

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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& HARRY HARRISON

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Friday 11th April

MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN

Our speaker this month is SF/fantasy author Michael Scott Rohan and in his own words...

“Since the late 1990s he has been increasingly affected by serious health problems, which both hampered and darkened his writing. He was also discouraged by the death or retirement of the editors with whom he'd worked, and by the more and more mechanistic nature of publishing in the SF and fantasy genre, flooding the shelves with short-lived and generally poor-quality titles, in the USA especially. Consequently after *SHADOW OF THE SEER*, sixth and last of the *Winter*

of the World series, he decided to retire, at least temporarily, and concentrate on his other main interest, classical music and opera, less demanding to write about.



May 9th – SF and fantasy author (and Guest of Honour at the forthcoming Novacon 38) IAN R MacLEOD will be our speaker

He was already a contributor to most of the major magazines in the field, notably the famous *Gramophone*, as well as newspapers such as *The Times* and *Newsday*, and now writes for *BBC Music Magazine*, as well as being one of its annual award judges.

Meanwhile his life has ranged from being a guest speaker at the Tolkien 2005 commemoration in Birmingham in 2005, to visiting Antarctica in 2006, and emergency heart surgery in 2007, leaving him with a pacemaker which he claims qualifies him as a card-carrying cyborg.

This is his first appearance in any SF/Fantasy arena for some years. He has never entirely stopped writing, however, and is presently working on a new project, and even thinking about looking for publishers to mug.”

*The meeting will take place in **OUR NEW VENUE** - the conference room on the first floor of the Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill just off New Street. The entrance to the hotel is adjacent to Wetherspoon's on the right.*

At the bottom of the ramp from New Street Station, turn left and walk up New Street. Bennetts Hill is the third road on the right.

The doors open at 7.30pm and the meeting will commence at 8.00pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar on the ground floor, and be seated in plenty of time.

A ROSE WITHOUT THORNS? by Vernon Brown

I'm not sure what members who attended either of our first two meetings at the Briar Rose think of our new venue but all the feedback that I have received so far has been on the positive side. Of course it will take a couple more meetings for us to get used to the place and settle in, rather like a cat making itself comfortable, but I have hopes that if things continue this way the Group has found itself a pretty ideal place in which to base itself.

Both meetings went well although there wasn't a great deal of time to socialise after the first speaker finished because Rog did his usual sterling job of extracting (extorting?) money from those present in an auction deferred from the AGM. At the March meeting there was more conversation and chatting with the speaker after his talk although as a number of familiar faces were missing it did seem a little quieter than usual. It was interesting to me, at least, that both talks utilised a feature of the room that we haven't had before – a ceiling mounted Powerpoint projector which means that, with luck, we won't have the problems that we have had in the past over providing such facilities, particularly if the speaker, as is now more likely, brings his/her own laptop.

Insofar as the more social side of the meetings are concerned the room seems about the right size - we did rattle about a bit in the Lichfield, it's just a matter of optimising the layout. To help there is now a coat rack provided behind the door to free chairs for use as chairs and to make things more comfortable not

only for the owner but for the person sitting behind them as well as making it easier to move around the room.

I have spoken with both night porters who set out the room and clear away after us. They are friendly chaps and it would be a good idea to keep in with them both – some of you will remember that we've had some rather miserable types at other venues in the past. So, as last month, I'd be grateful if glasses could be kept off the floor except during the 'formal' bit, it's safer as well. If you go for another drink, as may well happen now that there is decent beer available, perhaps you could return your glass or leave it on a tray by the door to keep things tidy.

In the past we have sometimes started a little later than we should have done but in future we are going to start as far as possible on time. Door will open at 7.30, we start at 8.00pm. so please try to be early because the new layout means that latecomers may find it difficult to get to a seat. If you do arrive after the talk has started would you please enter quietly, find a seat and pay immediately the talk finishes.

Finally, if you have any comments or suggestions about the Briar Rose, or future programme items, please let me know by email or post via Vicky, or by thrusting a pint into my hand at a meeting. VB

RAY BRADBURY: 1950 - 2008



Birmingham fan and NOVACON regular Ray Bradbury (not the SF author!) passed away in hospital on Monday March 17th. He would have been 58 on March 29th.

Ray turned up to his first convention - the 1971 Eastercon at Worcester – and entered the Saturday night Masquerade Party as a character from Keith Laumer's WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM. I was one of the judges and I remember thinking that it was if the front cover of the

paperback had come to life and as such was an obvious winner. But one of the other judges was convinced it was a professional piece that had been hired from a shop and was therefore ineligible. Along with the other judges, I bowed to his

superior knowledge. Afterwards, Ray told us that it was home-made and not hired; he had made every piece himself over several months.

Ray was a perfectionist and incredibly talented which was why his costume had looked so good.

Ray and his wife Carole, for many years worked in the licensed trade and when he ran the Ivy Bush in Edgbaston, the Brum Group moved into the upstairs lounge. For many years we had our monthly meeting there. I well remember the Sunday afternoon barbecue special he arranged having the barbecue on the top platform of the fire escape. When it started raining Ray moved the barbecue into the doorway. That was fine until the wind changed direction and blew all the smoke into the room where we all were!

Ray was a person with immense talent and perfected everything he turned his hand to.

He was a professional engraver by trade but had several other 'jobs'.

He was a professional magician being a full member of The Magic Circle. He entertained us with his sleight of hand at many Novacons.

He was a first class artist whose incredibly detailed sculptures were a joy to have. We're all aware that he designed and made the Nova Awards every year, but he also made a healthy living designing and selling sculptures showing famous scenes of magicians' tricks. Beautifully detailed models that revealed hidden details months after you thought you knew the model. He made sculptures for many other clubs as well – cricket clubs, golf clubs, etc., You name it – Ray did it..

He was an excellent cook and if you were lucky enough to have been invited to Ray and Carole's home for a meal, you know how true that was. When you sat down at the table there was always a place card clipped into one of his many tiny sculptures which he invariably insisted that you keep afterwards. Their hospitality was boundless.

He also had his Equity Card and over the years he appeared as an extra in many Midlands TV shows such as BOON and CROSSROADS.

A man of many talents. It's difficult to imagine the future without his beaming smile. I know we all will miss him.

Rog Peyton

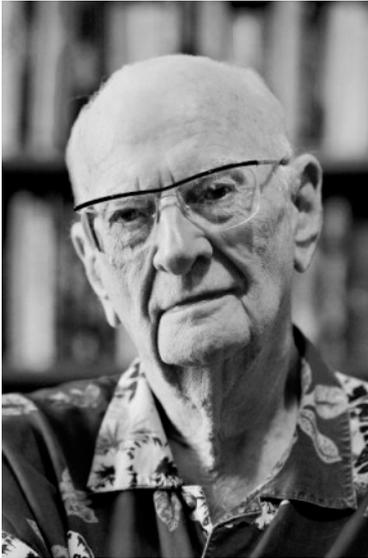
SIR ARTHUR C CLARKE: 1917 - 2008

With the death of Sir Arthur C Clarke, the world has lost one of the great visionaries of the future.

Much has been said about his conception of the geosynchronous communications satellite (which he failed to patent, and forever after regretted) and his work with Stanley Kubrick on the film 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY and its associated novel. Speaking on Radio 4, Terry Pratchett (a man who has written the odd book or two) said that Arthur "put the science into science fiction".

But he was much more than that. Arthur C Clarke was perhaps the first poet of the Space Age. His writing, whilst technically and scientifically accurate, was also elegiac and deeply philosophical. He may not have been strong on characterisation – something he shared with many of the science fiction authors of his generation – but his vision of the human race's place in the universe cannot be bettered.

Furthermore, Clarke was one of the earliest professional writers to emerge from the science fiction fan base, starting with his writing for fanzines in the 1930s and 1940s and through his Chairmanship of the British Interplanetary Society, which started out as a group of enthusiasts, but by the 1950s had become an influential pressure group advocating manned spaceflight and which had a reputation far beyond the UK.



His future vision was one of regular manned spaceflight between outposts in the inner planets – Venus, Earth and Mars – with people regularly living and working in space and delivering the benefits of technology to the mass of the people living on Earth. It was a technocratic vision but an honest one.

Clarke's lesser-appreciated philosophical side was reflected in his early novel *THE CITY AND THE STARS*, where he coined the saying “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” and also in his 1953 novel *CHILDHOOD'S END*, where he wove ancient myth into a tale of first contact, human politics and ultimately human transcendence.

In recent years, Clarke had collaborated with other writers, notably Stephen Baxter, the writer from the current generation of British science fiction authors most identified with the tradition of Clarke's work and vision. From 2001, he also sponsored an award for British science fiction writing.

Other works of Clarke's worth re-reading are *GLIDE PATH* (an autobiographical novel dealing with Clarke's wartime service in the RAF where he was involved with the development of blind approach landing aids for aircraft), *RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA* (the ‘first contact with aliens’ novel he wrote after 2001: *A SPACE ODYSSEY* which probably represented his original thought on the subject) and *THE SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH* (a novel depicting far-flung human colonies whose only contact with Earth is via starships that visit perhaps once in a lifetime). Of his many short stories which can be found in many anthologies and collections, you should seek out “The Sentinel”

(the inspiration for 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY), “The Star” (a Jesuit priest has his belief challenged on finding the remains of a lost civilisation) and “A meeting with Medusa” (an explorer taking a sophisticated hot-air balloon through the upper atmosphere of Jupiter discovers life and a new direction for himself).

I never met Arthur – his visits to the UK were ever more infrequent as he got older – but one of my most treasured possessions is a duplicated form response he sent out to enquirers with a personal note added at the end when I once invited him to speak at a student society. Others will have more direct memories; but Arthur was an unseen presence underpinning all of British science fiction for more than fifty years.

His absence will be sorely felt.

Robert Day

THE 2008 ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD NOMINEES

The annual award is presented for the best science fiction novel of the year, and selected from a list of novels whose UK first edition was published in the previous calendar year. The winner will be announced on Wednesday 30th April at an award ceremony held on the opening night of the Sci-Fi-London Film Festival.

The nominations are:-

THE RED MEN by Matthew de Abaitua (Snow Books)

THE H-BOMB GIRL by Stephen Baxter (Faber & Faber)

THE CARHULLAN ARMY by Sarah Hall (Faber & Faber)

THE RAW SHARK TEXTS by Steven Hall (Canongate)

THE EXECUTION CHANNEL by Ken MacLeod (Orbit)

BLACK MAN by Richard Morgan (Gollancz)

A prize of £2008 will be awarded to the winner along with a commemorative engraved bookend.

The judging panel for the 2008 Arthur C. Clarke Award are Niall Harrison and Claire Weaver for the British Science Fiction Association, Pat Cadigan and Francis Spufford for the Science Fiction Foundation and Pauline Morgan for the science fiction news website SF Crowsnest.com. Paul Billinger represents the Arthur C. Clarke Award as the Chair of Judges.

THE 2007 BSFA AWARD WINNERS

The results of the 2007 British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) awards were announced March 22, 2008 during Orbital 2008, the British national science fiction convention (aka Eastercon), at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel in London.

Best Novel: BRASYL by Ian McDonald (Gollancz)

Best Short Fiction: “Lighting Out” by Ken MacLeod (from disLocations; Newcon Press)

Best Artwork: "Cracked World" by Andy Bigwood (cover of disLocations)

BSFA 50th Anniversary Award: Best Novel of 1958: NON-STOP by Brian Aldiss.

THE 2008 HUGO AWARD NOMINATIONS

This year's Hugo ballot has been announced. The Hugos are selected by the membership of this year's Worldcon, Denvention, and will be presented at the con. Nominations were made by members of Denvention and Nippon 2008.

Best Novel

THE YIDDISH POLICEMAN'S UNION by Michael Chabon

BRASYL by Ian McDonald

ROLLBACK by Robert J. Sawyer

THE LAST COLONY by John Scalzi

HALTING STATE by Charles Stross

Best Novella

"The Fountain of Age" by Nancy Kress

"Recovering Apollo 8" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"Stars Seen Through Stone" by Lucius Shepard

"All Seated on the Ground" by Connie Willis

"Memorare" by Gene Wolfe

Best Novelette

"The Cambist and Lord Iron: a Fairytale of Economics" by Daniel Abraham

"The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate" by Ted Chiang

"Dark Integers" by Greg Egan

"Glory" by Greg Egan

"Finisterra" by David Moles

Best Short Story

"Last Contact" by Stephen Baxter

"Tideline" by Elizabeth Bear

"Who's Afraid of Wolf 359?" by Ken MacLeod

"Distant Replay" by Mike Resnick

"A Small Room in Koboldtown" by Michael Swanwick

Best Related Book

THE COMPANY THEY KEEP: C S LEWIS AND J R R TOLKIEN AS

WRITERS IN COMMUNITY by Diana Glycer; appendix by David Bratman

BREAKFAST IN THE RUINS: SCIENCE FICTION IN THE LAST

MILLENNIUM by Barry Malzberg

EMSHWILLER: INFINITY X TWO by Luis Ortiz, intro. by Carol

Emshwiller, fwd. by Alex Eisenstien

BRAVE NEW WORDS: THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SCIENCE

FICTION by Jeff Prucher

THE ARRIVAL by Shaun Tan

Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: ENCHANTED; THE GOLDEN COMPASS; HEROES, season one; HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX; STARDUST

Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: RAZOR; DR. WHO "Blink"; DR. WHO "Human Nature"/"Family of Blood";

STAR TREK NEW VOYAGES "World Enough and Time"; TORCHWOOD
"Captain Jack Harkness"

Best Professional Editor, Short Form: Ellen Datlow, Stanley Schmidt,
Jonathan Strahan, Gordon Van Gelder, Sheila Williams

Best Professional Editor, Long Form: Lou Anders, Ginjer Buchanan, David
G. Hartwell, Beth Meacham, Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Best Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton, Phil Foglio, John Harris, Stephan
Martiniere, John Picacio, Shaun Tan

Best Semiprozine: Ansible, Helix, Interzone, Locus, The New York Review of
Science Fiction

Best Fanzine: Argentus, Challenger, Drink Tank, File 770, PLOKTA

Best Fan Writer: Chris Garcia, David Langford, Cheryl Morgan, John Scalzi,
Steven H. Silver

Best Fan Artist: Brad Foster, Teddy Harvia, Sue Mason, Steve Stiles, Taral
Wayne

The finalists for the **John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer** were
also announced. The nominees are Joe Abercrombie, Jon Armstrong, David
Anthony Durham, David Louis Edelman, Mary Robinette Kowal and Scott
Lynch.

2007 DIAGRAM PRIZE SHORTLIST by Robert Day

New Readers Start Here:

THE BOOKSELLER, the trade journal of the UK book industry, every
year administers the Diagram Prize for the Oddest Book Title of the Year – any
book published in the previous year is eligible for the award.

Previous years' winners have included:

SCENES FROM THE HISTORY OF CONCRETE

LARGE AND VERY LARGE HOLE DRILLING.

GREEK RURAL POSTMEN AND THEIR CANCELLATION NUMBERS.

PROCEEDINGS FROM THE JOURNAL OF NUDE MICE.

DEVELOPMENTS IN DAIRY COW BREEDING AND MANAGEMENT;

AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO WIDEN THE USE OF STRAW.

This year's shortlist has now appeared. But first, some honourable
mentions that just failed to make the cut:

DRAWING AND PAINTING THE UNDEAD.

STAFFORD PAGEANT; THE EXCITING INNOVATIVE YEARS, 1901-
1952.

TILES OF THE UNEXPECTED; A STUDY OF SIX MILES OF
GEOMETRIC TILE PATTERNS ON THE LONDON UNDERGROUND.

As a result of increased media exposure this year, the organisers have been
contacted by a number of people with related interests. One correspondent
collects films on VHS with weird titles: the top titles in his library are:

SURF NAZIS MUST DIE.

CANNIBAL WOMEN IN THE AVOCADO JUNGLE OF DEATH.

And now for the shortlist itself:

I WAS TORTURED BY THE PYGMY LOVE QUEEN (Its sequel, GO AHEAD, WOMAN, DO YOUR WORST! EROTIC TALES OF HEROES CHAINED, will not be eligible until next year.
HOW TO WRITE A HOW TO WRITE BOOK.
ARE WOMEN HUMAN? AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUES.
CHEESE PROBLEMS SOLVED – at £135, a snip for the real cheese connoisseur!
IF YOU WANT CLOSURE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP, START WITH YOUR LEGS.
PEOPLE WHO MATTERED IN SOUTHEND AND BEYOND; FROM KING CANUTE TO DR.FEELGOOD.

Don't forget, these are real titles! The organisers tend to weed out titles considered to have deliberately courted weirdness to get a mention.) You, too, can register your vote at www.thebookseller.com or at <http://www.thebookseller.com>

RD

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES? by Vernon Brown

In these days of change for changes sake people tend to forget that there is a time and a place for everything or, to put it another way, 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. Some material may be transformed to such an extent that, to all intents and purposes, it's a new construct that can stand or fall on its own merits, Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET/WEST SIDE STORY springs to mind here, as does THE TEMPEST/FORBIDDEN PLANET but far too often



something that depends on its period setting for impact is merely degraded by being made 'more relevant to today's society' or some such platitude. A recent St Georges Day Concert had Henry V's Agincourt speech delivered by a youth half undressed in modern army uniform supported by a similarly attired youth and a girl in combat trousers and singlet; I cringed, as did many of the rest of the audience.

SF is lucky in that it's a fairly modern literature so it's difficult for any transpositions to screen to contain anachronisms, and any such transposing took place long enough ago that the films themselves have a period nostalgia of their own. Post-war there were some good and some bad adaptations of SF books of then current(ish) novels but films since the 60s have tended to be written for the screen and rely more on visual effects rather than content although there

have been a few book-to-camera transfers which have unfortunately taken the same direction. Then there have been the film of the film of the book versions like THE TIME MACHINE (2002/1960/1895) and WAR OF THE WORLDS (2005/1952/1897), the second films of both being pretty awful.

Now it's the turn of Flash Gordon! Way back in 1934 when he first encountered Ming the Merciless in a newspaper comic strip drawn by Alex Raymond, everything was that little (or not so little) bit over the top - costumes, backgrounds, the lot. This continued through the strip, the film serials, the TV series and the 1980 film. Originally intended to match, or surpass, the other popular strips and magazine covers of the period, this flamboyance has since become the period attractiveness that its devotees and its casual viewers, of which I am one, enjoy. But no longer!



As this article is being written, a modernised Flash Gordon is to appear in a new series on Sci-Fi TV, broad-shouldered and wearing jeans, boots and T-shirt topped by a two-tone, multi-zipped, shiny jacket. His ex-sweetheart, now engaged to a cop, isn't too bad as a smartly dressed TV reporter but Zarkov is now a tubby, bespectacled, 30-something, balding, thin-bearded nerd in a rugby shirt. The baddies don't come out any better either. Ming now looks like a cross between a Nazi and a Russian commissar in a black uniform with red collar and black leather Sam Browne while his daughter Aura looks like a refugee from a bordello, being dressed completely in crimson – boots, cropped trousers, basque, beaded necklace, diaphanous drape and lipstick. All in all, a far cry from earlier incarnations.



Perhaps I've overstated by a couple of percent but my premise still stands, that enjoyable material should not be plucked from its context and placed in another without consideration being given to the reason why it is enjoyable. To use an analogy that is so stupid that no intelligent person would even consider it, it's like noticing that the French, who have almost open-ended drinking hours, don't drink to excess, and believing that doing the same with British drinking hours would convert our drunken lager louts into civilised citizens, without reflecting that the French have a totally different way of life in the first place.

That's my opinion! If viewers want the characters that they watch to be in today's clothing, then the characters and plots should be written from scratch in a

modern format too. There were some excellent stories written around the middle of the last century that would transfer well to screen, but it would be better to leave them in peace than try to update them. New wine should not be put in old bottles, surely vice versa is as bad.

By the time that you read this Flash will have made his debut. If you watched him what did you think, how well has he metamorphosed? Do you agree with the above article? VB

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Author **Jody Scott** (b.1923) died in Seattle on December 27. Scott was the author of the SF novels *PASSING FOR HUMAN* and *I, VAMPIRE* **E. Gary Gygax** (b.1938) died on March 4 at his home in Lake Geneva, WI. Gygax is best known as the co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons*, along with Dave Arneson. This led to the growth of role-playing games. Gygax also published several novels and short stories Author **Janet Kagan** (b.1946) died on March



1 of acute Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Kagan began publishing in 1982 with the story "Faith of the Month" and went on to win the Hugo Award for her story "The Nutcracker Coup." **Dave Stevens** (1955-2008) - American comics artist; died 10 March, aged 52. He was suffering from leukemia. Stevens' first professional work was inking Russ Manning's pencils on the *TARZAN* newspaper strip; fittingly, he won the inaugural Russ Manning Award in 1982 for most promising newcomer. This was the year Stevens created his most

famous character, *THE ROCKETEER*, adapted for the cinema in 1991. A very rare, 1937 first issue of the first edition of **J R R Tolkien's** *THE HOBBIT* was sold at Bonham's in March for £60,000, twice its pre-sale estimate A six-sheet poster (81" x 81") of the original 1933 movie **KING KONG**, of which only three are known to exist, went up for auction in America on March 27/28 and was sold for \$345,000 SFWA has announced that **Michael Moorcock** will be the next recipient of the Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award, to be presented at the Nebula Banquet in Austin, Texas The Science Fiction Hall of Fame has announced this year's inductees will include **Ian & Betty Ballantine, William Gibson, Richard Powers, and Rod Serling**. The **Ballantines** were a driving force in mass market publishing, particularly science fiction, **Gibson** helped launch the cyberpunk movement, **Powers** was a long-time artist, and **Serling** is best remembered for the television show *The Twilight Zone* SF author **S.M. Stirling** reports that his latest novel, *IN THE*

COURTS OF THE CRIMSON KINGS, was inspired by his feeling that classic pulp writers had an unfair advantage: namely, that they could imagine a much more interesting solar system than the one we actually have. “An alternate history allows for something more like their vision of Mars and Venus, but done with modern technique and sensibility,” Stirling said in an interview **Terry Pratchett**, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's last year, has donated £500,000 to the Alzheimer's Research Trust. **Pat Cadigan** has suggested that Pratchett fans donate whatever they feel they can afford in an attempt to have Pratchett's fans match Pratchett's donations in a campaign called “Match It for Pratchett”. Donations can be made in Pratchett's honour at www.alzheimers-research.org.uk/howtohelp/ **J.K. Rowling** and Warner Brothers have announced that the seventh Harry Potter novel, HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS, will be broken into two films, bringing the film franchise to eight feature length movies The Disney insider news site reported a rumor that Pixar's first foray into live-action filmmaking may be a film based on **Edgar Rice Burroughs'** *John Carter of Mars* series. Citing anonymous sources, the site reported that WALL•E director Andrew Stanton told the staff at Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc. in October of last year that Disney/Pixar is gearing up to do a trilogy of films based on the books **David Eick**, co-executive producer of NBC's SF series BIONIC WOMAN, confirmed that the network has indeed cancelled the show, though the network has not yet officially said as much....RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

***JUMPER* by Steven Gould**

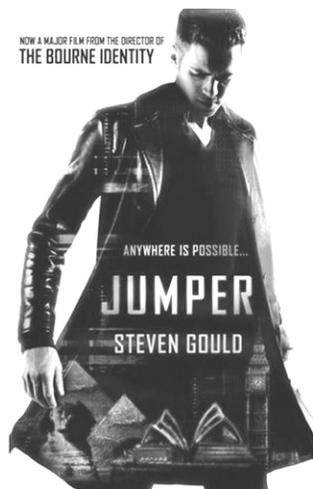
Voyager / 345pgs / £6.99 / paperback

Reviewed by Rog Peyton

I first read this back in 1992 when it was published in the USA. I loved it and could not understand why a British publisher didn't pick up the rights. But Andromeda imported several hundred copies and I never heard anyone expressing disappointment with it. It was Steven Gould's first novel and he went on to produce several fine novels.

Now it finally gets a British edition due entirely to the release of the new movie JUMPER, based on this book. But be warned – the movie is only 'based' on this novel. The movie is so different that a movie novelisation has now been released as well. Also written by Steven Gould, it's called JUMPER: GRIFFIN'S STORY and hopefully will be reviewed next month. Is this a first – the original

author also writing the movie novelisation? I can't think of a single instance of this happening before.



The novel opens with David Rice, a teenager, about to be beaten with the buckle end of a belt by his abusive, drunken father. He suddenly finds himself in his favourite place, the local library, and realises he has 'jumped'. When he is about to be gang-raped by a group of men, the same thing happens – back to the library, the place he has escaped to since his mother walked out on his father and him many years before..

Leaving his father and deciding to make his own way in life, David discovers the joys and perils of teleportation.

It's been many years since teleportation was a reasonably common theme in SF but it's been very scarce in recent years. Here we have a first-class novel with good characterisation, well-paced action and a wonderful *noir* quality. There's a lovely tribute in there when, after not meeting any other 'jumpers', he realises that his only blueprint for his position is remembering when he read Alfred Bester's *THE STARS MY DESTINATION*. That novel, of course, is *the* classic novel of teleportation. *JUMPER* is far and away better than any other book in that genre. Read it and enjoy! RGP

***THE NINTH CIRCLE* by Alex Bell**

Gollancz / 248 pages / £12.99 / trade paperback

Reviewed by William McCabe

Gabriel Antaeus wakes up one day not knowing who he is or how he has got where he is. He is alone in an apartment and there is a fortune in cash in there with him. He knows his name because there are identity documents with the money. There are also a lot of books on angels and demons. Within a day he has discovered where he is and two people who he either seems to recognise or seem to know him. He has also managed to beat off a group of muggers single handed which makes him think that he is something special and he soon discovers other 'powers'.



One of the two people, Zadkiel Stephomi, claims to know Gabriel but has promised not to tell him anything he doesn't already know. So Gabriel has to work out his history by himself. He doesn't really get anywhere. Though someone

is sending him mysterious clues. Every so often he gets a hint of something from Zadkiel but never that much.

This is being sold as fantasy's answer to the *Bourne* films. There is a fantasy element to the plot but it's minimal. The same could be said for most of the plot. Despite the shortness of the book, when the revelation came, I'd stopped caring. *WAM*

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

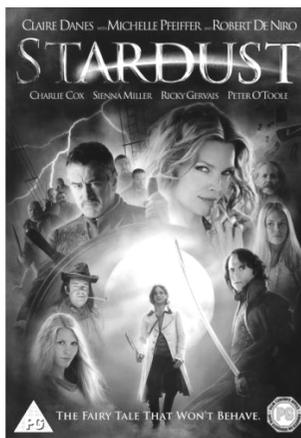
STARDUST (Paramount DVD 2007) ***(dir: Matthew Vaughn)***

When I was younger I loved the film called *THE PRINCESS BRIDE*. Irreverent, funny, firmly tongue-in-cheek, it was great. I still enjoy it today. *STARDUST* is along the same lines though maybe not with quite the same stroke of genius.

Tristan lives in a village by a wall leading to a fantasy world. He ventures through this one day to seek a fallen star for his one true love. Also featuring in the chase for the fallen star are three sons of a dead king, and the leader of a gang of witches hunting for eternal youth. He learns as he goes about his true heritage and what true love is.

This is one of those films where famous names appear throughout, which for the main part don't distract too much, though it has to be said I didn't think the scenes featuring the comedian Ricky Gervais were completely smooth and plot-relevant, and he did sound rather like his TV alter-egos, but other appearances were brilliant, particularly Robert De Niro, who sent himself up yet again as a pirate. The main actors did a sterling job – Michelle Pfeiffer as the lead witch, covered in make-up, hammed it up delightfully and was a pleasure to watch, as was Charlie Cox, not as famous but able to hold centre stage onscreen admirably. I wasn't so convinced by the two female leads – Sienna Miller as his first love was a little bit too two-dimensional, and I found his second true love, Claire Danes, a little irritating which really probably wasn't meant to be intentional, and not thoroughly convincing.

Other stuff of note includes the beautiful cinematography. The shots were good, the visuals stunning, and the CGI which forms so big a part in modern films wasn't over-emphasised to the point of ruining the film. The story was good if with occasional parts where you really have to completely suspend belief and ignore any plot holes (it's a fantasy film after all). Neil Gaiman



originally penned the story, and while it at first seems all too familiar with witches, ghosts, pirates and other fantasy paraphernalia, the human heart of the film pulls you in and gets you rooting for the protagonist.

I really liked Charlie Cox – I haven't seen him in anything else but he did a brilliant job with his development from nerdy bumbling kid to confident Cary Elwes-style hero at the end, and really held the film together.

Overall, I do think this is worth a watch. Maybe those of you who prefer more sensible serious films with a proper explanation for why things are happening will find this a bit of fluffy nonsense, but respect it as a Neil Gaiman fantasy fairytale and give it a chance, you may like it! It's a bit of a change from the Harry Potter kiddy film clones or the slasher horror movies doing the rounds, at any rate.

VC

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:-

Future dates -17th April, 15th May, 12th June, 17th July

ALT.FICTION will take place on Saturday April 26th. Alt.Fiction is a one-day event drawing together a range of SF, fantasy and horror writers for a mix of readings, panels and workshops across three rooms. This year's leading authors include Michael Marshall Smith, Brian Lumley, Charlie Stross, Mike Carey, Adam Roberts, Ramsey Campbell, Justina Robson and many more. Tickets for the day are just £20/£16 concessions (including a group rate for bookings of 10 or more) and cover all sessions on the day. Further information from alex.davis@derby.gov.uk or on 01332 715434.

webpage at www.derby.gov.uk/altfiction

or the blog at <http://altfictionday.blogspot.com>.

THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASTIC FILMS. 30th April to 4th May 2008, More details – go to <http://www.sci-fi-london.com/>

DISCWORLD CONVENTION 2008, Hilton Metropole Hotel, (NEC) Birmingham. 22nd-25th August 2008. Registration £55 (£36 concessions). Guests Terry Pratchett, Stephen Briggs, Diane Duane, Peter Morwood, Lionel Fanthorpe, Ian Stewart, Jack Cohen & others. www.dwcon.org

FANTASYCON 2008, Britannia Hotel, 1 St James St. Nottingham. 19th-21st September 2008. Registration is £60 (£50 for BFS members). Day rate is £25

Fri/Sun and £40 Sat. Contact 5 Greenbank, Barnt Green, Birmingham. B45 8DH or email membership@fantasycon.org.uk



Novacon 38 will be held at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, over the weekend of 14-16 November 2008; the guests are science fiction author Ian R MacLeod and the Brum Group's own Vernon Brown, who chaired the first Novacon back in 1971. Membership costs £38.00, payable to "Novacon 38" at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ; registration forms can be downloaded from the convention website, www.novacon38.org.uk, along with the first progress report.

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

9th May – **Ian R MacLeod**

13th June – **Eric Brown**

11th July – tba

8th August – **Summer Social**. A meal at the Black Eagle – details next month.

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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