

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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& **HARRY HARRISON**

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### FRIDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY

# IAN R MACLEOD

Ian MacLeod spent several years only being published in the USA, mainly in the SF magazines such as ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF. British publishers ignored him – until the publication of *THE LIGHT AGES* which was well-received and has sold extremely well, despite controversy over whether it's science fiction or fantasy. Personally, I don't think it matters. If it's so close to SF that there's an argument over it, then it must have something going for it. And if it's well written – as Ian's books are – then we should all pay attention.

Ian came to speak to us in 2004 but on this visit he has opted to be interviewed. Pauline Morgan will be interviewing him and talking about creative writing so you can guarantee an interesting evening. I'm sure that Pauline will ensure that Ian also gets to talk about subjects he didn't touch on his last visit. So please don't think that this evening will be a repeat of the 2004 visit by Ian.

*RGP*

**MARCH 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 MEETING** – author, editor and SF historian **BRIAN STABLEFORD** will be our guest in March. Brian has written the *Dies Irae* trilogy, the *Hooded Swan* sequence, the *Daedalus Mission* series plus many one-off novels.

*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.*

## **ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD NOMINATIONS**

The following novels are the nominations.

**Kazuo Ishiguro** – NEVER LET ME GO

**Ken MacLeod** – LEARNING THE WORLD

**Alastair Reynolds** – PUSHING ICE

**Geoff Ryman** – AIR

**Charles Stross** – ACCELERANDO

**Liz Williams** – BANNER OF SOULS

## **LIFE ON MARS**

If you haven't already seen the BBC 1 TV series, LIFE ON MARS, try and catch up with it. A detective from 2005 is injured and finds himself back in 1973. It shows how much the world has changed in just 30 years. Finding his station in 1973 and walking in to his office, he sees his bare desk and asks "Where's my PC terminal?" The answer from his 'boss' is "We haven't got a constable here by that name." It's GOODNIGHT SWEETHEART meets THE SWEENEY. Highly recommended. *RGP*

## **LIFE, JIM, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT !**

*Star Trek* star William Shatner sold a kidney stone to an online casino for \$25,000 to benefit charity, the Reuters news service has reported. Shatner sold the stone to GoldenPalace.com, and proceeds of the sale will go to Habitat for Humanity. Shatner told Reuters that it wasn't easy parting with a kidney stone, even if it had already left his body. He also said he would never sell unless he had visitation rights. "When I was contacted about selling my kidney stone to GoldenPalace.com for an original price of \$15,000, I turned it down, knowing that my tunics from *Star Trek* have commanded more than \$100,000", Shatner said, adding that he countered by offering to sell the ring-sized stone for \$25,000.

By privately selling his kidney stone, Shatner gave up an offer to sell it at auction on television. Comedian Jimmy Kimmel interviewed Shatner about his

painful stone on November 14 and immediately called it 'the ultimate *Star Trek* collectible' and offered to sell it on his show.

GoldenPalace.com plans to send the stone on tour with a collection of other unusual items.

<< WOW! Can you wait? Gosh – it COULD come to Birmingham! We could actually SEE Shatner's kidney stone....!!!! I'm now taking bets on the length of the queue to see this item. I'm offering evens that the queue could be up to... well, a whole metre long and 10,000 to one on it being longer than 2 metres....-RGP>>

## **THE DRACO TAVERN STORIES**

SF author Larry Niven has compiled 30 years' worth of *Draco Tavern* short-short stories into one collection, THE DRACO TAVERN, about a bar where aliens of all sorts saddle up, buy drinks and tell stories. Niven said that the concept predates the cantina from the original Star Wars movie: Niven grew up reading Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp's TALES FROM GAVAGAN'S BAR (1953) and Arthur C. Clarke's TALES FROM THE WHITE HART (1957) and decided to create his own bar. At the tavern, aliens come to drink and tell stories; humans come to drink, see the aliens, hear their stories and sometimes do business with them. The 26 stories in the collection include a few that have never been previously published.

### ***...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?***

#### **THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS'**

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions to me at [rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk) >>

## **FEBRUARY QUIZ – Rog Peyton**

- 01 Who wrote the *Sector General* stories?
- 02 Crime writer Evan Hunter wrote one SF novel. Name it.
- 03 HUNTER/VICTIM was the sequel to which novel?
- 04 In which novel do the Cat Moriah, the Swan of Tirlith and the Liralen appear?
- 05 Who, or what, was Harlie?
- 06 Who wrote *The Hooded Swan* series?
- 07 Petronius the Arbiter had how many legs?
- 08 Who wrote TALES FROM GAVAGAN's BAR?
- 09 What was Peter Hamilton's second book?
- 10 Subtract the total of our Presidents' ages from Tom Disch's 'numbers-only' title.
- 11 Who was named SFWA Grand Master in 2005?

- 12 Fill in the blank – “THE --- GUIDE TO BATTLEFIELD COVENANT AT DUNE’S EDGE: ODYSSEY 2

## **ANSWERS TO JANUARY QUIZ**

- 01 Jonathan Strange and Gilbert Norrell are both magicians.
02. Joss Whedon created FIREFLY, brought to the big screen as SERENITY.
03. The 2005 Nova Award for best fanzine was presented to BANANA WINGS.
04. SOLARIS was written by Stanislaw Lem.
05. Illogical as it might appear, Leonard ‘Spock’ Nimoy recorded the song “Bilbo Baggins”.
06. Ramon Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Heathcourt-Brace Sierra y Alvarez del Rey y de los Uerdes was better known as Lester del Rey.
07. Wells’s Martians landed at Horsell Common.
08. The hero of the BBC radio series JOURNEY INTO SPACE was Jet Morgan
09. Jessica Lange, Linda Hamilton and Naomi Watts have all played King Kong’s leading lady, a role first essayed by Fay Wray in the 1933 original.
10. Tom Wolfe wrote THE RIGHT STUFF, later filmed by Phil Kauman.
11. Dr David Keel, Cathy Gale, Emma Peel and Tara King all worked alongside John Steed in the classic tv series *The Avengers*. Later, he was joined by Mike Gambit and Purdey in the somewhat less surreal follow-up, *The New Avengers*.
12. The first true SF convention was held in Leeds, in 1937.

Winner: for the second month running - **Harry Hodson** – 12 (FULL MARKS AGAIN! CONGRATULATIONS!). Come on the rest of you – surely all of you can get SOME of the answers right....

## **NEWS IN BRIEF . . .**

.... **Harlan Ellison** has been named the 23<sup>rd</sup> SFWA Grand Master for 2006 .... The only genre work to win a **Golden Globe Award**, given out by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, was the ABC television series **LOST** which won for the Best Television Series, Drama category .... The nominees for the **Philip K. Dick Award** for best paperback original have been announced. The award will be presented on April 14 at Norwescon 29 in Seatac, Washington. The nominees are COWL by **Neal Asher**, WAR SURF by **M. M. Buckner**, CAGEBIRD by **Karin Lowachee**, NATURAL HISTORY by **Justina Robson**, SILVER SCREEN by **Justina Robson** and TO CRUSH THE MOON by **Wil McCarthy** .... **Kristine Kathryn Rusch** has won the 2005 Universitat Politècnica Catalunya Science Fiction Award for her unpublished novel DIVING INTO THE WRECK. The award, considered one of the most prestigious in Europe, comes with a prize of 6,000 euros .... **Harry Potter** outsells all books in 2005 - in first day! HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE, sold over 4 million copies on the first day alone, and 7 million overall, in the U.S. in 2005. This dwarfs the number two book - the paperback version of A MILLION LITTLE PIECES, did a ‘paltry’ 1.7 million copies for the year, and that book is now running into criticism. **J.K. Rowling**

said she'd be starting the seventh and final book early in 2006 .... **Sam Raimi** (SPIDER-MAN 3) will direct THE WEE FREE MEN, an adaptation of **Terry Pratchett's** bestselling young-adult fantasy novel .... Scientists **Ian Stewart** and **Jack Cohen**, bestselling authors of THE SCIENCE OF DISCWORLD and novels WHEELERS and HEAVEN, have joined the **John Jarrold Literary Agency**, for representation of their jointly-written novels. "I'm very pleased to welcome Ian and Jack to the agency," said Jarrold. "Science fiction is booming in the UK, with a number of very different writers having come to the fore in the last five or six years. Their backgrounds and flair make them perfect writers for this exciting time in the genre. And the concepts behind their forthcoming novels are universe-wide!" .... DUNE, the saga from director **David Lynch** is out on DVD (January 31<sup>st</sup>) in the USA, from Universal Studios Home Entertainment. The DUNE EXTENDED EDITION includes both the original theatrical version of the film and a new extended version never before available on DVD. The DVD features 40 minutes of new bonus material. With an all-star cast featuring **Kyle MacLachlan**, rock legend **Sting** and **Virginia Madsen**, DUNE has been completely digitally remastered for the extended edition <<Great news, but where's the other 7 hours still never shown anywhere? Remember DUNE author **Frank Herbert** told us about this, a year before his death? – RGP>> .... **Disney** has announced it will acquire **Pixar Animation** for approximately \$7.4 billion. The two companies have long had a collaborative agreement which has resulted in the films TOY STORY, A BUG'S LIFE and MONSTERS, INC. among others, but had hit a rocky patch with Pixar planning to pursue alternative distribution after the current deal expired. Pixar executives will now run Disney's animation division ....

*RGP*



## BOOK REVIEWS



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

*RGP*

**TEMERAIRE by Naomi Novik**  
**Voyager / 330pgs / £12.99 / Hardcover**  
**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**  
**Star rating: \* \* \***

At the core of this book is a brilliantly original idea, and this alone will endear it to many readers. It is an alternate world, historical fantasy novel. In Novik's universe, dragons are as much a part of the natural history of the world as are horses or elephants. Dragons have been domesticated. Only a very few of them can breathe fire. Then the problems start.

The setting is the Napoleonic wars, a period when Britain was at war with France. The French fleet is bottled up in port by the British Navy blockade. Except for the dragons, history has paralleled ours. Other authors have done similar things; Freda Warrington's *THE COURT OF THE MIDNIGHT KING* tells Richard III's story but with pagan magic wielded by the women; John M. Ford told a similar story in *THE DRAGON WAITING* but with vampires. Both of these are stronger books than Novik's, but this may partly be because they are more experienced writers. In both the former books, there is a very strong sense of period which is not evident in Novik's novel. She has not woven her dragons sufficiently into the fabric of the politics and culture.

The book opens in the middle of a battle between a British and a French frigate. The language is clumsy and convoluted. Two of us read the first sentence three times before we could make sense of it. Neither was I convinced by the scene described. Nevertheless, the British captain, Will Laurence, prevails and discovers a dragon's egg in the Frenchman's hold. It is about to hatch. Unless someone is able to harness the hatchling on emergence from the egg, it will become feral and be untrainable. With echoes of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragons of Pern*, the dragon decides that only Laurence will do. At this point he has to resign himself to leaving the Navy and joining the Aerial Corps. Man and dragon have bonded. In what is a relatively short book we then have related the problems of feeding a dragon at sea – they eat rather a lot, the training of the dragon and their part in rebuffing Napoleon's invasion of England. The rest is fairly standard fare. Laurence and his dragon, who he names Temeraire, initially don't fit into the elite society of dragon riders. Gradually this changes.

The concept behind the dragons is good but not quite convincing enough. They are huge beasts when fully grown. They are like airborne sloops, equipped with a crew of marines and other ranks which swarm all over them while in flight. The ability of a fifty ton behemoth to fly is explained by internal bladders! The quantity of meat required to feed them – two or three sheep a day each – is enormous and it is difficult to see how supply would be sustained, unless by the time of industrial expansion they are redundant and confined to remote landscapes bare of human industrialisation.

Novik is very coy about telling us the actual date of her novel's setting although a knowledge of English history will eventually pin it down to 1805 as the Battle of Trafalgar happens off stage (with air cover). There is no report of Nelson's death. Perhaps this is an oversight as it would be a shame if history was changed at this point when she has been careful to follow it almost exactly so far. The biggest problem with the novel, which may be because she is an inexperienced writer, is that it lacks depth and characterisation. It is fast paced and action-packed. There is good description of the dragons and the landscapes but if you take away the dragons the writing has little substance. I have no doubt, though, that it will prove to be a popular series.

WARNING! - TEMERAIRE has been repackaged and retitled in paperback by

Ballantine/Del Rey in the USA as HIS MAJESTY'S DRAGON for publication in three months time. It is the same book. PM

***TRANSCENDENT* by Stephen Baxter**

**(Destiny's Children Book Three)**

**Gollancz / 489pgs / £12.99 / trade paperback**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

**Star Rating: \* \* \* \* \***

The triumphant conclusion to this latest massive trilogy sees humanity reaching its ultimate apotheosis some half-million years into the future. Having conquered space and time, the Transcendence is a coalition of selected human beings melded into a single intelligence with the avowed objective of redeeming itself by atoning for all the suffering that has ever taken place throughout the whole history of humanity. If the only way to achieve this is to go back to the beginning of time and arrange for humanity never to have existed at all – well, perhaps it will be for the best.

The explication of this problem and its resolution involve two people. In the far future lives Alia, a candidate for the Transcendence, and she is linked across time to Michael Poole, who appeared briefly as a child in Book One. In 2047 he is an engineer battling the onset of global warming and plagued by visions of his dead wife, visions which the astute reader will soon guess are a product of this link to Alia. The story unfolds through a sequence of alternating chapters told from the respective viewpoints of Alia and Michael: this is a legitimate writing technique, but one of which Baxter is over-fond and uses in all too many of his books – notably the first instalments of this trilogy. Eventually, they come together and Michael has to visit the future to argue for humanity being allowed to continue.

Viewing the *Destiny's Children* trilogy as a whole, the second volume seems only loosely tied to the first and third. It seems to exist largely to tie the series into some of Baxter's previous work such as *TIMELIKE INFINITY* and the stories in *VACUUM DIAGRAMS*, showing how humans won the war for the future and swept the Milky Way clean of alien opposition. This leaves the current volume as more of a direct sequel to Book One than a continuation of Book Two. However, this comment is not meant in any way to detract from the impressive accomplishment which the series represents.

Noted in the past as a hard-science writer of futurist SF, Baxter is now extending his reach to deal with more philosophical, metaphysical, or even spiritual matters. The Transcendence to which future humans aspire is little, if at all, distinguishable from Godhood, and there are cogent and persuasive arguments to be made as to whether this status is desirable and what use should, or should not, be made of the power it provides. And what is SF for if not to provide a forum for this kind of discussion? MJ

## ***A MAZE OF DEATH by Philip K Dick***

**Gollancz SF Masterworks / 190pgs / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Chris Morgan**

**Star rating: \* \* \* \***

I remember classifying this as a problematical addition to Dick's body of work when I first read it, newly in US paperback, almost thirty-five years ago. It is an exceptional novel with, at its core, a new religion which, as Dick says in a brief but very illuminating Foreword, "is not an analogue of any known religion." This has a four-fold deity, comprising the Manufacturer, the Intercessor, the Form Destroyer and the Walker-on-Earth, each with a well-developed role and explained in a non-supernatural text: A J Spectowsky's HOW I ROSE FROM THE DEAD IN MY SPARE TIME AND SO CAN YOU.

To counteract the weight of this theology, Dick deliberately used one of his less plausible B-movie plots. There are more than fifteen main characters, almost all of whom have their thoughts used in places, almost as many violent deaths, a very strange alien setting, and more twists than one can keep track of. So it all moves very fast, though none of the characterisation is particularly deep. All characters are flawed obsessives: an alcoholic, a nymphomaniac, a pill addict, a cleaning fetishist and so on.

The planet they all arrive on (in one-way spaceships, all part of an unexplained new project) is Delmak-O (or Delmark-O if you believe the back-cover blurb). It's extremely odd, almost dreamlike, with a mixture of organic and electronic creatures. There's a large building which moves away as you approach it, and miniature buildings, kept as pets. There's an oracle, called The Grand Tench, in the shape of a huge cube of gelatin; ask it a question and it replies with an answer from the I CHING.

There are characters with funny names, like Ben Tallchief, Susie Smart (usually known as Susie Dumb) and Ignatz Thugg, though they are all to a certain extent contrivances or mouthpieces rather than people.

I hope none of the foregoing will put you off. Despite difficulties and seemingly contradictory passages, this is an amazing and entertaining short novel, one of Dick's best. Just don't expect too many answers or joyful conclusions. *CM*

## ***THE HOUSE OF STORMS by Ian R. MacLeod***

**Pocket Books / 457pgs / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

**Star Rating: \* \* \***

MacLeod garnered considerable praise for his novel THE LIGHT AGES and now returns to the same world in a novel which is not properly a sequel, being set a century or so later. Following the tumultuous events of the preceding book England seems to have become more conventionally



industrialised although the magic of aether still permeates every aspect of life and the guilds are still in control of the spells and processes which govern its use.

In this strange alternate England, the amoral Alice Meynell has risen from humble beginnings to a position of the highest power by ruthlessly using people before casting them aside while destroying others who might stand in her way – indeed, she is not above committing murder to further her ends. These ends include the protection of her son Ralph, first seen as a consumptive teenager but who undergoes a near-miraculous cure when she brings him to Invercombe, a country estate near Bristol. He attempts to pursue his own future and conducts a passionate affair with a servant, Marion Price, resulting in the birth of a changeling child, but his mother puts a stop to all that and moves to draw him into the power structure she is building. Her efforts are largely responsible for plunging England into a civil war from which no-one emerges unscathed.

This is certainly another remarkable book, but maybe too long for its subject matter. The strange alternate world in which it is set and the complexities of the story demand a deal of exposition, but in the later stages there are times when the detailed explanations of what is supposed to be happening tend to obscure the fact that not very much is happening at all. The ending, too, is inconclusive – Marion Price sails away like Frodo at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* but all the other leading characters simply fade away, leaving no certainty as to what happens to them. The importance of the book lies not in the resolution of the stories of the people involved so much as in the process of those stories taking place.

*MJ*

***THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD* by Patricia A McKillip**

**Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks / 199pgs / £7.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by Chris Morgan**

**Star rating: \* \* \* \* \***

This may be the best of all fantasy novels. Not the longest, not the most subtle, not the most original. Yet it's full of love, hate, revenge and fear, put across with a youthful exuberance which the best fantasy must possess.

Patricia McKillip was 26 when this was first published (in 1974). Similarly, Poul Anderson was 28 when *THE BROKEN SWORD* was published, and Peter Beagle was only 20 when *A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE* first appeared. Older writers may be more experienced, more polished, but they are too cynical to believe in love or to write with the necessary lack of restraint. Believe me, I know.

*THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD* is magical in more ways than one. Sybel is a young woman with considerable magic powers, who lives happily alone except for a few fabulous beasts: a lion, a cat, a boar, a falcon, etc., whom she controls and communicates with. She agrees to look after Tam, a baby cousin of hers, and because he is heir to a throne she is forced to take sides in a war

between kingdoms. Tam is on one side and the man Sybel loves is on the other. Okay, so the plot does creak a bit, but it still offers plenty of surprises.

The story is told in the most beautiful poetic language, full of metaphors and similes, only occasionally venturing into the purple. Even the beasts have mellifluous names: the Cat Moriah, the Swan of Tirlith, the Liralen. Read almost any page of the novel aloud and it sounds like an incantation.

Cleverly, McKillip creates legends as she goes along, helping to persuade the reader that, spiralling outwards from Eld, are many kingdoms, many wizards and witches, and a heritage of myth and legend which has built up over centuries.

It is important for you to know that no Forgotten Beasts are harmed during the unfolding of this story, though a few men do die, some nastily.

A wonderfully satisfying novel, highly recommended.

CM

## ***THE LORD OF THE RINGS: A READER'S COMPANION***

***by Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull***

**Harper Collins / 894pgs / £20.00 / hardcover**

**Reviewed by Dave Corby**

**Star Rating: \* \* \* \* \* (see note below)**

As most Tolkien fans are aware Douglas A. Anderson's ANNOTATED HOBBIT (1988) is a very well thought of and much appreciated book, and many of Tolkien's readers have often wished that the weightier sequel could get a similar treatment. Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull have undertaken the task to provide almost exactly that, although it soon became apparent that, due to the length of TLOTR and the enormous amount of annotation that could be applied, such a project would require a tome coming to many thousands of pages. Therefore instead we have the READER'S COMPANION, which is essentially the annotations published on their own, to be read alongside the main text.

As the authors explain in the introduction the popularity and depth of TLOTR have lead to an enormous number of related references to mythology, academic works, books, essays, films, music and websites, amongst other more obscure links. The purpose of a reader's guide such as this one is to highlight interesting or explanatory facts and links as they are encountered as one reads TLOTR. In fact, so great is the wealth of related detail that the book, by necessity, can be considered a 'boiled down' distillation of the available material. Given that this alone runs to 894 pages, one can only try to imagine how large a complete set of references could be, assuming that such a work could actually be possible in the first place...

The entries themselves are clearly and concisely written, even if sometimes the actual links are quite obscure. By way of example, the first annotation, concerning the word 'Hobbit', naturally arises from the first line of "Concerning Hobbits" at the beginning of TLOTR, and gives us potential etymologies of the word hobbit, making reference to English (and Old English)

folklore, Tolkien's own remarks on the subject, the Oxford English Dictionary, Christopher Tolkien's *History of Middle Earth*, folklore in older Germanic languages such as Gothic, and a wide variety of other works, as well as the authors' own, not inconsiderable, investigations and speculations upon Tolkien's writings. If this is the 'boiled down' version the thought of the full material scares the willies out of me!

So, why exactly have I given this a 5 star rating? The magnitude of the achievement cannot be overestimated, and the book certainly lives up to its aims. For a true Tolkien fan (such as I), this is an almost indispensable volume, filled with fascinating insight. But I must append a warning to my recommendation; the casual Tolkien fan may find this a step too far, being perhaps a bit too intense to read 'casually' alongside TLOTR. Indeed, the READER'S COMPANION deliberately assumes that the readers has already read TLOTR, and, due to the complexity and extra detail of this work, it is not recommended that a first time reader of TLOTR attempt to use this at the same time. There is quite enough depth and detail to enjoy in TLOTR the first time around without trying to add more! Nonetheless, for anyone looking for more, especially in terms of understanding much of Tolkien's process of creation, or for those who are just fascinated by TLOTR and all to do with it, I cannot recommend this enough.

DC

## ***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:-**

16th February - Susanna Clarke - JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL

16th March - tba

20th April - tba

**Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre** is hosting the musical version of John Updike's satirical fantasy THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK from 26-29 April and the stage version of the Disney hit BEAUTY AND THE BEAST from 16 May until 3 June. Booking office - 01902 429212

**The British Fantasy Society** is proud to announce **Fantasycon XXX** for readers, writers, artists and fans of the Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror genres. This year we welcome Neil Gaiman, Juliet McKenna and Ramsey Campbell as our Guests of Honour. The convention is open to everybody, although BFS members do get a preferential membership rate. Current prices: £45 (£40) until end of June. Day rates available. The dates for this year are 22nd - 24th September 2006 and the venue this year will be the Britannia Hotel,

1 St James Street, Nottingham. Further information can be found at our new website, [www.fantasycon.org.uk](http://www.fantasycon.org.uk) or email Vicky on [fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk](mailto:fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk)

**NOVACON 36** – the BSGF’s own convention will again be held at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, Nr Birmingham. Guest of Honour will be **Ken MacLeod**. Registrations are currently £33. Cheques to ‘Novacon 36’, Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ Email: [x15@zoom.co.uk](mailto:x15@zoom.co.uk)  
Website: [www.novacon.org](http://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](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)*

### ***FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSGF***

March 10<sup>th</sup> – SF author and SF historian **Brian Stableford**

April 7<sup>th</sup> – Horror/Fantasy artist **Les Edwards**

May 12<sup>th</sup> – Fantasy author **Storm Constantine**

June 9<sup>th</sup> – SF/Fantasy artist **Jim Burns**

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

***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