

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

NOVEMBER 2009

ISSUE 458

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

COMMITTEE:

VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);
VICKY STOCK (SECRETARY); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);
DAVE CORBY (PUBLICITY OFFICER); WILLIAM MCCABE;
NOVACON 39 CHAIRMAN: ALICE LAWSON

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Friday
6th November
STEVE
GREEN

Our speaker in November is local fan, publisher and journalist Steve Green. A man of many talents! He has been involved in SF fandom since the 1970s, published fanzines, most famously the SF newszine *CRITICAL WAVE* with Martin Tudor, reviewed books and films for various professional magazines and been a regular con-goer and organiser. Subsequent to his career as a newspaper reporter (initially on *The Walsall Observer*, later on *The Solihull News*), Steve has contributed to such magazines as *The Dark Side* (for which he wrote 51 instalments of the

December 4th - **THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**. There are still a few tickets left for our Christmas Social – see last month’s newsletter for full details. **REMEMBER THAT TICKETS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT – GET THEM NOW!**

review column "Fanzine Focus"), Interzone (interviewing the comics writer and editor Stan Lee and the author/screenwriter Peter Atkins), *Fantasia* and *SFX*, as well as being an occasional contributor to the 1990s BBC Radio 5 series *The Way Out*. He currently produces an online column on real ale and the British pub industry for *The Sunday Mercury*. In addition he has had several of his own short stories published, including "Cracking" in THE ANTHOLOGY OF FANTASY & THE SUPERNATURAL, plus a large number of poems.

He was chair of Novacon 14 (1984) and Novacon 37 (2007), and ran the Fan Lounge at Intervention, the 1997 Eastercon. In addition, he was a guest speaker at the Exeter University convention Microcon in 2008 and 2009, and has been invited back for the 2010 event. Other roles include: vice-president of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, 2005-07; current administrator of the Delta Film Award, presented annually at Manchester's Festival of Fantastic Films; current administrator of the Nova Awards for British fanzines, presented annually at our own Novacon.

While doing all that, for a few years he managed to find time to set the regular monthly Quiz in this newsletter and is also a past editor of this very newsletter

. Is there no end to this man's talents, you might ask. Well, no - there are also unsubstantiated rumours that he was a World Champion Yo-Yo expert in his pre-fandom days. Maybe we might get a display of his prowess in this field - if the rumour is correct. He is also currently supposed to be training for the 2012 sumo wrestling championships. A man of many talents, indeed.

Earlier this year Steve deservedly won TAFF (the TransAtlantic Fan Fund) which, in August, paid for him to attend the World SF Convention in Montreal, Canada. Steve spent a month visiting other SF fans as well as being feted at the Worldcon. Part of his talk will be about the convention which will be supported by a slide show. The other part of his talk will be revealed on the evening. Well, he's got enough history there to talk for the next two years!!!! *RGP*

*** * * NEW MEETING VENUE * * ***

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of the Old Joint Stock, Temple Street, just off Colmore Row. From the Briar Rose, continue up the hill, take first right, first left and it's about 4 or 5 buildings down on the left.

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. Members' admission is £3.00; non-members' is £4.00.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Jan 2010

NOW is the time to be thinking about the Group's activities during the forthcoming year. At January's AGM the 2009 Committee will stand down and elections will be held to elect the 2010 Committee. Not all the present committee members are necessarily standing for

re-election, so if you want to do your bit and are interested in standing for any of the posts please read the following 'Job Descriptions' and email the Committee (see page 1 header) for more information and details of current Committee activities.

GENERAL DUTIES (and a requirement)

To organise BSFG meetings throughout the year including the annual Quiz, summer Social and Christmas Social.

To attend monthly Committee meetings in the City Centre, usually on the Wednesday evening of the week preceding the week in which the Group Meeting is held.

To assist other Committee members in their duties as necessary.

To present a report at the AGM.

To have email access at home.

OFFICERS' DUTIES

CHAIRMAN

To chair Committee meetings and present a report as necessary.

To chair Group Meetings, introduce and thank the Speaker.

To negotiate with hotels and other organisations on behalf of the Group.

To liaise with the Secretary in arranging the Committee meeting agenda.

SECRETARY/MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

To communicate with Speakers on behalf of the Committee.

To communicate with other persons and organisations on behalf of the Committee.

To present a report at Committee meetings.

To take and circulate ASAP Minutes of Committee meetings.

To maintain BSFG Membership records.

To organise the collection of membership subscriptions, renewals etc.

To liaise with the Treasurer as necessary.

To present a report on current membership numbers at Committee meetings.

TREASURER

To maintain the current BSFG Bank Account.

To attend Group Meetings, arriving early and ensuring that the Meeting room is prepared for Group use.

To collect admission money etc at Group Meetings.

To liaise with the Membership Secretary.

To present a detailed current Financial Report at Committee meetings.

To present an Annual Financial Report at the AGM.

PUBLICITY OFFICER

To advertise the BSFG by all means possible.

To present a report at Committee meetings.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

To maintain contact with sources of potential information for the Group Newsletter.

To edit and produce master copy ready for printing.

To organise printing of the Newsletter, and to distribute it, to a specific timescale.

To liaise with book publishers for review copies.

To present a report at Committee meetings as necessary.

ORDINARY MEMBERS – two required, one of whom will automatically be...

WEBSITE MANAGER

To maintain the BSGF Website to an agreed format and to update it as necessary.

To present a report at Committee meetings.

The other ORDINARY MEMBER

To take on specific special jobs as directed by the rest of the committee.

To contribute to the efficient functioning of the Committee.

LET'S HAVE SOME NEW BLOOD ON THE COMMITTEE....!!! VOLUNTEER NOW!

NEWSLETTER EDITOR WANTED!

There will be new blood on the committee next year as I have decided not to restand as Newsletter Editor. It's a job I've thoroughly enjoyed doing but I feel I'm no longer the person to continue. What is needed is someone who is more on the pulse of today's science fiction – yes, and even fantasy.

Science fiction has changed – as it certainly should – in the years since Andromeda closed its doors. When I had the shop I was hearing of new books and new authors weeks and sometimes months before they hit the shelves. I was reading new books weeks before they were published. Now? I find it difficult to pick up a new SF book and get much enjoyment from it. New SF novels look boring, the blurbs make them sound boring and the first few pages of many simply **are** boring. Where are the novels that inspire artists to produce eye-grabbing covers? What happened to novels that reading the first page made you stay up all night because it was impossible to put them down? The problem, most of you will say, is not with the books but with me. And you are almost certainly right! I'm jaded and without the shop to keep me on my toes, my interest in SF is declining fast. I'm currently reduced in going back to real basics trying to rediscover my sensawunda – I'm rereading Edgar Rice Burroughs!!!!

My god – I actually produced Newsletter #1 way back in 1971. I've had several stints at producing the newsletter over the past 38 years and my current session (5 years? 6 years? Longer?) will be the last. So it's obviously time for one of you to take over! I'm quite happy to give advice in the first few months and even help out with the News in Brief column. You won't be left to flounder.

If someone doesn't volunteer by January, there won't be any newsletters. Well, that's not quite true – Vernon will knock something out, and you wouldn't want that, would you?!!!!

RGP

...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 or queries to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk

From one of our founding members Peter Weston, commenting on our Chairman's piece in the September issue: - "Sorry, Vernon, but I can't let you get away with a couple of things in your article. For a start, you ask,

'When did Man first reach the Moon?' and answer firmly that it was on 14th September, 1959.

"No, I'm afraid it wasn't. Man first reached the Moon in the person of Neal Armstrong in 1969, as we all know. You're talking about the moment when the first object from Earth (from mankind, if you like) reached the Moon.

"But that's only quibbling over semantics. The bit I really have to jump on is where you mention the 'dark side' of the Moon. Yes, it was only a slip of the mind I'm sure, and I bet Dave Hardy will have dashed off a rebuttal about a millisecond after reading it, but for the record let me be the second one to say that there is no dark side; you meant the far side, which is equally well illuminated but it's just that we can never see it."



NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Author **Louise Cooper** (b.1952) died on October 20. She published *THE BOOK OF PARADOX*, her first novel, in 1973 and became a full-time author in 1977. She was the author of more than 80 novels. A past speaker at the BSGF and attendee at many conventions, several of us knew her. She was a very likeable person who was always appreciative of her luck in making it as a writer and I remember her being totally amazed a few years ago when I showed her the high prices her early books were fetching Author **Mary Schaub** (b.1943) died Sept 25.

Schaub collaborated with **Andre Norton** on *THE MAGESTONE* and published many short stories, most of which were also set in Norton's *Witch World* Artist **Ed Valigursky** (b.1926) died on September 7 of heart failure. In addition to a large amount of work for magazines including *Amazing*, *IF*, and *Fantastic Adventures*, as well as book covers for Ace, Valigursky's artwork was commissioned by NASA Producer **Barry Letts** (b.1925) died on October 9. Originally an actor, he decided to become a director and producers in the 1960s. His association with *Doctor Who* began in 1967 when he directed the six part "The Enemy of the World." He was a producer of the show from 1969 to 1974, during which time, he hired Tom Baker. Letts returned to the show as an executive producer from 1980-1981 Author **Philip Klass**, who writes as **William Tenn**, has been hospitalized with congestive heart failure, pneumonia, and gall bladder difficulties. According to his wife, Klass is recovering and will spend time in rehab following his release from the hospital **Diana Wynne Jones** had a tumour and a portion of her left lung removed in July. She is now recovering **Octavia Butler's** literary papers have been donated to the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The donation consists of more than 39 cartons and

eight file cabinet drawers of papers and manuscripts which will be delivered to the library and catalogued for researchers. Butler, who won two Hugos, 2 Nebulas, and a MacArthur “Genius” grant, died in 2006 **Richard Corben** has been named the newest Spectrum Grand Master. Spectrum runs an annual series of art contest and exhibits for speculative fiction. Corben’s first professional SF art sales was for the September 1967 cover of F&SF. he went on to illustrate for numerous fanzines Latest titles from **NESFA Press** are THE COLLECTED STORIES OF ROGER ZELAZNY volumes 3 (THIS MORTAL MOUNTAIN) and 4 (LAST EXIT TO BABYLON) and COLLECTED STORIES OF POUL ANDERSON Vol 2 (THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS) **Charlaine Harris** books continue to dominate sales in the USA. At Borders/Walden she has Nos 1-8 in the bestselling paperbacks while over at B&N/B Dalton she has Nos 2-9, being beaten out by the 50+ year-old FAHRENHEIT 451 by **Ray Bradbury** The **Doctor Who Museum** in Blackpool, England, is scheduled to close on November 8. First opened in 2004, the museum will remain open from 10:30 am to 8:00 pm every day until then. The museum’s collection of *Doctor Who* props and costumes will be redistributed to other *Doctor Who* exhibitions throughout the United Kingdom **Ellen Kaye-Cheveldayoff** was declared the winner of Baen Books’ contest to title **Esther Friesner**’s 2010 vampire anthology. Kaye-Cheveldayoff suggested the title FANGS FOR THE MAMMARIES. In addition to the book bearing her title, Kaye-Cheveldayoff will receive mention in the book’s introduction as well as ten free copies of the book and \$100. Now why can’t one of us come up with totally original titles like that!!!!???. The **Walt Disney Company** has announced a plan to acquire comics publisher **Marvel Entertainment** for a combination of shares and cash valued at around \$4 billion giving them ownership of 5,000 Marvel characters The **NASA Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite** (LCROSS) sent a Centaur rocket into the Cabeus crater, making a new crater about 18 meters across. Scientists plan to study the debris arc to learn about the chemical makeup of the region, and hope to find traces of water ice. Although there was hope that the debris would be visible through small telescopes from Earth, no such debris was spotted. Scientists have received spectrometer data and are working to decipher it An enormous ring has been discovered around Saturn. Spotted by the **Spitzer Space Telescope**, the dust ring was seen in the infrared spectrum, where it shows a temperature of -193°C (-316°F). The new ring begins about 5.95 million km (3.7 million miles) from the planet and extends for 11.9 million km (7.4 million miles). The ring encompasses the orbit of Saturn’s moon Phoebe, and like Phoebe it orbits Saturn in a retrograde motion. According to a JPL spokeswoman, this is the first time Saturn was explored with an infrared instrument

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

***SPIRIT* by Gwyneth Jones**

Gollancz / 472pgs / £18.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0575074729

£14.99 trade paperback ISBN: 978-0575074736

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



Between 1991 and 1997, Gwyneth Jones published a trilogy of novels (WHITE QUEEN, NORTH WIND, and PHOENIX CAFÉ) which chronicled the arrival on Earth of an alien race known as Aleutians (because they arrived on the Aleutian Islands between Alaska and Russia). Four hundred years have passed since most of the Aleutians departed. On Earth, the politics and social dynamics have changed greatly in the meantime. The Buonarrotti device, which enabled the Aleutians to arrive in the first place, has begun to open up the Universe and other planets and other alien races are known about.

Ten-year old Gwibiwr (Bibi) is the sole survivor of a clan of rebels that have been holding out in the mountains for decades. The time came when this anomaly had to be eradicated. General Yu's army swept the caves clean of life. Bibi survived because she was good at hiding but once discovered she is given a choice, to be become Lady Nef's servant, or the General's concubine. From that moment, her fate is tied to that of Lady Nef. The first part of SPIRIT shows Bibi's development into a young woman and the friendships she develops.

Bibi is only partly aware of the political machinations surrounding Lady Nef and General Yu but it is these that cause her life to change direction. The General is sent on a mission to the planet known as Sigurt's World. After a spell on Speranza, a space station in the Oort Cloud, they transit to the planet populated by aliens which have characteristics in common with bats. Due to several miscalculations and wrong assumptions, the mission is cut off from Earth, the situation goes horribly wrong, especially for Bibi who is forcibly married off to the local prince.

The Spirit of the title is a semi-sentient space ship owned by François, the Aleutian advisor to Lady Nef. François seems to be the only one who has planned

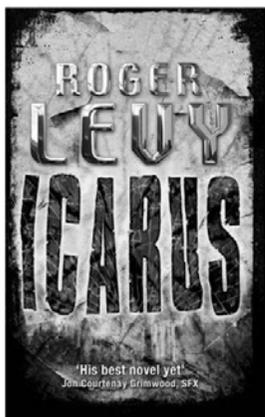
ahead and when he becomes suspicious of their Sigurtian hosts, he gives command of his ship to the three mercenaries who looked out for Bibi in the early days. Despite desperate hardship Bibi finds that she has friends in unexpected places.

This is a well written, likeable novel. The different races have their own characteristics distinctly drawn and the planets Bibi visits are well realised. Ultimately it is a novel of survival and adaptation but with the essence of honour and duty laced through it. The main complaint is that in the later stages of the novel, Bibi's character becomes aloof and unemotional as she tends to drift through the last part of the story, leaving the action to others. *PM*

ICARUS by Roger Levy

Gollancz / 432pgs / £7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0575079816

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



There are times when you know that good ideas are not enough. A lot of care has gone into the world building in this novel. There are two planets in a far distant solar system which have been colonised by humans. One is an inhospitable world of raging winds where the inhabitants live mostly underground, the other is mist covered and lushly forested. They are designated Haven and Haze. The societies on both are tyrannical dystopias.

On Haven, Quill is a part of Survey. Teams of two burrow through rock in small coffin-like craft in search of useful minerals. He and his partner, Schek, come across a space ship escape pod buried in solidified magma. They are immediately attacked by a team from Fact who want to destroy the knowledge about and aboard the ship.

On Haze, Petey is forced by the lord of her village to give up her son, Marten, to be educated as a lord. Her people are not allowed possessions, not even sons. When her mate is killed she tries to stay close to Marten but finally has to accept that he is gone. After the massacre of a nearby village by the lords she is found and taken to a village high in the mountains where the haze permeates everything.

The third strand of the novel is the story of the charismatic and philanthropic preacher who was directly responsible for the colonisation.

Although the action and mechanisms of the societies are well constructed, the characterisation is weak as are some of the structural elements. It might be supposed, as there are no clues given, that Petey's and Quill's misfortunes are concurrent. They are not, and though they come together eventually the initial

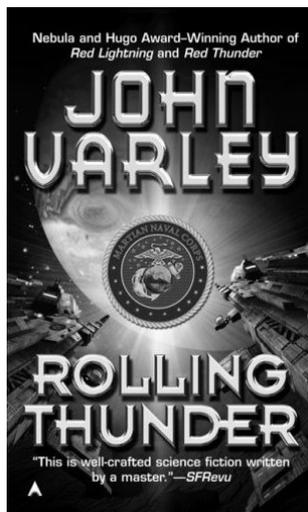
time difference is about fifteen years. Though he might be good at some things, Levy is very poor at emotions, sex and writing from a female viewpoint.

Solid science fiction but not to be recommended to the sophisticated and mature reader. PM

***ROLLING THUNDER* by John Varley**

Ace / 384pgs / \$7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0441017720

Reviewed by Peter Weston



This one came into my hands from a friend who knew I like John Varley's slick style and fertile imagination, but at first I refused, "already read it," I said. That was my first mistake – I was thinking of RED THUNDER, first title in this series of three (the second being, of course, RED LIGHTNING).

My second mistake was going on to read the book. Honestly, when it starts with the line, "Once upon a time there was a Martian named Patricia Kelly Elizabeth Podkayne Strickland-Garcia-Redmond" you know the author is pulling your leg. It might as well have been subtitled, "a homage to Heinlein juveniles", and just to hammer-home the point the final sentences mention three of them: "I'm going to miss my home, the Red planet. But now I'm between

planets. Now it's time for the stars".

The first book was quite a charming adventure for thirteen-year-olds; a couple of bright kids build a home-made rocket and rescue NASA's Mars mission from disaster. The second title didn't really have much point to it, and this one is teenage-magazine slush, with a heroine named 'Poddy' who gives roughly equal time to the awful aliens from Europa who are destroying the Earth and her nauseating sexual experiences. Why does a fine writer like Varley produce this sort of rubbish? Why does it get published? Why did I read it? PRW

***THE CITY & THE CITY* by China Miéville**

Macmillan / 500pgs / £17.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-1405000178

Reviewed by Peter Weston

That reiteration of THE CITY should, correctly, be printed upside down except that I can't easily do it on my computer. Its significance is that the novel takes place in two cities which inter-penetrate; that is, the run-down and vaguely Eastern-European Beszel co-exists with the booming and slightly Oriental Ul

Qoma. Two separate cultures, different languages even, occupying the same physical space, the inhabitants of one habitually ‘unseeing’ the citizens of the other, even with two lots of traffic obeying different rules on the same streets (except that they aren’t the ‘same’, not when a BesŹ only acknowledges his ‘own’ set of pedestrians, buildings and street-signs).

I’ve been a bit suspicious of tackling Miéville’s previous books (perhaps it’s the ear-ring that does it) and to be honest, this didn’t look the sort of thing I’d enjoy, yet I slipped into it easily and found it a clever, fast-paced and fascinating murder mystery set in a bizarre and surreal landscape. But at the end of the day it’s another one of those SF books which, as the Austrian critic Franz Rottensteiner once said, “offers silly answers to stupid questions”. The twin cities could only last as long as their inhabitants were prepared to observe the ridiculously restrictive rules which govern their daily lives. And they wouldn’t stand for it, not for five minutes never mind five centuries! So it’s all nonsense, though entertaining nonsense!

PRW

***RAY BRADBURY'S FAHRENHEIT 451 - THE
AUTHORIZED ADAPTATION by Tim Hamilton***

Voyager / 150 pgs / £10.99 paperback ISBN : 978 0007304738

Reviewed by William McCabe

On the back cover, along with the price, you will find the notation ‘Graphic Novel’. This is the only time this term is used on this book. There are many reasons for such adaptations of famous or worthy novels. There are the versions that make things easier for those who have trouble reading or do not like to read. Since this book is the same length as the print version, I don't suppose this is one. Similarly there are those that have great (or at least good) artwork but the images here are drab and uninspiring - certainly nothing worthy of a poster. This is a workmanlike adaptation of the original with nothing added and very little taken out. That is all.

For the (hopefully) very few who have never read this book, this is the story of a future America that has banned books and restricted all forms of entertainment to the merely trivial. TV has become all-encompassing and filled with soap opera and faked news. Our Hero, Montag, is a fireman in a world where everything is fireproof and the fireman's job is to burn books and, occasionally, anyone else who gets in the way. This is the story of his personal discovery of books and how they are preserved for future generations.

This is a classic of the SF genre that has crossed over into the general consciousness. You should have read it. To be more precise, you should have read the original novel, not this version.

WAM

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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 contact addresses.

Any information about forthcoming SF / Fantasy / Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk

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 - 19th November

THE MISFiTs are an informal group of local SF fans who meet regularly at 7pm at the Wagon & Horses, Oldbury on the third Friday of each month. Real ale, good food, great company. Next meeting is on 20th November.

More details from Martin Tudor (empties084@btinternet.com).

Novacon is the Birmingham SF Group's own convention. Membership is £39 for an adult, 13-16 year olds £10, 12 years and under is free. These rates are until the end of October.



Rooms are double or twin £40 per person per night, singles £56 pppn. Children 5-12 years £5 and children under 5 years are free. Please book early! Forms are on the website - <http://novacon39.org>.

The Park Inn Hotel is a new venue for us. It has been fully refurbished and all the main function space is on the ground floor. Bigger bookroom! Two bars! A lift to all floors! Leisure facilities! Beer! Free carparking! The hotel is on a main road about a mile from Nottingham city centre, so no problem with buses. The hotel is completely no-smoking



which will please many and infuriate a few, but that's the way things are now.

We have Justina Robson as our Guest of Honour. We again have two science-speakers and the usual mix of serious and light-hearted programme to keep you entertained.

Full details from 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or email alice@altair-4.co.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

December 4th – CHRISTMAS SOCIAL – skittles, buffet, prizes, fun!!!

January 8th 2010 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and AUCTION

February 12th – QUIZ versus the B'ham University SF Group

March 12th – Gollancz editor JO FLETCHER returns with more amusing and interesting anecdotes of life in publishing

April 9th – Author and satirist ADAM ROBERTS

May 14th – comic fantasy author JASPER FFORDE

June 11th – to be announced

July 9th – to be announced

BRUM GROUP NEWS #458 copyright 2009 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk). 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, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG