

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

APRIL 2005

ISSUE 403

HONORARY PRESIDENTS: BRIAN W ALDISS & HARRY HARRISON

COMMITTEE: VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);
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Friday 8th April

ROG PEYTON

Yes, folks, it's ME! I shall be our speaker this month. Negotiations with our intended speaker failed to materialise and so we looked around for a speaker at Eastercon. But it turned out to be the smallest Eastercon for 30 years with virtually no professionals present.

So what could we do? The old 'panel on books' fall back? Nah! Done it too many times. Who could we get locally? I drew the short straw. And as Vernon so politely said, "YOU? Oh well, it's better than nothing." So with the confidence engendered by our beloved chairman, I agreed.

What will I talk about? I don't know but I'm sure I can pull something out from over 45 years in SF where I've been a bookseller, a publisher, an artist's agent, convention organiser, editor, auctioneer, etc. Now if Vernon would just stop twisting my arm, I'll try to prepare something. Alternatively, I may play the whole thing by ear and let you all ask me questions. *RGP*

MAY MEETING - the Write Fantastic - a group of no less than six fantasy authors! Sarah Ash, Chaz Brenchley, Mark Chadbourn, Juliet McKenna, Stan Nicholls and Jessica Rydill will be speaking to the Group and answering your questions.

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.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING - "Dave Hardy's SFX in Space" ***by Vernon Brown***

In principle reviewing a talk, book or film is simple – a précis of the content, a few words linking it to others in the field, and the critics overall impressions. It's a bit more difficult to review Dave's DVD presentation at the last meeting mainly because it's a series of linked items rather than a continuous narrative. Which means either giving a brief overview review of 'very good' or going into detail, which would take far too long. But I'll keep my fingers crossed and try to steer a middle path.

Essentially Dave has taken the salient points of the film of the Apollo 11 Moon Landing, i.e. take-off, landing, exploring and return, and sandwiched them with the equivalent portions of SF films of the 50s, in particular DESTINATION MOON. Using subtitles and voice-over Dave pointed out the similarities and differences between fact and fiction as well as giving some of the background of the making of the SF films. DESTINATION MOON is probably the nearest to reality, which is only to be expected because it is loosely based on ROCKET SHIP GALILEO by Robert A Heinlein, who also acted as technical advisor together with the German rocket expert Herman Oberth.

Afterwards there was the usual question and answer session which was, however, quite brief because Dave's presentation was so lucid and self-contained. I thoroughly enjoyed a different way of seeing films I'd seen before, it certainly brought back memories of sitting with a camera in front of the television in the middle of the night watching the first 'small step' on the Moon. If you missed it you missed an excellent evening, although I think that Dave may be showing it at Worldcon later this year so you may get a second chance. *VB*

ANNE McCAFFREY - SFWA GRAND MASTER

SFWA President Catherine Asaro has announced that Anne McCaffrey will be named SFWA Grand Master at this year's Nebula Weekend in Chicago. She is only the twenty-second writer so honoured by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America since 1974. She joins Robert A. Heinlein (1974), Jack Williamson (1975), Clifford D. Simak (1976), L. Sprague de Camp (1978), Fritz Leiber (1981), Andre Norton (1983), Arthur C. Clarke (1985), Isaac Asimov (1986), Alfred Bester (1987), Ray Bradbury (1988), Lester del Rey (1990), Frederik Pohl (1992), Damon Knight (1994), A. E. van Vogt (1995), Jack Vance (1996), Poul Anderson (1997), Hal Clement (1998), Brian Aldiss (1999), Philip Jose Farmer (2000), Ursula K. LeGuin (2003), and Robert Silverberg (2004).

QUATERMASS IS BACK!

As part of BBC FOUR's TV ON TRIAL season in March, Janice Hadlow, Controller of the channel, has commissioned a live adaptation of THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT, the iconic Fifties sci-fi classic production.

This is the first live television drama to be shown on the BBC for over 20 years. THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT was a television phenomenon, attracting massive audiences when it burst into British homes in 1953. It brought science fiction to the small screen for the very first time and its eponymous lead character, rocket scientist Professor Quatermass, became the UK's first TV hero. Now fans of the original series as well as a new generation will be gripped by the heroics of Professor Quatermass when a rocket crashes to earth, unleashing a terrifying chain of events...

TV ON TRIAL invites the great British public to pronounce their verdict on whether today's TV is better or worse than it used to be. Across a week from Sunday 27 March, BBC FOUR broadcasts some of the outstanding TV programmes of the past six decades of British television. Each night is introduced by two prominent broadcasting figures - one a champion, the other a critic of the featured decade. Viewers then register their votes and comments via email, text message and telephone. A live studio debate at the end of the week-long 'trial' announces the result.

SCIENCE FICTION STING

What could induce thirty professional authors to spend hours writing the WORST prose they could produce?

They did it to prove a point - that a Maryland-based company called PublishAmerica is lying when they claim to be 'selective' and reject 70-80% of the manuscripts submitted to them.

Over a holiday weekend last year, thirty-odd science fiction writers each banged out a chapter or two of ATLANTA NIGHTS, an original 'novel' about hot times in Atlanta high society. Their objective was to write the most awful tripe they could and submit it to PublishAmerica, a self-described 'traditional publisher' located in Frederick, Maryland. PublishAmerica claims they are not a vanity press, but the authors made their point when the print-on-demand (POD) publisher accepted the book and sent a publishing contract. Vanity presses don't read what is submitted to them before accepting it the way real, traditional publishers do.

The project began after PublishAmerica posted an attack on science fiction authors at one of its websites. PublishAmerica claimed, "As a rule of thumb, the quality bar for sci-fi and fantasy is a lot lower than for all other fiction.... [Science fiction authors] have no clue about what it is to write real-life stories, and how to find them a home."

The writers wanted to see where PublishAmerica puts its own 'quality bar'.

If the publisher really is selective, as it claims, or if it is a vanity press that will accept almost anything, as Writer Beware, the scams watchdog committee of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA), asserts.

After ATLANTA NIGHTS was completed, any sign of literary competence was removed. Then even more mistakes and computer-generated nonsense were inserted, and the results submitted to PublishAmerica.

PublishAmerica accepted the book on Tuesday, December 7, 2004.

Writer Beware revealed the sting on a public writers message board on January 23, 2005. Within hours, PublishAmerica withdrew its offer, saying "Upon further review it appears that your work is not ready to be published. There are portions of nonsensical text in the manuscript that were caught by our editing staff as they previewed the text for editing time assessment, pending your acceptance of our offer."

So that aspiring authors can see for themselves just what literary 'standards' PublishAmerica maintains, the writers have made the novel available online at

<ftp://ftp.sff.net/pub/people/doylemacdonald/sting/StingManuscript.rtf>.

Ironically, several authors and instructors wanted physical copies to illustrate how not to write a novel. SFWA elected to print up copies of the manuscript at a reputable POD publisher, lulu.com. All proceeds from the sale of ATLANTA NIGHTS by "Travis Tea" will be going to SFWA's Emergency Medical Fund, a charity which helps authors who have no health insurance. To purchase ATLANTA NIGHTS go to:

<http://www.lulu.com/travis-tea>.

Excerpt from ATLANTA NIGHTS:

Alright. No Dopplering dotcom plummet to eat a terminal snack of pigeonflavored pavement after the dead cat bounce. No jolt of autocratic asphyxiation, wrenching the Apex Data Ruler the way he wrenched himself in the wee of the night when he lay prostate on his back and no one could hear him ejaculate Margaret's name into the Sealy Serta mattress drenched with the carnal effluents of desire. No tragic grandiose flinging of the BellSouth fiber=optic wiring over the rafter beam since there wasn't one, positioning the SemperFidic ergonomic office chair, looping the Jimmy Hendrix original hand-made collectable silk necktie neck, kicking the spinning chair across the anti-static mat cleated like Beckum's soccer shoes to the migraine Millikin Carpet, kicking the climate controlled air with its direction adjustable hypoallergenic louvers, kicking the generic afterlife.

There was always Valium.

<<< I love it! I love it! - I've always hated vanity presses - it's great to see one get stung. - RGP >>>

HUGO NOMINATIONS 2005

Best Novel (424 nominating ballots)

THE ALGEBRAIST by Iain M. Banks (Orbit)

IRON COUNCIL by China Miéville (Del Rey; Macmillan)

IRON SUNRISE by Charles Stross (Ace)

JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL by Susanna Clarke (Bloomsbury)

RIVER OF GODS by Ian McDonald (Simon & Schuster)

Best Novella (249 nominating ballots)

"The Concrete Jungle" by Charles Stross (Atrocity Archives, Golden Gryphon Press)

"Elector" by Charles Stross (Asimov's 09/04)

"Sergeant Chip" by Bradley Denton (Fantasy & Science Fiction 09/04)

"Time Ablaze" by Michael A. Burstein (Analog 06/04)

"Winterfair Gifts" by Lois McMaster Bujold (Irresistible Forces NAL)

Best Novelette (215 nominating ballots)

"Biographical Notes to 'A Discourse on the Nature of Causality, with Air-Planes' by Benjamin Rosenbaum" by Benjamin Rosenbaum (All-Star Zeppelin Adventure Stories Wheatland)

"The Clapping Hands of God" by Michael F. Flynn (Analog 07-08/04)

"The Faery Handbag" by Kelly Link (The Faery Reel Viking)

"The People of Sand and Slag" by Paolo Bacigalupi (Fantasy & Science Fiction 02/04)

"The Voluntary State" by Christopher Rowe (Sci Fiction, scifi.com 5/5/04)

Best Short Story (269 nominating ballots)

"The Best Christmas Ever" by James Patrick Kelly (Sci Fiction, scifi.com 5/26/04)

"Decisions" by Michael A. Burstein (Analog 01-02/04)

"A Princess of Earth" by Mike Resnick (Asimov's 12/04)

"Shed Skin" by Robert J. Sawyer (Analog 01-02/04)

"Travels with My Cats" by Mike Resnick (Asimov's 02/04)

Best Related Book (263 nominating ballots)

THE BEST OF XERO by Pat and Dick Lupoff (Tachyon Publications)

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO SCIENCE FICTION ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge University Press)

DANCING NAKED: THE UNEXPURGATED WILLIAM TENN, VOLUME 3 by William Tenn (NESFA Press)

FUTURES: 50 YEARS IN SPACE: THE CHALLENGE OF THE STARS by David A. Hardy and Patrick Moore (AAPPL; Harper Design International)

WITH STARS IN MY EYES: MY ADVENTURES IN BRITISH FANDOM by Peter Weston (NESFA Press)

Other categories can be seen on <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/pressr31.htm>

<<<So, for the first time ever, ALL novels nominated are by British authors! And in the Best Related Book category I spy not one, but TWO books by members of the Birmingham SF Group!!!! - RGP
>>>

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... The news came in just before Easter that **Andre Norton** had died. A tribute will feature in next month's newsletter Prior to her death the SFWA announced the formation of the **Andre Norton** Award for young adult novels. The awards will be presented along with the Nebulas with the first award being presented in 2006. The award will be selected following the same procedure as the Nebulas and the first jury will include **Sherwood Smith, Janni Lee Simner, Jean Rabe, Victoria McManus, Greg van Eekhout, Martha Bartter, and Catherine Asaro** **John DeLorean**, the American car-maker whose radical 'gull wing' saloon features throughout the BACK TO THE FUTURE trilogy, has also died following a stroke. He was 80 The Science Fiction Museum in Seattle has announced its first annual arts contest for aspiring young artists and writers. The top candidates from each category will be exhibited at Norwescon 28. Judges will include **Michael Whelan** and **Michael Bishop** The First Man Booker Award for a living author for 'continued creativity, development and overall contribution to fiction on the world stage' will be awarded this June. The prize, will include £60,000 and be awarded every other year. An author will only be able to win once. Eighteen authors are on the first shortlist including the following who have genre credits to their name: **Margaret Atwood, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Stanislaw Lem, Doris Lessing, and Philip Roth** The James Tiptree, Jr. Literary Award Council is pleased to announce that the 2004 Tiptree Award has two winners: **Joe Haldeman's** novel CAMOUFLAGE (Ace Books 2004) and Finnish author **Johanna Sinisalo's** novel TROLL: A LOVE STORY (Grove Press 2004) UPN has announced that it will cancel the television series STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE on May 13 after it concludes its fourth season. ENTERPRISE becomes the first Star Trek series not to complete seven seasons since the original series was cancelled after three seasons. A total of 98 episodes will have aired by the time of the show's cancellation NASA has announced the launch date for the next space shuttle mission, STS-114. The space shuttle Discovery will launch on May 15 with a crew of seven led by **Commander Eileen Collins**. Two months later, on July 12, the space shuttle Atlantis is scheduled for its return to flight. The full crew for STS-114 includes Pilot **James Kelly, Wendy Lawrence, Charles Camarda, Soichi Noguchi, Stephen Robinson** and **Andrew Thomas** RGP

THE APRIL QUIZ - Steve Green

- 1 In which 1969 novel do hermaphrodites populate the planet Winter?
- 2 Which SF author wrote for and played with the rock group Deep Fix?
- 3 How are Bob, Helen, Violet and Dashiell Parr better known?
- 4 Which scientist appears in many of Isaac Asimov's robot stories?
- 5 Name the original artist on DAN DARE, PILOT OF THE FUTURE.
- 6 Which disease is genetically farmed in Thomas M Disch's 1968 novel CAMP CONCENTRATION?
- 7 What is the alternate title for Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN?

- 8 How is Ann Halam better known?
- 9 In which 1979 film does H G Wells pursue Jack the Ripper across Los Angeles?
- 10 Name the matriarchal cult in Frank Herbert's DUNE and its sequels.
- 11 Who received the Nova Award for 'best fan' at last year's Novacon?
- 12 Which rock group were initially commissioned to produce the score for 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY?

ANSWERS TO MARCH QUIZ IN ISSUE #402 (Nobody claimed a drink! Again! You useless lot!)

- 1 BUG JACK BARRON, due to its serialisation in the Arts Council-funded magazine NEW WORLDS.
- 2 1981. The second on J K Rowling's novel is set in 1992, when Harry is twelve; the attack by Lord Voldemort took place 11 years earlier. This means the final showdown will be set in 1997, so perhaps Harry went over to the dark side and became a New Labour spin doctor.
- 3 Harry Bell, designer of the famous 'Britain is Fine in '79' Worldcon banner.
- 4 Robert Sheckley, who will be one of the Guests of Honour at this year's Worldcon in Glasgow.
- 5 Four: BENEATH... (1970), ESCAPE FROM... (1971), CONQUEST OF... (1972) and BATTLE FOR... (1973). A handful of episodes from the short-lived TV spin-off were stitched together into features, but only appeared on TV.
- 6 Robert A Heinlein; Philip K Dick; E(dward) E 'Doc' Smith; John Brunner.
- 7 The hobbit Deagol, murdered by Smeagol before the latter's transformation into Gollum.
- 8 THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL directed by Tod Browning's protégé Robert Wise.
- 9 The classic FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND
- 10 John Christopher
- 11 A custard pie fight in the War Room (director Stanley Kubrick decided to destroy the Earth instead); Sellers played the eponymous scientist, an RAF officer and the US President (a fourth part was taken over by Slim Pickens after Sellers was injured).
- 12 Virgil Finlay (1914-1971). Brum Group co-president Brian Aldiss apparently described this trend in pulp art as 'the great nipple shortage'.
- 13 The Heechee
- 14 Ex-war hero 'Snake' Plissken, as portrayed by Kurt Russel in 1981's ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK and its 1996 sequel ESCAPE FROM L.A.
- 15 1972. The 1971 event was run by Vernon Brown and members of the Aston University SF Group (that said, there was a heavy crossover between the two organisations). It was intended as a one-off, although one ad produced by Peter Weston rather jumped the gun by inserting a 'Novacon 1' logo and announcing 'a whole new series of science fiction conventions'.



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

***QUICKSILVER ZENITH* by Stan Nichols**

HarperCollins / 327pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star rating: * * *

This is the second volume of a fantasy trilogy, that begins at a cracking pace, and continues at the same speed. Volume one, QUICKSILVER RISING, introduces the principal characters and sets up the identity of this world. Here, magic has roughly the same function as electricity does in ours. The rich can afford all kinds of magical items, usually called glamours, while the poor have to make do with low quality fakes. The dynamics of the plot are complex, with four factions vying for attention. Two empires, constantly at war with each other, dominate most of the civilised world. As they are both despotic, there is a Resistance, an association of groups working towards the lifting of the yoke of tyranny. To the north, Zerriess, the leader of the barbarian hordes is moving southwards, killing the magic as he goes. The danger he represents has yet to be recognised by the other powers. Thrown into this mixture is a wild card. Prince Melyobar, the titular ruler of Bhealfa is mad and in his floating palace is attempting to outrun Death. Anything he does is likely to mess up the plans of any of the others.

The focus of the plot is centred on the island of Bhealfa. Here, an odd selection of characters are brought together by circumstance – Serrah, a disgraced soldier; Reeth a bandit prone to berserker rages; Kutch an apprentice wizard; Karr a politician; Kinsel, a pacifist singer; Tanalvah, a whore; and many others. These fall in with the Resistance movement.

QUICKSILVER ZENITH sees the Resistance movement planning to escape from tyranny by buying an island and moving all their sympathisers to it. Naturally there are problems – there is a traitor in Resistance, Kinsel in arrested and undergoes a travesty of a trial before being sentenced to the galleys, and Reeth is accused of the murder of the leader of the paladins. The paladins are a mercenary group that have become rich by playing for both empires. With all the issues thrown into the melting pot, it does not seem that one final volume will be enough to resolve all of them.

The plot moves very fast, with a lot of action. Even if all the sword fights are not wholly convincing it doesn't matter too much as the reader is swept along. There is also a vast cast list. As a result it is impossible to develop them in any great depth in the space they have been allowed. In many ways these would have been more satisfying books if they were longer. Nevertheless, you are left wanting to know what happens next.

PM

***CHANGING PLANES* by Ursula LeGuin**

Gollancz / hardcover

Reviewed by Peter Weston

Star Rating: (unfinished)

I opened this one with some enthusiasm; after all, LeGuin wrote *THE DISPOSSESSED*, still in my opinion one of the greatest SF novels of all time (though Mr RGP strongly disagreed at the recent AGM).

The title is a pun and sums up the whole idea in one sentence; if you get really bored and miserable when waiting at an airport, you can slip into some alternative world or another. That's it; the rest of the book is a series of short and very silly excursions into these other 'planes' – one in which the inhabitants don't speak, one where they are perpetually angry, one in which genetic engineering has gone wild, one where they have a religion, or metaphysics, or delusion that no-one else can understand, and so on.

There is no 'story' in the normal sense, and maybe the author is trying to say something about the evils of our world, but I lost patience at the sixth or seventh pointless little tale. The whole thing is a piece of sheer self-indulgence that no publisher would have considered if Mrs LeGuin's magic name wasn't attached. This time Rog's epithet is right; "absolute rubbish!" PRW

***NO PRESENT LIKE TIME* by Steph Swainston**
Gollancz/Orion / 317pgs / £9.99 trade pbk; £10.99 hardcover
Reviewed by William McCabe
Star rating: * *

It's unusual that a sequel or second part of a trilogy will improve on the first book. This is no exception. The things that were different and innovative in book one are just a little older here. Many of the characters and settings are the same. Things that were explained in book one aren't gone over again. This saves time but it means the book doesn't hold up so well if you haven't read the earlier volume. The biggest problem is that there isn't anything new here that lives up to the first book. All of the best ideas here were done better in book one. All that's really new here are a couple of points of plot that look like a set-up for something in the next book.

Once again, our focus is on Jant, the immortal messenger of the Circle and the only man on his world that can fly. Now the war with the insects is over, life returns to normal. Competition for a place among the immortals returns. This results in the defeat of the swordsman Gio, but he will not take his defeat gracefully. He raises an army and attacks the Circle. Meanwhile, Jant is sent with a ship to start up relations with a newly-discovered island 3 months distant. On his failure and return, the failed rebellion takes to the sea in the hope that they can take this new island for themselves.

Although the book is well-enough written and a fair story, so much of this reflects back to the earlier story (*THE YEAR OF OUR WAR*) that it loses in comparison. Plot points like Jant's addiction and the resolution to the story are so close to the original that I wonder if it was worth doing again. Maybe it's just the filler in the middle of a trilogy. WAM

TV REVIEW

The Return of DOCTOR WHO - Vernon Brown

Having missed the original DR WHO programmes (although I have since seen a variety of episodes and excerpts as well as both films), I looked forward with great anticipation to his new series. Granted that from preview clips he looked more suitable to be the incisive leader of a nonconformist antiterror/smuggling/drug squad (he turned out more like the manic psychologist in WIRE IN THE BLOOD), but I was willing to see what would transpire. I even decided to watch it live to get the full immediate impact rather than record it to watch at leisure. To my dismay the impact was less seismic and more a passing lost zephyr that gently ruffled the hair.

As children's TV taken up by adults, the old DR WHO was fun with basic plots, absurd monsters and wobbly sets but these gave it its appeal. True, the first episode of the new DR WHO has absurd monsters and little plot but the sets and settings are far too slick for their content, for the monsters and the plot. I think that it's unsuitable for young children, too unsophisticated for older children and lacks enough plot on the one hand or enough violence on the other to appeal to most adults. Of course I may be wrong but just consider the storyline.

Dr Who introduces himself to Rose by popping in and out of doorways like a Jack-in-the-Box to interject cryptic comments and commands. Then by some magical means (don't even think 'sufficiently advanced technology') shop mannequins start staggering around killing people so the Doctor and Rose find the controlling Mind down a sewer where Rose kills/incapacitates it with a poison that Dr Who had brought as a peace offering (I think). The mannequins drop dead and Dr Who and Rose go off in the Tardis. There's also Rose's boyfriend who gets eaten by a rubbish bin which apparently cannot stomach him (I don't blame it) because he reappears later just in time for her to decide that she feels the same way and dump him again when she goes off with the Doctor.

Perhaps I'm not quite grasping something there that I should be; perhaps I expected too much! But the thing that worries me is that all the reviews I've read not only say that the new DR WHO is great/brilliant but they also call it science fiction. However, I'll be fair and just say *Chacun a son gout*. VB

<<Perhaps I'm not quite grasping something here that I should be...why are you wasting time watching children's TV programmes? You should have been at Eastercon! And I presume *Chacon a son gout* means 'load of old tosh'. - RGP>>

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. Books to be discussed:-
April 14th - Chris Bunch - THE EMPIRE STONE

May 12th - David Gemmell - DARK MOON

June 23rd - Robert Holdstock - CELTIKA

July 21st - Diana Wynne-Jones - YEAR OF THE GRIFFIN

THE BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY - next open night will take place on Wednesday 4th May. This will be a special evening as it will also feature the launch of 'The Write Fantastic'. This group, which includes Stan Nicholls, Mark Chadbourn, Juliet McKenna, Sarah Ash, Jessica Rydill and Chaz Brenchley, is an initiative by authors to introduce fantasy fiction to readers who have never tried the genre, and to show those who have stopped reading it, for whatever reason, the breadth and depth in current fantasy writing. The evening is open to all members and non-members alike, it is free, and will take place from 6.30pm at the Walkers of Holborn pub, 9 Norwich Street, London, EC4A 1EJ. Nearest tubes: Chancery Lane (0.2 miles), Farringdon (0.3 miles), Blackfriars (0.5 miles). For further info on the evening etc., please contact Vicky on aunico@hotmail.com

TOLKIEN AT SAREHOLE MILL. This event, the 6th of it's kind, will be held over the weekend of May 14th and 15th 2005 at Sarehole Mill. It is free to get in, although parking normally costs £1. The event includes historical re-enactments, traditional arts and crafts, historic and conservational guided walks through Moseley Bog, historic bus tours of Brum, amateur dramatic productions in Moseley Bog by Shire Productions, children's activities, retailers like Waterstones and Games Workshop, and this year, for the first time, the Moseley Farmer's Market, to name but a few of the things going on... Contact Dave Corby on ClaretCorby1@activemail.co.uk

FARINGDON ARTS FESTIVAL runs every year in the Oxfordshire town of Faringdon, between Oxford and Swindon. In 2005, our dates are 4-10 July, and on Saturday 9th July we're playing host to three SF and fantasy authors. Running a half-day workshop on How To Write A Novel (£10 fee, limited to 20 places), is Juliet E. McKenna; talking about her work will be Gwyneth Jones; and headlining our literary strand, in a rare public appearance, will be Brian Aldiss. (Both authors admission free, and will not run at the same time as Juliet's workshop.) Our website will be up and running shortly. In the meantime, for more information, or to book for Juliet's workshop, contact Paul Cornell at paulcornell@owlservice.freemove.co.uk

INTERACTION: THE 2005 WORLDCON will be held in Glasgow, 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

TOLKIEN 2005: THE RING GOES EVER ON is a 5-day conference celebrating 50 years of THE LORD OF THE RINGS, to be held at Aston University, Birmingham, from the 11th to 15th August 2005. All details on website <http://www.tolkiensociety.org/2005/>

FANTASYCON 05 has been booked for the 30 September - 2 October 2005, at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, near Birmingham. Further details to follow.

***** NOVACON 35 ***** - the Brum Group's own convention, will again be held at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall over the weekend of 11th to 13th November. Guest of Honour is Alastair Reynolds. Cheques to 'Novacon 35', Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ email: x15@zoom.co.uk Website: www.novacon.org

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

May - Write Fantastic Group. Six authors - **Sarah Ash, Chaz Brencley, Mark Chadbourn, Juliet McKenna, Stan Nicholls** and **Jessica Rydill** will be speaking to the Group on the merits of fantasy fiction. See their website

See <http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/prod/dialspace/town/way/ync90/twftest/>

June - tba

July - **Harry Harrison**

August - tba - hopefully a US author staying on after Worldcon

September - **Jane Johnson/Jude Fisher/Gabriel King**

October - tba

November - **Peter Hamilton**

December - **Beer & Skittles**

Jan 2006 - AGM

Feb - **Ian R MacLeod**

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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.

And still my problem with Microsoft Word continues - another month on and I'm forced to revert to good old reliable Lotus Wordpro.

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 Secretary, 5 Greenbank, Barnt Green, Birmingham, B45 8DH