

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 2006

ISSUE 420

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

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); VICKY COOK (SECRETARY);**
PAT BROWN (TREASURER); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);
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Friday 8th SEPTEMBER **PETER WESTON**

AMAZING! ASTOUNDING!
STARTLING! THRILLING!

Join Peter Weston on a voyage of discovery into the lost world of the pulp magazines. Hundreds of gorgeous covers from the golden days of science fiction - and YOU can chose which magazines you want Peter to talk about!

Joint co-founder of the current Birmingham SF Group, and one-time editor of the UK's premier fanzine SPECULATION, Peter will be giving another of his highly entertaining talks on aspects of the history of SF.

Do NOT miss this one!

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

**OCTOBER 15TH – HUGO AWARD-WINNING SF
ARTIST JIM BURNS, WILL BE TALKING ABOUT HIS
ARTWORK AND SHOWING SLIDES.**

commence at 7.45pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar and be seated in plenty of time.

MICHAEL DAMESICK

It is with great sorrow that we learned of the death of BSFG member and long-time fan, Michael Damesick. Always a bit of a loner, Mike got into SF and discovered fandom while at Oxford University, joining the SF society there and then attending Eastercons and Novacons for the past 25-30 years. He moved to Birmingham about 10 years ago and immediately joined the BSFG, making appearances whenever the programme was about *science fiction*. I don't remember ever seeing him at an item about fantasy or horror.

His body was discovered at his flat after the landlords failed to get any response by mail or by phone. After his body was spotted on the floor, the police were contacted and they entered the flat. The results of the autopsy are not yet known. The funeral was held at Robin Hood Crematorium and BSFG members, Vernon and Pat Brown, Chris and Pauline Morgan and myself, were in attendance along with several fans who have known him over the years.

THE AUGUST SUMMER SOCIAL ***By Ruth Hardy (BSFG Hanger-On)***

Friday 11th August: the Brum Group annual pub knees-up. Nine of us met at Snow Hill station to take the Metro to the Black Eagle pub. Two more joined at this venue.

The pub was humming, but fortunately a long table was booked for us. One young waitress rushed round serving us all; some of the diners were pretty awkward in their demands! I was transfixed by her nails, which were about 2 inches long and beautifully decorated. Amazing that she could manage her job so well, let alone use the calculator. The nail-admiring conversation delayed her a bit, but she enjoyed showing them off. Very expensive to have them done, she said! How does she play the piano, I wondered...

The starters were large; the garlic mushrooms looked particularly good. Most guests at my end of the table then chose a mixed grill. There was a plentiful supply of succulent chips, made from real spuds, not polystyrene! The food was good, plates mostly scraped clean. I'm told the real ale was excellent, especially the Landlord the Titanic and the Rum Punch. Company was convivial. Altogether a very pleasant evening with lots of fun.

Vernon had invented a wonderful Self-Invoicing Personal Identification System (SIPIS); we all dutifully filled in our cards, and this - probably - made settling the bill much easier than formerly. After deducting our paid deposits of £5 each, most guests paid well under £8 for 2 courses, making it a very reasonable meal.

LAST MONTH'S MINI-QUIZ

The error that had occurred in every issue of the BSGF Newsletter this year was that Tony Berry was listed in our header as Novacon 35 Chairman – this should, of course, have been Novacon 36 Chairman! And even Tony hadn't noticed!

PLUTO: IS IT A PLANET? Oh Yes, It Is. Oh No, It Isn't! By David A Hardy

“Men Very Easily Make Jugs Serve Useful, Necessary. . . er . . .”

We seem to have lost our 'Purposes'? Well, that's how I learned to put the planets of our Solar System in order when I was a boy, but that all seems to have gone to pot in the last few weeks. The IAU (International Astronomical Union) consisting of 2,500 astronomers from around the world, has been meeting in Prague and have been discussing the weighty matter: Is Pluto a planet, or not? And if it is, what about the other 'new' planets that have been discovered recently?

On August 16th, the IAU announced that the 'new' Solar System will consist of: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Ceres, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, Charon, and the snappily-named 2003 UB313 (presumably a sort of UB40 for unemployed planets?). However, this one had already been unofficially named Xena, apparently after the star of some TV programme or other, and it looks as if the name might stick. Publishers hastily made plans to update their astronomy books and encyclopaedias, while school teachers ripped down the mobiles hanging from their classroom ceilings in order to add the new objects. NASA wasn't too happy, because its probe New Horizons is due to rendezvous with the 'ninth planet' in 2015.

“The solar system is a middle-aged star, and like all middle-aged things, its waistline is expanding,” said Jack Horkheimer, director of the Miami Space Transit Planetarium and host of Public Broadcasting's 'Stargazer' television show. Opponents of Pluto, which was named a planet in 1930 by its discoverer, Clyde Tombaugh, still spoiled for a fight. Earth's Moon is larger; so is Xena, about 70 miles wider. In fact, there are many moons of Jupiter and Saturn that are bigger than some of the objects that now qualify as planets, such as Mercury ~a fact that bothered some astronomers. But the IAU said Pluto meets its proposed new definition of a planet: ‘any round object larger than 500 miles in diameter that orbits the Sun and has a mass roughly one/12,000th that of Earth.’ Moons and asteroids will make the grade as long as they meet those basic tests. “The new objects will be known as 'plutons'”, said the IAU. “Hold on just one cotton-pickin’ minute there!” hollered the geologists. “We're already using that term to mean magma that works its way into rocks.” Red faces amongst the IAU!

So the news item around the world was that there are now not nine but twelve planets. My own gripe with this was that there should have been twelve even without including Ceres (previously an asteroid) and Charon (a *moon* of Charon, for Pete's sake!). What about those other new planets, Sedna (reverse anagram of Andes?) and Quaoar? Well, actually they are all just Kuiper Belt Objects (including Pluto), and there are probably thousands or millions of those, so what's all the fuss about? Well, it all came to nothing anyway. The BBC website was one of the first to announce 'Forget all that. Pluto *isn't* a planet after all.'

As an aside, take a look at that BBC website, which is at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5282440.stm>

(Steve Green e-mailed me to ask if the picture was mine. NO, Steve!) Click on the small illustration to zoom in on it. Does Charon look a bit familiar? It should do, because everyone reading this has seen it in our own sky for as long as they've been alive: it's *our Moon*. Good old Auntie Beeb and her cheapo artists! But anyway, the announcement was that "Astronomers have voted to strip Pluto of its status as a planet. It will now be known as a 'dwarf planet'." One reason for this change of heart is that with so many new bodies being discovered on the edge of the 'old' Solar System, we could end up with 50 or more planets. (Well, why not? The more the merrier, some might say!) Amid dramatic scenes in the Czech capital (says the BBC site, although actually only a handful of astronomers were left in Prague by now) which saw delegates waving yellow ballot papers in the air, the IAU voted to block this possibility - and in the process took the historic decision to relegate Pluto. The scientists agreed that for a celestial body to qualify as a planet:

- * it must be in orbit around the Sun
- * it must be large enough that it takes on a nearly round shape
- * it has cleared its orbit of other objects

This last criterion has already met with opposition, because nearly all of the planets, including Earth, are in fact still surrounded by debris left over from the formation of the Solar System ~ hence meteors.

But frankly, I think the scientists and astronomers have rather blown it by ignoring public sentiment, and the historical significance of Pluto. And after all, ultimately it is the public (usually the US one) who pay the bills for space exploration; and who's going to want to send a probe to some nonentity. . . ?

DAH

<< So Pluto is no more – apparently Mickey and Minnie are devastated! –
RGP>>

2006 HUGO RESULTS

Presented at L.A.con IV, August 26, 2006 in Anaheim, California, USA.

Best Novel: SPIN by Robert Charles Wilson (Tor)

2 ACCELERANDO by Charles Stross

3 OLD MAN'S WAR by John Scalzi

4 LEARNING THE WORLD by Ken MacLeod

5 A FEAST FOR CROWS by George R.R. Martin

Best Novella: "Inside Job" by Connie Willis (*Asimov's* Jan 2005)

Best Novelette: "Two Hearts" by Peter S Beagle (*F&SF* Oct/Nov 2005)

Best Short Story: "Tk'tk'tk" by David D Levine (*Asimov's* Mar 2005)

Best Related Book: STORYTELLER: WRITING LESSONS AND MORE FROM 27 YEARS OF THE CLARION WRITERS'

WORKSHOP by Kate Wilhelm (Small Beer Press)

Best Professional Editor: David G Hartwell (*Tor*)

Best Professional Artist: Donato Giancola

Best Semiprozine: LOCUS edited by Charles N Brown, Kirsten Gong-Wong and Liza Groen Trombi

Best Fanzine: PLOKTA edited by Alison Scott, Steve Davies & Mike Scott

Best Fan writer: Dave Langford

Best Fan Artist: Frank Wu

Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: SERENITY Written and Directed by Joss Whedon. (Universal Pictures/Mutant Enemy, Inc.)

Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: DOCTOR WHO "The Empty Child" & "The Doctor Dances" Written by Steven Moffat. Directed by James Hawes. (BBC Wales/BBC1)

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of 2004 or 2005: John Scalzi

The 2008 Worldcon will be held in Denver.

Birmingham Book Festival 2006

4 – 13 October 2006

The Birmingham Book Festival brings a wonderful range of fascinating writers to Birmingham city centre. This year the line up includes Willy Russell, Billy Bragg, Lionel Shriver, Simon Armitage, Ian McMillan, Mil Millington, Richard Dawkins, John Hegley and Julie Walters.

Many events include discussion and debate, enabling audiences to voice their own ideas and opinions and allowing readers and writers to share their enthusiasm for books and writing. This year's festival uses some unusual spaces, including a narrowboat, the Electric Cinema (the oldest working cinema in the UK), a suite on the 18th floor of the new Radisson SAS Hotel, the National Trust's back-to-back houses in Hurst Street, and The Pen Museum.

The Festival is presented in partnership with The Orange Studio and Birmingham Libraries. Box Office: 0121 303 2323

Items of possible interest to BSFG members:-

The God Delusion - Richard Dawkins on Wednesday 11 October
7 – 8.30pm at The Library Theatre, Birmingham Central Library, Chamberlain Square. Richard Dawkins is the Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University and a fellow of New College. His book *The Selfish Gene* catapulted him to fame, and was followed by a string of bestselling books: *The Extended Phenotype*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, *River Out of Eden*, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, *Unweaving the Rainbow* and *The Ancestor's Tale*. His new book *The God Delusion*, based on two documentaries broadcast by Channel 4, is a powerful study of the impact of religions on our world from a science writer who is uncompromising in his search for truth.

Tickets: £8 (£6.50)

Launch of Raw Edge Extra – A Celebration of Birmingham's New Writing Talent Friday 6 October at 7 – 9pm - The Orange Studio, Cannon Street, off New Street. An evening of poetry, prose and performance to celebrate the launch of *Raw Edge Extra*. This special edition of the region's new writing magazine showcases new works by fifteen Birmingham based writers and performers. 7pm for complimentary drinks in the Talk Bar in The Orange Studio for a 7.30pm start. The evening will be compered by *Raw Edge* editor Dave Reeves. Tickets: This event is free but please reserve a place with the Box Office

Speed Reading – A Reading Group in a Hurry - Monday 9 October & Wednesday 11 October, 6.30 – 7pm at The Orange Studio, Cannon Street, off New Street. Like speed dating, but with books! No time to join a book group? Cut to the chase and avoid the unnecessary chit-chat with our speed reading group. Simply bring along up to four books you think are great and be prepared to very quickly (and we mean, very quickly!) tell someone else why you like them so much (the books, that is, not the other person...). In return they will tell you about some books they admire. The result is lots of talking about books... and it will all be over in time for the next event!

Tickets: This event is free and non-bookable.

For full details of the Festival, go to:-

<http://www.birminghambookfestival.org/>

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Christmas Social will once again be held at the Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak. where we have hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00 to 11.00pm on Friday 1st December. **PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE FROM THE USUAL SECOND FRIDAY.**

Tickets are £10 each which covers the cost of the Skittle Alley and the food but not your drinks (we have our own Bar). There will be prizes for individual games – you don't have to know how to play skittles because we have our own variants of the game designed to give everyone a chance, none of which would be allowed at Competition or any other level. There will be a free half

hourly raffle, crackers and, to judge by comments after the last two last year's Socials, a good time to be had by all.

Details of the buffet and Order Forms will be announced/circulated next month but NOW is the time to start planning and deciding if you intend coming...

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Author **Philip E High** (1914-2006) died July 9. High's first story, "The Statistics" appeared in *Authentic Science Fiction* in 1955. He contributed numerous stories to UK SF magazines before his first novel, THE PRODIGAL SUN, appeared in 1964 in the USA. His other novels include NO TRUCE WITH TERRA (1964), THE MAD METROPOLIS (1966), THESE SAVAGE FUTURIANS (1967), REALITY FORBIDDEN (1967), THE TIME MERCENARIES (1968), INVADER ON MY BACK (1968), BUTTERFLY PLANET (1971), COME, HUNT AN EARTHMAN (1973), FUGITIVE FROM TIME (1978) and BLINDFOLD FROM THE STARS (1979)

Robert J Leman, known to friends, readers, and fans as Bob Leman, died on August 8, 2006, at home among family and friends who had set up a 'home hospice'. He had suffered a long progressive illness with courage and dignity. Leman published at least 13 short stories in F&SF from 1967 through 1988. They were collected along with two other stories in FEESTERS IN THE LAKE AND OTHER STORIES which was released by Midnight House in 2002. His story "Window" was a Nebula Award finalist. Beginning with appearances in letter columns in the old pulps, Leman was active in SF fandom well into the 1960s, publishing a classic fanzine called *The Vinegar Worm*. He was a member of First Fandom Physicist **James van Allen** (b.1914) died on August 9. Van Allen discovered the Van Allen Belt, a torus of charged ions above the Earth which floresce, causing the Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis. A staunch supporter of unmanned exploration of the solar system, van Allen has often spoken out against manned space travel. As an undergraduate, he helped prepare the Byrd Antarctic Expedition

William Hope Hodgson (1877-1918) received the 2006 Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award at Readercon in July **Rob Holdstock** has finally turned in the manuscript for THE BROKEN KINGS, the long-awaited third volume in the *Merlin Codex* series, to **Jo Fletcher** at Gollancz (the first two in the series were published by Simon & Schuster)

Gollancz has announced the creation of a new SF, fantasy and supernatural romance line, Gollancz Romancz, The line will launch in January 2007 The interactive android version of Philip K Dick's head, missing since January, is still missing The movie adaptation of I AM LEGEND starring **Will Smith** will begin principle photography on September 23rd 2006 in New York City and continue filming until March 31st 2007. An adaptation of the 1954 **Richard Matheson** novel of the same name, it is being directed by **Francis Lawrence**. The movie is set for a November 21st 2007 release date and is the third film adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel although it seems this will be the most

faithful attempt at bringing the book to film NASA has confirmed that it has lost more than seven hundred boxes of data from the Apollo period, including the original tape recording of **Neil Armstrong** and **Buzz Aldrin**'s first landing on the moon. NASA is quick to point out that no data has been lost since all of the information in the lost boxes has been backed up **Deborah Dozier Potter** has filed a lawsuit against Fox claiming fraud, concealment and breach of promise over the 1960's BATMAN television series. Potter, whose father, **William Dozier** was one of the show's producers, discovered a contract between Fox and ABC which indicates that she is entitled to 26% of the net profits from the show The SciFi Channel has announced the cancellation of STARGATE SG-1, shortly after the series celebrated its 200th episode and became the longest running SF series on television. STARGATE's sister show, STARGATE ATLANTIS will continue to air new episodes Plans for a **DOCTOR WHO** spin-off show starring **Billie Piper** were scrapped at the last minute, series producer **Russell T Davies** has revealed. "It was actually commissioned by the controller of BBC One and budgeted," the writer told Doctor Who Magazine. Davies later decided the programme, ROSE TYLER: EARTH DEFENCE, was "a spin-off too far" and called it off Celebrity autobiographies are the books most often abandoned by readers, according to a new survey. The books most often left behind in hotel rooms are all works written by the rich and famous, the survey by Travelodge found. They were:-

- 1) CONFESSIONS OF AN HEIRESS - Paris Hilton: 2) MADE IN PORTUGAL - AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY by Jose Mourinho: 3) JORDAN: A WHOLE NEW WORLD - Katie Price: 4) JADE'S WORLD - Neil Simpson: 5) MANAGING MY LIFE: MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY - Alex Ferguson: 6) HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE - JK Rowling: 7) TONY ADAMS ADDICTED - Tony Adams: 8) GAZZA - MY STORY - Paul Gascoigne: 9) BRIDGET JONES' DIARY - Helen Fielding: 10) ABOUT A BOY - Tony Parsons

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

RGP

9TAIL FOX by Jon Courtenay Grimwood

Gollancz / 326pgs / £12.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star rating: * * * *

Grimwood is a widely travelled man. Each of his books has a different location which, to an outsider, seems as authentic as if he had been brought up in the place. This novel takes us to San Francisco. Bobby Zha is a quarter Chinese.

He is also a cop. He was brought up, largely by his Chinese grandfather and has absorbed the tales he used to tell about their culture. One of Bobby's talents is that children, animals and the homeless seem to trust him so that often he can get information where others fail.

The 9-tail fox is a celestial creature from Chinese mythology. When Bobby meets it, he knows he is in deep trouble. In fact, he is dead. This is not the whole story as Bobby wakes up in the body of a man who has been in a coma for twenty years. The settlement after the accident that left Robert Vanberg in a coma has become substantial. Bobby finds he suddenly has this wealth at his disposal. His immediate action is to fly to San Francisco and attend his body's funeral. Next he wants to find out why he was killed – all the evidence suggests to him that he was set up even if the SFPD don't think so. There seems to be a connection with the dead baby with a tail that Colonel Billy, one of the homeless, says he has found, and the apparent shooting of an intruder by a young girl at the home of a Russian émigré.

Bobby knows that he does not have much time to solve the riddles before the 9-tail fox returns to claim his soul permanently.

This is an excellent fantasy thriller. The characters are well drawn, especially the quirky minor ones and the plot hangs together well. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

PM

QUANTICAO by Greg Bear

Harper/Collins 439pgs / £17.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star rating: * * * *

There seems to be a vogue at the moment for near future thrillers. Both Paul McAuley and Jon Courtenay Grimwood have moved to writing this kind of story. QUANTICO is Greg Bear's contribution to this new sub-genre. The techno-thriller is a good way of speculating about the places new scientific developments may be leading us to. At the same time, there is an opportunity to write a good, fast-paced narrative that carries the story at speed.

The 'Quantic' of the title is the FBI training ground. At the same time as William Griffin and his class-mates are desperately trying to qualify for their badges, William's father is staking out a farm in the mountain forests in Washington State. The man living on the farm is a religious fanatic of the Christian kind. Known as the Patriarch, he has a record of bombing such places as abortion clinics. He is also very cunning. The FBI has underestimated his ingenuity and the situation, literally, blows up in their faces.

One of the agents that survive the shambles is Rebecca Rose. She is convinced that the Patriarch was working with someone else to develop a potent way of spreading anthrax spores. Because of his family interest, she recruits William to help her track down the people supplying the Patriarch with his equipment.

Meanwhile, one of William's classmates, an American Muslim named BuDark, has been recruited by the secretive wing of the FBI because of his ability with languages. They believe that the anthrax threat is not just a home-grown one as there is evidence that the major religious centres of Rome and Jerusalem have also been targeted. Those attempts have been foiled but imminent is the great Muslim exodus to Mecca for the annual Hajj. The Middle East is still a very unstable region and anything could set the factions at each other's throats again. The threat must be found and stopped.

Bear is far too intelligent a writer to have written a straight thriller. There are plenty of unexpected twists. He has also devised a very plausible method of generating his biological agent. It could be done, but as he says in the postscript, he has left out vital information. He has a wish to warn his readers of a potential danger but he has no intention of giving malefactors a means for putting his ideas into practice.

PM

END OF THE WORLD BLUES

by Jon Courtenay Grimwood

Gollancz / 362pgs / £12.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Star Rating: ****

Grimwood has settled down to be a good writer of near future thrillers. Admittedly, this volume and his earlier *STAMPING BUTTERFLIES* have elements that are very far future but in both, most of the action is firmly based on an Earth that with very little imagination looks like a probable tomorrow. What is exotic is his choice of arena. Kit Nouveau is an ex-rock band member. At the start of the novel he is living in Japan with his artist wife, running an Irish bar. Most of his patrons are exiles, many of them bikers. He ambles through life.

Everything begins to fall apart when someone tries to kill him. The attempt is thwarted by a street entertainer/beggar, a young girl who calls herself Lady Neku. Kit's bar is bombed and his wife is killed in the ensuing fire. He discovers that she had never registered the marriage in Japan so the property he thought he owned is not legally his and also that his wife's sister has married into a family that is the Japanese equivalent of the Mafia. To compound his troubles, his ex-girlfriend's mother seeks him out. Mary is thought to have committed suicide six months earlier but her parents believe she may be alive and they want Kit to find her.

Kate O'Mally has built up an extensive underworld network. Kit finds himself in the unenviable position of working for one set of gangsters while another set wants to kill him. Following him, first to England, then Holland, is Neku who has her own reasons for wanting to protect him.

And the end of the World? Woven between chapters is the story that Neku tells us, about her flight from the future where the Earth is dying, her family is dying and she is fleeing from a marriage of convenience. The world Kit has

known in Japan has ended with the destruction of his bar and the death of his wife. All the principal characters experience an element of World's end in their lives. For some of them there may be an opportunity for rebirth.

This is an excellent, fast paced thriller and well worth reading. PM

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm 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:-

28th September - Robert Silverberg's ROMA ETERNA

19th October - tba

Fantasycon 2006 - Date: 22nd - 24th September 2006. Place: The Britannia Hotel, St James Street, Nottingham. GoHs: **Neil Gaiman, Juliet E. McKenna, Ramsey Campbell, Raymond E. Feist & Clive Barker**; with MC: **David J. Howe** For more information check out www.fantasycon.org.uk. For those of you who would prefer to make your booking via credit card, please email Debbie Bennett at fcon-admin@britishfantasysociety.org.uk ... this facility is by request only and will not be available on the main website. For any other queries email fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk Further information can be found at our new website, www.fantasycon.org.uk or email Vicky on fcon@britishfantasysociety.org.uk

Raymond E Feist will be in Birmingham the 25th September at Forbidden Planet at 12.30pm for signing.copies of INTO A DARK REALM

Juliet E McKenna will be tutoring a residential creative writing course focusing on SF&F at the Castle of Park in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, from 1st to 7th October 2006. This week will cover key elements of writing strategy, and practical approaches. Group work will develop skills for exploring ideas on plot, character and world building while individual exercises will enable participants to relate the sessions to personal projects.

For more details, visit www.castleofpark.net or www.julietemckenna.com

Terry Pratchett will be at Ottakar's in Bromsgrove on October 2nd 2006 to sign copies of WINTERSMITH. The signing will start at 5.30pm. Address: Ottakars, 66-68 high St, Bromsgrove, Worcs, B61 8EX For further information call Stuart on 01527 833339

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
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

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

October – award-winning SF artist **JIM BURNS**

November 3rd – tba

December 1st – **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL** – full details to be announced.

January 2007 – Annual General Meeting

February – tba

March – SF author **JUSTINA ROBSON**

Newsletter 420 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