094.

They're also starting a number of readers' groups - details from Dave Massey

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). Details from Andrew M Butler, Dept of Media and Arts, Canterbury Christ Church University College, Canterbury CT1 1QU, UK. Email: amb21@cant.ac.uk
Website: <http://literaryconferences.britishcouncil.org/conferences/>

FANTASYCON is 22nd-26th September, at the Quality Hotel, Walsall. Guests of Honour are Rob Holdstock and Muriel Grey. Full details from **FANTASYCON 2004**, Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8PQ. Or you can print a registration form or booking form off their website at www.britishfantasysociety.org.uk/info/fantasycon.htm

NOVACON 34 - the Birmingham SF Group's very own convention will again be held at the popular Quality Inn, Walsall over the weekend of November 5th to 8th. Guest of Honour is Ian Watson. Cost of registration is £35 - send to **NOVACON 34**, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.
email: x15@zoom.co.uk **BOOK NOW!** Booking forms and registration forms can be printed directly off the website at <http://www.novacon.org/>

INTERACTION: THE 2005 WORLDCON will be held in Glasgow next year, 4th to 8th August 2005. Guests of Honour are Greg Pickersgill, Christopher Priest, Robert Sheckley, Lars-Olof Strandberg and Jane Yolen. Full details, printable forms, etc from their website <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/>
Snail mail address: **INTERACTION**, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ

*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*

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FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

August 13th - Summer Social. We'll be going to the Black Eagle, Handsworth. We have ONE place only left. First come, first served - £5 deposit to The Treasurer

September 10th - artist **Bryan Talbot**, interviewed by Steve Green.

October 8th - **Peter Weston** will be returning from being Fan Guest of Honour at this year's Worldcon. Peter has written a 130,000 word history of his life in SF fandom and it will be published at Worldcon. It contains a LOT of history of the Brum Group and many of you are mentioned in it! Peter will be talking about the Brum Group part of the book and also signing copies of his book. He will also be talking about the WHOLE book in a talk at **NOVACON 34**.

December - Christmas Social - Skittles at the Selly Park Tavern

January 8th 2005 - Annual General Meeting

March 12th - Peter F Hamilton

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Newsletter 394 copyright 2004 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton. 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 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.

Your email address wanted...

And I'm still interested in receiving your email address so that I can add it on to a list of people to receive up-to-date hot news. Recently I found out about Brian Aldiss doing a radio programme. I was able to distribute full details of the event to all who I thought would be interested a couple of days before the event. I'm actually compiling a list of email addresses - not just of Brum Group members - of people who would be interested in receiving hot news. If you want to be on it, send me that address to rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

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