

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MARCH 2006

ISSUE 414

HONORARY PRESIDENTS: **BRIAN W ALDISS, O.B.E.**  
& **HARRY HARRISON**

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);**  
**PAT BROWN (TREASURER); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);**  
**TIM STOCK (PUBLICITY); JINNIE CRACKNELL & WILLIAM MCCABE;**  
**NOVACON 35 CHAIRMAN: TONY BERRY**

WEBSITE: [www.bsfg.freesevers.com](http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com)

EMAIL: [bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk)

**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> MARCH**

# **BRIAN STABLEFORD**

Brian's first sale was way back in 1965 – a short story sold to John Carnell's SCIENCE FANTASY magazine. His first novel was published in the USA as one half of an Ace Double, CRADLE OF THE SUN, followed shortly after by THE BLIND WORM. Only when he started writing trilogies/series did he get published here in the UK. The *Dies Irae* trilogy (THE DAYS OF GLORY, IN THE KINGDOM OF THE BEASTS and DAY OF WRATH – all in 1971). But it was with his second series that his career really took off – the 6-book series *The Hooded Swan* (1972-1975). The whole series was published as one volume, titled THE HOODED SWAN, two or three years ago. The *Daedalus Mission* series followed – another 6-book series only 5 of which got published in the UK. Brian then returned to stand-alone novels – MAN IN A CAGE (1975) and THE MIND-RIDERS (1976) before once again reverting to writing series. Dozens of books have followed including possibly his most famous, THE EMPIRE OF

**APRIL 7<sup>th</sup> 2006 MEETING – ONE WEEK EARLIER THAN NORMAL DUE TO EASTERCON. Our guest will be SF, Fantasy & Horror artist LES EDWARDS who will be talking about his work and showing examples on a slide show.**

FEAR, THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON and THE ANGEL OF PAIN.

As an editor, Brian has been responsible for several anthologies including THE DEDALUS BOOK OF BRITISH FANTASY and TALES OF THE WANDERING JEW. As a writer of non-fiction he has written books on modern science and James Blish.

Add to all this the fact that he has a degree in Biology and a doctorate in Sociology and it becomes obvious that the BSFG is in for a real treat. Another great evening that you will not want to miss RGP

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

## **...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 [<>](mailto:rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)

## **ANSWERS TO FEBRUARY QUIZ**

01. James White
02. TOMORROW AND TOMORROW by 'Hunt Collins'.
03. Robert Sheckley's TENTH VICTIM.
04. Patricia McKillip's THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD.
05. A computer in the David Gerrold classic WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE
06. Brian Stableford.
07. Four – he was the cat in Robert Heinlein's THE DOOR INTO SUMMER.
08. L Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt
09. A QUANTUM MURDER
10. Answer is 174. Disch's novel was 334 and both our President's are 80.
11. Anne McCaffrey.
12. DRAGONHIKER'S.

Winner: AGAIN is **Harry Hodson** – 12 (FULL MARKS AGAIN! CONGRATULATIONS!). Come on the rest of you – surely all of you can get SOME of the answers right....the answers to several of the questions were actually in last month's newsletter!!!

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

.... The sad news just arrived that **Octavia Butler** died last Friday 24th February. A lovely lady who I had the good fortune to meet when she was GoH

at the 1997 Eastercon. She was one of my favourite authors and I think I've read everything she had published up to 2001 with the exception of her first novel, SURVIVOR, which she advised me not to read as she was not proud of it. A great author with superb books to her credit – KINDRED, the 'Xenogenesis' series and the 'Patternmaster' series. She was one of that small band of authors who never seem to write enough but what they do write is of a very high standard. An obituary from her local paper can be found at

[http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/6420ap\\_wa\\_obit\\_butler.html](http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/6420ap_wa_obit_butler.html) .... Some of you will remember **Leroy Kettle** from 70s/80s Ratfandom and his fanzine TRUE RAT. Roy has been awarded an OBE for his work as a senior policy adviser on Disability Rights .... Editor **David G Hartwell** received the Skylark Award from NESFA at Boskone during the weekend of February 17. The Skylark Award is presented to individuals who have contributed significantly to science fiction, both through work in the field and by exemplifying the personal qualities which made the late **E E 'Doc' Smith** well-loved by those who knew him. It has been given out since 1966 .... To celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the birth of **Robert E Howard**, THE COMPLETE CHRONICLES OF CONAN has just been published by Gollancz. With a beautiful simulated leather binding and a full colour frontispiece by Les Edwards, this volume runs to just under 1000 pages and has every Howard Conan story in chronological order. Fantastic value at just £18.99 .... Film rights to **Graham Joyce's** wonderful contemporary fantasy THE TOOTH FAIRY have been optioned. Graham will write a new screenplay .... **Katherine Kurtz** has delivered a new Deryni novel, CHILDE MORGAN, to Ace books .... THE COMPLETE HAMMER'S SLAMMERS by **David Drake** has been published in hardcover at \$35 by Nightshade Books in the USA .... Nightshade have also just published THE LOST DISTRICT AND OTHER STORIES by Joel Lane **ibooks Inc.** and **Byron Preiss Visual Publications** filed for bankruptcy and vacated their New York offices on February 22, 2006. The companies were founded by **Byron Preiss**, who passed away on July 9, 2005. In an announcement, Preiss's widow **Sandi Mendelson** said "In the months after my husband's tragic accident last summer, his companies set out to honor his commitments to his authors and projects and continue his vision in publishing. We very much wanted to go forward in the spirit and direction that Byron believed in; however, it became clear that without his unique creative force driving the companies he created, this was not possible. I know this outcome will be disappointing to many in the publishing community .... ABC has given a green light to the SF anthology TV series **Masters of Science Fiction**, which will present works of well-known authors such as **Ray Bradbury** and **Isaac Asimov**, Variety reported. IDT Entertainment and Industry Entertainment, which produced the 13-episode anthology Masters of Horror for Showtime, are behind the science fiction version as well. ABC has ordered four episodes, but IDT and Industry plan to go ahead and produce at least six episodes and as many as 13. The project is targeted to air in the 2006-07 TV season .... New ability to sense dark matter has resulted in scientists re-estimating the overall mass of the

galaxies in the local group with the result that they have determined that our galaxy, the Milky Way, is more massive than the Andromeda Galaxy (M31), which was previously believed to be larger than the Milky Way. In addition, the Milky Way seems to have "stolen" more than one million stars from the globular cluster M12 ....

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

### ***PUSHING ICE by Alastair Reynolds***

**Gollancz / 457 pgs / £14.99 / hardcover**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

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

When one of Saturn's moons inexplicably leaves its orbit and sets off to exit the solar system altogether the only spaceship anywhere near is the *Rockhopper* with its crew of comet miners. They are therefore ordered to give chase and eventually find themselves on a one-way trip to an unknown destination aboard an alien artefact. This journey will plunge them into a struggle for survival which will tax their ingenuity to the utmost: eventually they will be humanity's first contact with alien races before finally being linked to the far future of the human race – a future which they may have been partly responsible for bringing about.

Yet again, Reynolds displays an extraordinary breadth of imagination and sheer inventiveness, together with an ability to portray well rounded and believable – if not always likeable – characters.

However, I must confess to slight reservations. Previous stories on the theme of 'First Contact' have generally involved aliens sufficiently like ourselves to enable some sort of understanding to be reached – even if that meant understanding the inevitability of conflict. It is now more generally realised not only that alien thought processes may be quite unlike ours but also that alien technology may be so advanced as to be beyond our understanding. Thus any writer endeavouring to portray contact with an alien culture has to tread a fine line between giving free rein to his imagination and needing to ensure that the products of his imagination remain comprehensible and not too unfamiliar to his characters, to say nothing of his readers. In this case, the description of the futuristic technology surrounding the inadvertent travellers and their struggle to make sense of it, thereby enabling themselves to survive the beginning of their journey, goes almost too far (although this is, of course, is just my opinion) and the middle section of the book describing that part of their experience slows the

pace somewhat. Once contact has been made the story picks up again and becomes more interesting.

But still major issues remain unresolved. To begin with, there is no explanation of the transportation system which has brought them so far in space and time – it is just there, but its origin, purpose and modus operandi remain unknown. Also, it is made apparent that humanity is still going on, thousands of years in the future, but there is no suggestion as to the intervening history and the relationship – if any – between humans and aliens during this time. Finally, the book ends with a small party setting out on their own to explore the universe, but there is no indication what will happen to them.

Perhaps, as has been the case before with this writer, there will be a sequel – to recount what happened both to this group and to those left behind, to say nothing of how the human race got from here to there.

None of which is to say anything but that I heartily recommend this epic novel.

*MJ*

### ***TIME'S EYE by Arthur C Clarke and Stephen Baxter***

***(Time Odyssey Book 1)***

**Gollancz / 345 pgs / £6.99 / paperback**

**Reviewed by John Shields**

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

TIME'S EYE is a story of Earth within an alternative universe of the past, the present and the possible future of humankind.

It is set against the occurrence of a global realignment of the fabric of space and time. This has resulted in selected times of human biological and social evolution being shifted from their rightful place within the historical timeline to coexist at one instance, resulting in a patchwork of eras situated across the earth. These slices of time range from the beginning of man's evolution from forest dweller to savannah dweller, through the periods of ancient and modern history and on forward to a proposed near future.

That this is something other than natural is evidenced by the appearance of the large hovering spheres within the individual time slices and the oddly geometric and obviously artificial boundaries.

The story concentrates on the coming together of two groups and the events they experience as they travel towards the proposed centre of the disturbance. The first consists of a helicopter crew from the near future; Rudyard Kipling and the British Army in the NW Frontier; and Alexander the Great and his army; the second consists of a group of cosmonauts and Genghis Khan and his army.

The plot runs smoothly through the reconstructed Earth, taking the reader to areas of the world that the two great war leaders knew in their time and postulates on their reactions to the changes. The leisurely journey through the world is broken by various faster-paced sections of the story.

One such interruption of the slower tempo of the story is the eventual coming together of the armies of Alexander and Genghis Khan in a battle for the possession of the central controlling sphere.

An enjoyable and exciting read postulating the effects of such an occurrence and the resulting social interaction between people of different time periods.

*JS*

***WORLDSTORM* by James Lovegrove**  
**Gollancz / 452pgs / £10.99 / trade paperback**  
**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**  
**Star rating: \* \* \***

This is a book where the reader has to take a lot on trust or get very annoyed. The setting is a world ravaged by a very powerful storm, the 'Worldstorm' of the title. It moves around the populated areas causing devastation. It cannot be a natural meteorological phenomenon because it does not diminish or follow any logical weather pattern. The people are divided into four factions, each group manifesting psychic powers relating to one of the four elements – earth, air, fire and water. There is a certain amount of tension between factions.

There are three main characters. Elder Ayn is a pre-visionary. He already knows what will happen in his life, in great detail. This makes him arrogant. He believes that as it is fore-ordained, there is no alternative to the actions he is going to follow through. By implication, everything is predestined and no-one has choice. He has decided that he can thwart the Worldstorm by bringing together two people to create a child who will have the power to destroy it. He manufactures excuses to be in the right place at the right time to meet them.

Yashu is the first of them. She is born in the islands of Water Inclined people. Until Ayn arrives, she thinks she has no powers. He proves to her that she is Air Inclined like him and should go to the mainland with him. She is a sooth-seer and recognises when others are telling the truth. As Ayn believes what he is saying, she trusts him. He is very careful not to lie in her presence.

Gregory Brazier is the son of a Fire Inclined family. His powers belong to the Earth persuasion. Ayn picks him up in the aftermath of the Battle of Penresford which pitches Fire against Earth after a visit by the Worldstorm.

This is a world riddled with prejudice and superstition. At the end, nothing has moved on. Lives are very much the same as they were, with the exception of the major characters. Even then, it is difficult to know whether Ayn's manipulations have changed anything. Finally, the reader is left with the thought that either there will be a sequel which will decide if Ayn was right or wrong in his suppositions, or Why? The story is left hanging.

As far as the writing is concerned, it is competent enough. Perhaps the prejudices between the factions are insufficiently explored, though they may be a result of the format. Part of the book is related as Ayn's memoirs to his enshriner, Khollo. He has an eidetic memory and can forget nothing and these sections are

pompous as befitting Ayn's character. However, they distract from the flow of the narrative which really belongs to Yashu and Gregory. Without knowing if there is to be a sequel it is difficult to know whether to recommend the book. There are probably more fulfilling novels available than this one. A shame, because there are some interesting ideas within it. PM

***THE COSMIC PUPPETS* By Philip K Dick**

**Gollancz / 140pgs / £6.99 / Paperback**

***CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST* By Philip K Dick**

**Gollancz / 246pgs / £7.99 / Paperback**

**Reviewed by Peter R Weston**

**Star ratings: \* \* \* and \* \* \* \***

Back when I started to read science fiction, Philip K Dick was known for a handful of short stories – competently done; things like “The Defenders” and “The Golden Man”, but gimmicky and slight, little to distinguish him from dozens of other contributors to the 1950s’ magazines. Then he started to get more serious, his attention turned towards longer lengths, and in 1961 he wrote the justly-praised and Hugo-winning *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE*. But the novels gradually grew more and more strange, with the big turning point probably being *THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH*, in 1965, which attracted a great deal of attention. Remember, this was at the height of the ‘New Wave’ controversy and Dick was hailed as one of its prophets.

I was editing *SPECULATION* magazine at the time, and didn’t care for the novel or the adulation with which I felt it had been greeted. So for the next few years we published reviews and other material that tried to take a more balanced, objective look at the Philip K Dick phenomenon. In the end we gave up, overwhelmed both by his volume of production and by the almost-universal critical acclaim.

*THE COSMIC PUPPETS* is Dick’s very first novel, published as half of an Ace Double in 1957. Expanded from an earlier magazine story from 1953 it is still very short (140 pp), and looked at analytically the setting doesn’t make sense, the plot-mechanics are rudimentary and characterisation is minimal. However, the writing is oddly gripping and for the first couple of chapters we do genuinely wonder what is going on, until everything gets swept up – far too quickly - into a whirlwind resolution. The most interesting aspect of the book is the way in which it foreshadows the theme that came to completely dominate the author’s life; reality is not as it seems, and for that reason it has some historical interest for those interested in the evolution of Dick’s work.

*CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST* is a longer (246 pp) and much better book. Dating from the mid-seventies, its tone is similar to Dick’s better-known *A SCANNER DARKLY* (written in the same period), with multi-perspectives on events and the same semi-autobiographical take on the craziness of Californian life. It compares with Vonnegut’s later novels though doesn’t go so

directly for sardonic humour; instead, an air of gentle melancholy pervades the story of Jack Isidore – the ‘crap artist’ of the title – who believes in all sorts of nutty ideas, fills his apartment with rubbish (including old SF magazines) and in general doesn’t do very much with his life. Sound familiar? Neither book is marketed as genre ‘science fiction’ but those of us in the know will recognise the propeller beanie and the Hugo rocket on the cover of CRAP ARTIST. I found it oddly compelling. *PRW*

***TITAN by Ben Bova***

**Hodder & Stoughton / 502 pgs / £18.99 / hardcover**

**Reviewed by Dave Hardy**

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

I was quite surprised when I was offered this book to review, as I had assumed that Ben Bova’s ‘Grand Tour of the Solar System’ series was complete, all major planets (and the asteroids) having been covered. But clearly he has not finished with it, as this shows.

Many of the old protagonists, such as Dan Randolph and Martin Humphries, are of course long-gone, and even the Yamagata Corporation doesn’t get a mention, although the insidious New Morality are still lurking in the background. But this is really a sequel to SATURN, and in fact it follows on directly from plans announced at the end of that novel: a huge L-5-style habitat, housing ten thousand people, has now been built and placed in orbit around Saturn, and in it we find Pancho Lane, her sister Susan (now called Holly), Malcolm Eberley, Professor Wilmott, Tavalera, Manuel Gaeta, and other familiar names.

At first this seems slower-paced and even less exciting than the previous books, as time is spent setting the scene inside this vast cylinder and the politics that are going on as a new Chief Administrator is due to be elected. Malcolm Eberley is confident of being re-elected, and wants to mine Saturn’s rings for ice, to be supplied to provide much-needed water for the rest of the Solar System. But Holly Lane has other ideas, as she wants the ban on having children to be lifted, and she takes advantage of Nadia Wunderly’s discovery of what appears to be life in the ring particles (or is it?) to prevent this from happening. Another main storyline is the Titan Alpha probe which has been placed on the surface of Titan, is roving around collecting data – but refuses to transmit it! This drives Eduoard Urbain to distraction as he and his team try to make contact.

The stuntman, Gaeta, finds himself under pressure to come out of retirement and first to bring back more samples from Saturn’s rings, then to go down to the surface of Titan in a dangerous attempt to solve its communication problems. Oh, and then there’s Timoshenko, who wants to destroy the habitat and all within it. . . All in all, a satisfying read for fans of hard SF. *DAH*

***THE VESUVIUS CLUB - Graphic Edition***

**by Mark Gatiss, Ian & Guy Bass**

**Simon & Schuster / 110 pgs approx / £12.99 / large paperback**

**Reviewed by William McCabe**

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

This is the comic book version of Mark Gatiss' period adventure novel. The pictures are by Ian Bass and letters by Guy Bass (his name does not appear on the outer cover). The page count is complicated as the numbering starts on the fifth page of the comic and does not appear on every page. The count at the top includes all of the inside illustrated pages whether part of the story, fake advertisement, or additional illustration.

The plot is fairly simple in this version. Lucifer Box, artist and resident of 9 Downing Street, is a secret agent of the British Empire in the Edwardian Era. Here he investigates the death and/or disappearance of several leading vulcanologists (Volcanoes, not rubber) and strange events in Naples. The story also involves an orgy in a club, drugs, a plot to destroy a large part of Italy and 'Purple Zombies'. There's no real subtlety, not many surprises, and the characters are paper thin.

It seems obvious that this was an attempt at a period 'James Bond' or 'Avengers' style spy thriller. The smart lines, the choreographed fight scenes, the immaculate costumes are all there. The problem is that it seems half-hearted in so much of what it does. There are names from obvious puns (Tom Bowler, Bella Pok) but only a couple of them. There's a deliberate attempt to put the book in a period (there's a 'cover' dated May 1939) but there are illustrations that wouldn't have passed a censor until the 1990s and subject matter that wouldn't have been acceptable until at least the 1970s. And the only way you know the zombies are purple is because it says so (only the cover is in colour).

This book is not particularly smart or funny. It doesn't even have that odd sense of humour from *THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN* (Gatiss was one of the writers/creators). As a pulp fiction style comic book it's OK but nothing more.

*WAM*

 **FILM ROUND-UP** 

**BY VICKY COOK**

***Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy (2005)***  
***directed by Garth Jennings***

This is, of course, the film version of the popular Douglas Adams books of the '70's, brought a little more up to date and with just a little bit of poetic licence. It keeps the musical themes so memorable from the radio and TV series,

keeps the quirky humour of the characters and set-pieces, and is quite an enjoyable journey. Arthur Dent's ordinary life is thrown into disarray when first developers appear to tear down his house and secondly his best friend Ford appears to be an alien warning of impending doom. They escape and meet many colourful characters, including the incomparable President of the Universe, Zaphod Beeblebrox, and Arthur goes on a quest to find himself and true love, as well as the 'meaning of life'.

Martin Freeman plays Arthur well. He is a bit younger than I had imagined Arthur – in slightly trendier pyjamas and not so much of a stereotypical Brit – hopeless and nerdy. The love triangle between Trillian, Arthur and Zaphod is padded out a bit more in this version. I was not sure about this - it worked ok but at times seemed about to turn the film into a bit of a romantic slush and probably won't appeal to traditionalists. It also meant Zaphod was in effect reduced to a jealous love rival. Sam Beckett plays Zaphod well enough – zany and over the top, but I remember him being a stronger, more adventurous character in the books. The two heads were a bit odd, more like two faces so there was no interaction between them, and the fake one looked incredibly bad. I was also not too happy with Ford Prefect – he is thoroughly modernised in his look and behaviour here, and he becomes a bit hopeless and not as outgoing or with all that much to do. I enjoyed his carefree style from previously, and felt he was just not as strong a character here. There are lots of famous voices and cameos in this who are all rather amusing – the choice of Stephen Fry in particular to add his velvet tones to the narrator was inspired, and his part helps along those not so familiar with the premise.

Visually, I found the film excellent. The scene-changing mechanisms are good, the effects and characters work together well and make this overall an enjoyable film. There is a good sense of the magic that made the books and series so popular. Things do date over time so some might say that the modernising was necessary, for instance using so much CGI. I am a bit of a traditionalist myself in some things, but I can understand that, in these days of LORD OF THE RINGS/ *Harry Potter*, HGTTG had a lot to do to keep up within the genre.

### ***League of Gentlemen: Apocalypse (2005)*** ***directed by Steve Bendelack***

The three series of this television comedy show, *League of Gentlemen*, have been a huge hit, and inevitably of course, the makers turned their thoughts to a film adaptation. With popular TV shows this sometimes works, sometimes falls flat on its face. LOG; APOCALYPSE is surprisingly quite successful. The novel plot of the characters taking their makers hostage is a plus point as their world starts to fall apart once the creators have turned their attention to other worlds, in this case a historical romp. Things gradually disintegrate into a war between characters from the relevant shows as the creators try to make sense of what is going on and resolve things.

The film has more of a constant structure than the TV series, which worked as a series of sketches, albeit with ongoing storylines, and the film also is at times darker, even more serious than its TV counterpart. The TV series did grow darker in tone as it progressed so this could be seen as a natural progression. What was surprising to me was that they didn't depend on the popular well-known characters, such as Tubbs etc. The stars here are the not so well-known Geoff Tipps, Herr Lipp and Hilary Briss Still, they are 'brought to life' and their characters developed to good effect, which I appreciated – there are even quite poignant moments in the film such as Herr Lipp coming to terms with himself. As I have found in later days of the TV series though, it is hard to distinguish whether it is comedy or horror, which means laughing feels uncomfortable!

The common problem of appealing to fans and non-fans is evident here. There are plenty of references for the film fan to pick up on, such as *THE SHINING*, etc. While many films tend to put these references in, to get a cheap laugh for instance, it is done with considerably more style here and didn't feel too cheesy. The film also does what plenty of others have done before - used lots of cameo appearances from various TV stars. These things would appeal to non-fans of the series, thus presumably widening the appeal of the film.

Overall then, as a fan I enjoyed it, but found it getting too dark to be laugh-out-loud. I am not sure a non-fan would enjoy it, though if they enjoy a film with lots of cameos and film-references, there will be no problem. I would recommend they try the TV series first to get a sense of the premise. *VC*

## ***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 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***

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**

**Newsletter 414** copyright 2006 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership or, for that matter, the person giving the ‘opinion’.

Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month 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