

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 2004

ISSUE 396

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 September 10th

Comics artist and writer

BRYAN TALBOT

"The Adventures of Luther Arkwright"

Bryan Talbot, our Guest this month, is probably best known for his creation of the superb *Luther Arkwright* comic strip, of mind-boggling parallel worlds. He is a very talented graphic artist, who, like Frank Hampson and the *Dan Dare* series for EAGLE, both writes and illustrates his scripts.

In 1978, he began both *Frank Fazakerly*, *Space Ace of the Future* for AD ASTRA 1 and *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* for NEAR MYTHS.

Among other things he has worked as a graphic designer for British Aerospace, as well as in an advertising agency, and has produced comic strips for 2000AD, covers for DC SUPER HEROES MONTHLY, as well as Rock and SF art prints, posters, and badges.

Bryan has held one-man Comic Art exhibitions in Lancashire, Tuscany, London and New York, appeared in numerous others and is a frequent guest at international Comic festivals. Editions of his comics are published in Italy, Spain, Germany, Brazil, France, Denmark and Finland. In ADULT COMICS by Roger

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: OCTOBER 8th MEETING - new author STEPHEN HUNT will be talking :
: to the Group about his writing and also about running one of the :
: biggest SF websites :
:

Sabin (Routledge 1993) he is cited as one of the creators of the Graphic Novel form.

His 284 page graphic novel, HEART OF EMPIRE was published in 9 parts by Dark Horse, winning an Eagle Award and nominated for two Eisners.

His talk to the BSFG this month will be a talk/slide show based on HEART OF EMPIRE. 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.

THE SUMMER SOCIAL

The August meeting saw 12 members of the Group visiting *The Black Eagle* in Handsworth for a meal and drinks.

Surprisingly, everyone turned up early - either going direct to the pub or meeting outside Snow Hill Station.

We managed to get the whole of one part of a very small bar where we drank a few pints and chatted away until we were told our table was ready. I would like to say that several things went wrong and continue to report, humorously, on the embarrassments of the evening. But, alas, I can't. Everything went smoothly and a good time was had by all.

At about 10.30pm, most left to go to their various homes while four of us remained drinking

A damn fine evening!

RGP

JAMES WHITE AWARD

The 2005 James White Award short story competition is now accepting entries. The winner will be announced in Glasgow during Interaction, the 63rd World Science Fiction Convention. The competition is open to non-professional writers from all over the world who may submit up to four original science fiction or fantasy short stories of between 2000 and 4000 words each. The winning story will be selected by an international panel of judges and will be published in INTERZONE. In addition, the author will receive a trophy and a cash prize. Full details may be obtained from the competition website <http://www.jameswhiteaward.com>.

Fan in BBC Radio Quiz

Former Novacon Chairman and long time fan Nick Mills contended for the title Brain of Britain 2004 on Tuesday, 27th July.

Nick's first round match will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 at 1.30pm on Monday 13th September. The broadcast will be available online for one week from that time (follow the links from www.bbc.co.uk). There will also be a repeat broadcast on Radio 4 on Saturday 18th September at 11pm.

Brain of Britain: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/comedy/brain.shtml>

World fantasy Award Nominations

Best Novel:

K J Bishop THE ETCHED CITY

Kij Johnson FUDOKI

Ian R MacLeod THE LIGHT AGES

Jeff VanderMeer VENISS UNDERGROUND

Jo Walton TOOTH AND CLAW

Best Novella:

Simon Clark & Tim Lebbon EXORCISING ANGELS

Jeffrey Ford "The Empire of Ice Cream"

Greer Gilman "A Crowd of Bone"

Glen Hirshberg "Dancing Men"

Kelly Link "The Hortlak"

Best Short Fiction:

Charles de Lint "A Circle of Cats"

Maureen F McHugh "Ancestor Money"

Alex Irvine "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman"

Chris Roberson "O One"

Bruce Holland Rogers "Don Ysidro"

Best Anthology:

Jack Dann, Ramsey Campbell & Dennis Etchison, eds. GATHERING THE BONES

Ellen Datlow, ed. THE DARK: NEW GHOST STORIES

Kelly Link, ed. TRAMPOLINE: AN ANTHOLOGY

Rosalie Parker, ed. STRANGE TALES

Jeff VanderMeer & Mark Roberts, eds. THE THACKERY T. LAMBSHEAD
POCKET GUIDE TO ECCENTRIC & DISCREDITED DISEASES

Best Collection:

Jack Cady GHOSTS OF YESTERDAY

Elizabeth Hand, BIBLIOMANCY

Glen Hirshberg, THE TWO SAMS
George R. R. Martin, GRRM: A RETROSPECTIVE
Michael Marshall Smith, MORE TOMORROWS & OTHER STORIES

Best Artist:

Brom
Donato Giancola
John Jude Palencar
John Picacio
Jason Van Hollander

Best Professional:

Peter Crowther For PS Publishing
John Howe/Alan Lee For Artwork in THE LORD OF THE RINGS
Kelly Link/Gavin Grant For Small Beer Press
Sharyn November For Firebird Books
David Pringle For INTERZONE/service to the field
Sean Wallace For Prime Books

Best Non-Professional:

Deborah Layne/Jay Lake For Wheatland Press
Paul Miller For Earthling Publications
Ray Russell/Rosalie Parker For Tartarus Press
Dave Truesdale For Tangent Online
Rodger Turner, Neil Walsh and Wayne MacLaurin For SFSite.com

British fantasy Award Nominees

The British Fantasy Awards nominations for 2004 has been announced. The winners will be announced the weekend of September 26 at the British Fantasy Convention in Walsall, England.

Best Novel (The August Derleth Fantasy Award):

Simon Clark, VAMPYRRHIC RITES
Christopher Fowler, FULL DARK HOUSE
Jon Courtenay Grimwood, FELAHEEN: THE THIRD ARABESK
James Herbert, NOBODY TRUE
Peter Straub, LOST BOY LOST GIRL
Liz Williams, THE POISON MASTER

Best Short Fiction:

Ramsey Campbell, "Fear the Dead"
Mark Chadbourn, WONDERLAND
Simon Clark & Tim Lebbon, EXORCISING ANGELS
Christopher Fowler, "American Waitress"

Mark Samuels, "The White Hands"

Best Anthology:

Andy Cox, ed., CRIMEWAVE 7: THE LAST SUNSET

Stephen Jones, ed., BY MOONLIGHT ONLY

Stephen Jones, ed., THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF BEST NEW HORROR, VOL. 14

Joel Lane, ed., BENEATH THE GROUND

Andy W. Robertson, ed., WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON'S NIGHT LANDS, VOLUME 1: ETERNAL LOVE

Jeff Vandermeer & Mark Roberts, eds., THE THACKERY T. LAMBSHEAD POCKET GUIDE TO ECCENTRIC AND DISCREDITED DISEASES

Best Collection:

Ramsey Campbell, TOLD BY THE DEAD

Christopher Fowler, DEMONIZED

M. John Harrison, THINGS THAT NEVER HAPPEN

Mark Samuels, THE WHITE HANDS AND OTHER WEIRD TALES

Michael Marshall Smith, MORE TOMORROW AND OTHER STORIES

Best Artist:

Dave Bezzina

Deirdre Counihan

Bob Covington

Les Edwards

Dominic Harman

Best Small Press:

The Alien Online (ed. Ariel and co.)

Elastic Press (Andrew Hook)

PS Publishing (Peter Crowther)

Scheherazade (ed. Elizabeth Counihan)

The Third Alternative (ed. Andy Cox)

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Actress Fay Wray (b.1907) died on August 8. Although Wray had a career spanning decades, she is best known for her role as Ann Darrow in the 1933 film KING KONG Harry Harrison is the first author to win two major literary awards inside a two week period. On July 9th he was he inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame in Lawrence Kansas. Then, on July 22nd he was awarded the Inkpot Award for Outstanding Achievement in Science Fiction and Fantasy by the Comic-Con International in San Diego Stan Nicholls has a new website address - www.stannicholls.com J K Rowling has announced that she plans on producing an eighth *Harry Potter* book while staying true to her pledge to only write seven novels. The eighth book will apparently contain excerpts which were not included in the original books. Rowling says that the proceeds from the

companion volume will all be donated to charity Cassini has discovered two previously unknown moons in orbit around Saturn, bringing the planet's total number of moons to 33. These moons, only a little over 2 ½ miles in diameter, orbit between the orbits of Mimas and Enceladus, at 120,000 and 131,000 miles from Saturn's centre A new film based on H G Wells' WAR OF THE WORLDS, directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Tom Cruise, has been put on a fast track for production with only 10 weeks of preproduction. The budget for the film could exceed \$100 million LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Movie and music mogul Saul Zaentz has sued the studio behind the hit THE LORD OF THE RINGS movie trilogy for more than \$20 million in unpaid royalties, Hollywood trade paper Daily Variety reported Bring back the staircases! The Daleks will, after all, be appearing in the new DR WHO

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

RIVER OF GODS by Ian McDonald

Simon and Schuster / 483pgs / £17.99 hardcover / £10.99 trade paperback

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating: * * * * *

When most writers look to the future they envision it in terms of western society. India seems to be a largely forgotten nation. Until now.

RIVER OF GODS is set in 2047, one hundred years after India was granted independence. In the years between our present and this future, there have been a number of changes, most of which are logical extrapolations of current trends and concerns. India itself has fragmented into a number of smaller countries along cultural, geographic and religious boundaries, reminiscent of the situation before the British unified it. Most of the action takes place in Bharat on the Ganges, the capital of which is the holy city of Varanasi. The borders are unsettled. Water is the issue. The monsoon is three years overdue and the dam between Bharat and Awadhi is of strategic importance. Whoever controls the dam, controls the water supply to Bharat. AI (aeai) technology has developed to a point that most routine tasks involving machines, from household cleaners to fighter aircraft and factory robots are controlled by them.

The story is told from the points of view of ten apparently disparate people whose lives are drawn together over the short period of time described in this novel. Mr Nandha is a Krishna cop. He leads a squad that destroys illegal aeais and any that have gone rogue. Shiv is a victim of the advances in technology. He is not a particularly nice person. We meet him first on the banks of the Ganges just

after he has harvested some ovaries for sale on the black market. Unfortunately, the bottom has just dropped out of the market due to the perfection of the technique for producing stem cells from any cell in the body. Almost immediately, he finds his debts being called in.

Tal is a willing victim of technology. Yt is now a member of the third sex, a nute. Drastic surgery has re-sculptured yt's body into a beautiful, ethereal creature. Most people regard the few normal men who are attracted to them as perverts. So Tal is manoeuvred into an entrapment situation with Shaheen Badoor Khan, the Muslim advisor to Bharat's Prime Minister, Sajida Rana. The Americans have not been forgotten and the larger picture of this future is not ignored. The United States is far more insular than now, but they still have a space industry. Lisa Durnau is taken up to view the strange object they have found in the heart of an ancient asteroid. They are not quite sure what it is, but it has generated three images: her face and those of her old tutor/lover Thomas Lull and that of an unknown woman. Lisa is sent to find Lull who has secreted himself away in Bharat.

These and other strands are slowly brought together. Even when they are not aware of it, they influence each other and what seems at first to be a random pattern, begins to make sense. The one constant is the River Gauges and the concern about water. This future and this novel have been carefully constructed. The setting is an extremely believable extrapolation and the ideas within it, thought provoking.

It would be a grave mistake for present politicians to forget the country. It also be a mistake for SF writers to do the same. India will be an important influence in our future.

Ian McDonald continues to outdo himself with each novel he writes.

PM

CARTOMANCY by Mary Gentle

Gollancz / 313pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating: * * * *

From time immemorial, people have had a desire to know what the future holds for them. Cartomancy is divination using maps. Here, the idea of cartomancy is used as a framing device for a collection of stories published between 1983 and 2004. The title story, originally published as a whole in 1991, is split into two with an introduction to the magical map that has been painted on the walls of a room in the Citadel of Virtue and a return to it in the final few pages of the volume. It is viewed by Eldhyriel, the Knight-Patriarch of the Order of Virtue and the other stories represent what he sees. Unfortunately, this framing device does not enhance the volume, mainly because of the diversity of the other stories and the fact that there is nothing within them to link back to the idea of cartomancy

A high proportion of the stories involve physical conflict of some kind and many of Gentle's fighters are women. Several have links to her other works. "The Logistics of Carthage", for instance, is set in the same alternative history as ASH, and is a precursor by a decade or so for the novel. "The Road to Jerusalem" also has its roots in an alternative history. Whereas "The Logistics of Carthage" deals with a Europe where the country of Burgundy did not disappear from the maps in the 1477, "What God Abandoned" is another story that plays with history.

The military theme is continued in "Orc's Drift" (written with Dean Wayland and the only collaboration here). This story is pure fun. The desert outpost is occupied by orcs and the troops are bored. Then a fairy turns up

"Anukazi's Daughter" and "A Shadow Under the Sea" are both set in the same fantasy world. Both feature betrayals and both have strong, female warriors as principal characters. "A Sun In The Attic" could also be regarded as fantasy but of a much gentler kind, with the emphasis on politics rather than warfare, but like so much of Mary Gentle's work, there is room for doubt. It could be science fiction. Research into the applications of lenses that could lead to revelations best left uncovered and the question is a choice between the greater good of the people and scientific development.

"The Pits Beneath the World" is pure science fiction using the theme of a misunderstanding between ours and the alien's cultures to good effect.

These and the other stories in this volume are well crafted and are a fair representation of Mary Gentle's work. Most have female lead characters who are slightly out of kilter with the rest of their society and most of these women are willing to actually fight, sometimes with actual swords. They are all strongly motivated. Don't expect softness or sentimentality from this writer. PM

THE ONION GIRL by Charles de Lint

Gollancz / 508pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating: * * *

Charles de Lint has built a world which he visits frequently in his novels and short stories. In the poorer areas of Newford you are as likely to see magical creatures as vagrants and bag ladies - if you know how to look. The characters that frequent these tales are such people. Often, as in any neighbourhood, old friends will be found. This is Jilly Coppercorn's story.

Jilly is an artist. She and two of her friends, Sophie and Wendy, call themselves 'The Small Fierce Women'. It characterises their outlook on life. At the start of the novel, Jilly is involved in an accident which lands her in hospital. For a while her survival is in doubt, and then her injuries are such that she may not be able to paint again. Newford, though, lies close to the borders with the Otherworld. Sophie has always been able to travel there in her dreams to the extent that she has a whole other life there. Now Jilly finds that her dreaming self can also

go there, and she can do all the things she currently cannot do in her real life, like sketch.

At about the same time as Jilly's accident, a pack of wolves, the personalities of other dreamers, appears in the Otherworld. These are hunting and killing unicorns.

The narrative of the present is interspersed with chapters from the point of view of Raylene, the sister Jilly left behind when she escaped from an abusive father. Gradually, as the layers of Jilly's and Raylene's lives peel away we get a glimpse of the forces that shape a person. This is a powerful novel, drawing on emotion to paint the characters and myth to give it that extra magic. *PM*

POLYSTOM by Adam Roberts

Gollancz / 344 pages / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Rating: * * *

The eponymous Polystom, whose story this is, appears as a vague and somewhat ineffectual character despite being one of the most important people on his world. He is the Steward of Enting, a planet in a solar system utterly different from our own, where the distances between the planets and other heavenly bodies are measured in hundreds, rather than millions of miles, and a common atmosphere surrounds all so that interplanetary journeys are accomplished in ordinary aircraft. As Steward, Polystom possesses seemingly unlimited wealth and is surrounded by numerous servants to carry out his every wish, but he seems strangely unable to order his life in any meaningful way: even when he undertakes marriage it is a failure and ends in the death of his young wife.

Eventually he becomes involved in an ongoing war on one of the other planets, but finds himself totally out of his depth. He meets the ghost of his wife and through her learns that there are actually two world systems – the one he knows, and another wherein the planets are much bigger and farther apart, with vast distances of vacuum in between – more like our own, in fact. One of these world systems is an artificial simulation inside a computer in the other. But which? Is Polystom himself a real person or a computer simulacrum programmed to think himself real? There is no way to tell, except by carrying out an act of sabotage which will destroy the artificial world, leaving only the real one. But in doing so, Polystom may negate his own existence – and here the book ends.

I felt that the book started well, good descriptive passages conveying a picture of a strange alternative reality. However, I soon became irritated with the character of Polystom himself, wishing he would pull himself together a bit, although his character, with all its shortcomings, can be seen as probably essential for the story to develop in the way it has to. Eventually, however, the story development became too slow-moving as it progressed to a conclusion which was never really reached.

So, despite being ingenious (if not exactly original) and quite well written, I found it ultimately a book to read more with admiration than enjoyment.

MJ

***ROMA ETERNA* by Robert Silverberg**

Gollancz / 385 pages / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Rating: * * *

This is one of the most unusual and original books I have read in a long time. It isn't strictly a novel, but a collection of 11 short stories; however, these are linked, and follow the Roman Empire from 1203 to 2723 by their reckoning. This is an 'alternate history' in which the Roman Empire never fell and Christianity and Islam never developed in the way that we know. As explained by a scholar in the first section, the Hebrew exodus from Egypt failed, and is all but unknown.

However, it is not the sort of world I expected from the cover. Beautifully painted by Chris Moore, this shows a streamlined spaceship rising, watched by a solitary figure leaning against the column of what could be a temple. For one thing, this never happened (a cover not accurately depicting the contents? Horror!) since the ship took off from open desert. But this also gives the impression that this is how the Empire developed; perhaps taking Roman rule out to other worlds? That's what I would expect, at any rate. . .

Not so. Apart from the fact that it oscillates between Roman and Greek rulers, the empire apparently continues for century after century much as before. Sometimes the Emperor is strong and builds up well-trained armies to repel the barbarian hordes of Huns, Goths and Vandals who constantly try to invade at the borders; sometimes he is a simpering ninny who wastes all of the money in the imperial coffers on frivolities and new palaces for himself and his cronies. Whoever he is, heredity rules (literally) and no-one dares to go against an Emperor's wishes. One of them sends a massive armada in an attempt to conquer the 'New Worlds' of Peru and Mexico, but they are repelled by half-naked savages. Enraged, he tries again, and again, bankrupting the empire and killing off its best armies. Eventually, one of his successors settles for merely trading with these countries.

Inevitably, language changes, and pure Latin is replaced by an assortment of dialects and hybrid tongues. But all the time they ride in horse-drawn carriages, send messages by runner, and fight with spears and arrows. Not until halfway through, in 2543, do we start to find an occasion reference to the telegraph, to trains, to bicycles, to steam-driven road vehicles, and eventually to 'sky ships'. The spaceship of the cover, in the very last few pages, is a one-off. Eventually there is a rebellion and the Empire is replaced by a Republic, but it seems to make little difference to the man in the *via*.

Having said that, this is sensitively written and (as one would expect from Silverberg), erudite, and clearly shows the author's interest in and deep knowledge of the subject. Each story is well worth reading in its own right, and offers insights into human nature and a world that just could have been.

Still, I can't help thinking that an opportunity has been missed for another kind of alternate universe. Another writer, perhaps? DAH

THE DEVIL IN GREEN and THE QUEEN OF SINISTER

by Mark Chadbourn

Gollancz / 453pp / £ 6.99 / paperback

Gollancz / 349pp / £10.99 / large paperback

Reviewed by Vicky Cook

Rating: * * *

The blurb starts "Humanity has emerged blinking from the Age of Misrule", thus immediately indicating a sequel of sorts to Chadbourn's previous *Age of Mistule* series. In these series he paints a vision of our world, apparently ravaged, not by war, but by mythical creatures which now prowl the fields and towns, striking down anyone who stands in their path.

The two books here reviewed, *THE DEVIL IN GREEN*, and *THE QUEEN OF SINISTER*, approach this world in different ways. Presumably both are set some months after the *Age of Misrule* which Chadbourn focused on in his previous trilogy. In *THE DEVIL IN GREEN*, the attention is on Salisbury, where the cathedral is at the crux point of various ley lines, and thus the wrath of all sorts of nasty things comes down on it. Mallory is the 'hero' who joins the warrior-Christians who have set up camp in the cathedral, and soon realises the group's fundamentalist tendencies could prove catastrophic. Meanwhile he still manages to make friends, find love, and discover himself.

THE QUEEN OF SINISTER moves away from the characters of the first book, and focuses on a pleasant but somewhat complex young woman called Caitlin, who is a doctor in a town stricken with the plague. She soon learns however that there may be other forces at work behind this plague, and, sets off on a long journey to escape her past and find peace, happiness, and possibly a cure along the way. But of course things are not really that simple.

The two books are very different. The first book is set almost exclusively in and around Salisbury. For the most part the action sticks in the world as we know it. The characters are, in the main, male. The second features three very strong females, and suddenly introduces the idea of swapping dimensions, through the magic of one of the characters. There is a couple of long scenes which are not set on this world, but while they are in our dimension they travel a long distance, and there are scenes in various places such as Birmingham (it is very obvious that the author knows this city in depth). What is also different is that while the heroes are both similar in the fact that they are Brother/Sister of Dragons, the realisation

of this seems to take longer in the first than the second book. *THE DEVIL IN GREEN* approaches this subject better, as once the protagonist realises the truth, there isn't an awful lot of self-discovery left to do, apart from, in Caitlin's case, recovering from her grief at the loss of her family. I sympathised a little more with Mallory who is rather less seemingly perfect an individual, and seems to suffer all the frailties of humanity, with no particular special powers. Caitlin we learn all of a sudden has MPD, a goddess living inside her, and can do all sorts of ferocious things when the mood takes her!

The best thing about the second book was learning a bit more about the world as it is then. We meet more of these mythical characters, and not all of them are evil or out to extinguish mankind, as they seem to be in *THE DEVIL IN GREEN*. At the same time *THE QUEEN OF SINISTER* doesn't hold the same interest as far as issues and complexity goes. *THE DEVIL IN GREEN* has a whole host of religion-driven ideas and issues in it, and it makes very interesting reading.

Chadbourne has obviously done his research into prehistoric Britain and its Celtic culture, and this research really shows in the intensity and vividness of the books. Both are recommended reading, worthy for the sheer vivacity of the descriptions, the idea of hope in the face of desperation, and a rather cracking good adventure story!

VC

***ABSOLUTION GAP* by Alastair Reynolds**

Gollancz / 565pgs / hardcover £12.99

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating: * * * * *

This is Science Fiction to satisfy all those who want the whole gamut of space ships, aliens and adventure. *ABSOLUTION GAP* is sequel to *REVELATION SPACE* and *REDEMPTION ARK*. Each book is strong in ideas, characterisation and plot.

There are two strands to this novel. First there are the characters who are familiar from the first two novels. Twenty years has passed since the mutated ship *Nostalgia For Infinity* landed on Ararat. The older ones still remember the rescue from the planet of Resurgam before the Inhibitors destroyed the solar system and hope that life is settling down. The Inhibitors are a machine race that destroy any species that attains space flight. Humans have come to their notice and they are hunting them down. They have followed the Conjoiners to Ararat's system and now they have to leave, in a hurry. Their destination is Hela.

The other strand concerns the moon Hela. Here a cult has developed due to the planet it orbits occasionally vanishing for a fraction of a second. A procession of huge moving structures, known as cathedrals, constantly circle the world in order to keep the planet directly overhead to observe the vanishings better. Rashmika Els lives on this hostile ice-covered world. When a trading

caravan comes close enough to her village for her to join it, she leaves home to seek her brother who did the same thing a number of years ago.

Gradually these two apparently unconnected stories draw together. the breathtaking scope of this novel is impossible to convey in a few words. It needs to be experienced to appreciate it and although it comes to a conclusion for most of the characters, the Inhibitors are still out there. PM

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

SPIDERMAN 2 (dir: Sam Raimi; released 16 July)

This follows the same sort of lines as the first one - Peter Parker is still beset by personal teenage-style problems as he fights various nasty criminals as his alter ego. Meanwhile this time the villain of the piece is one Doctor Octopus, i.e. a scientist whose disastrous attempt at a scientific breakthrough leaves him welded to four powerful steel arms. Also cropping up is the son of the Green Goblin, who is out for revenge for the death of his father.

All in all, however, I was mildly disappointed. While the action scenes are very well done, with the effects of Spidey swinging across the city far more believable than before, the scenes where he is trying to woo, and then not woo, Mary-Jane are far too long and drawn-out, and just detract from the rest of the film. The more interesting bad guy really has very little screen time in comparison, indeed he disappears from much of the middle section. Granted his story isn't all that long anyway, but maybe they could have had another bad guy, like the Green Goblin #2 to liven things up?

Worth catching if a fan, but if not, beware as this may put you off any more in the series.

I, ROBOT (dir: Alex Proyas; released 6 Aug)

This was much better. I had heard various grumbles about this film nicking the three laws of robotics and the title of one of Asimov's books and not a lot else, but when I came to watch it, I was pleasantly surprised.

There is the decidedly techno-phobic hero with a little secret of his own. There is the huge TERMINATOR-style cybernetics firm which wants to produce one robot per household, with the prim and proper female scientist who you just know is going to end up helping the hero out. And then the robots rebel...

Some scenes ended up looking suspiciously like TERMINATOR, as robots clambered effortlessly up buildings and chased vehicles. There are lots of big booms and action scenes, but amidst all this, there are some morals to be told too.

Robbie (sorry, Sonny) the Robot just wants to understand the human way of things, and the three laws are frequently called upon, as everyone struggles to understand how they can be apparently broken. The climax is well done and resolved, leading to an ultimate satisfaction with the film. Hit of the summer, definitely!

THE VILLAGE (dir: M Night Shymalan; released 20th Aug)

This runs on the same lines as the director's previous efforts. I am a fan so I enjoyed it, but some may find it a bit slow and predictable. Basically it is a bit of a love story among some remote villagers, who live in fear of the mythical creatures living in their backwoods. The film is full of suspense and little jumpy bits, which works well - although it did not live up to the expectation of the mounting tension. The 'twist' wasn't quite as outstanding as I had been expecting. Another 'like it or loathe it' film from this talented director.

So there we have three of the big 'SF' films to see this summer/autumn. If nothing else, go see I, ROBOT, definitely the pick of the bunch in terms of style and humour.

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... 9th September

FANTASYCON is 22nd-26th September, at the Quality Hotel, Walsall. Guests of Honour are Rob Holdstock and Muriel Grey. Over 100 people registered including big fantasy/horror names such as Cherith Baldry, Chaz Brenchley, Ramsey Campbell, Mark Chadbourn, Christopher Fowler, Muriel Grey, Robert Holdstock, Stephen Jones, Juliet E McKenna, Mark Morris, Stan Nichols and Lisa Tuttle - to name but a few. 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.britishfantasyociety.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/>

The Stafford Players will be staging **Terry Pratchett's CARPE JUGULUM** from 10th-13th November 2004. The play will be performed at The Stafford Gatehouse, Eastgate Street, Stafford, and tickets are available from the Stafford Gatehouse Box Office - Tel (01785) 254653. Ticket costs are £7.50 (£6.00 concessions) with a special "3 for 2" offer on the first night. Further info from <http://www.staffordplayers.com>

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

October 8th - new author **Stephen Hunt**, recently taken on by agent John Jarrold will be talking about his new career and his SF website which is one of the biggest on the net

November 12th - 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.

(I, as Replay Books, will hopefully be getting copies from the USA but the publishers are not accepting orders until AFTER Worldcon. The book will now be hardcover only at between £12 and £15. Order now (and pay later) so that I can ensure sufficient copies.

Email me at replayer@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)

December - Christmas Social - Skittles at the Selly Park Tavern. Please remember that last year we hit the maximum of 30 people without having to turn anyone away. Make sure you join us for a great Christmas social evening by getting your ticket asap. Full details and price in next newsletter.

January 8th 2005 - Annual General Meeting

March 12th - Peter F Hamilton

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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.

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, B373 5JH