

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

NOVEMBER 2010

ISSUE 470

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

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Friday 5th November

CHARLES STROSS

Charlie Stross is well known to many of you as he regularly attends SF conventions and was, in fact, Guest of Honour at our own NOVACON 3?. Having worked in a variety of jobs, including pharmacist, technical author, software engineer, and freelance journalist, he is now a full-time writer.

His first novel, *SINGULARITY SKY*, appeared as recently as 2003 since when he has written a sequel, two novels in the *Laundry Files* series, six books in the *Merchant Princes* series, two books in the *Halting State* series, five standalone novels

December 3rd – the **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**. Full details inside on Page 2 – NOTE that it is on the first Friday of the month and that tickets **MUST** be booked for this event.

and two collections of short stories. Plus many pieces of fiction, including his first novel from 1993, *SCRATCH MONKEY*, which is only available online.

His work has been nominated for virtually every Award going and several pieces have won.

Charlie is one of our finest writers and we welcome him back to the Brum Group. Be sure you don't miss this meeting! *RGP*

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Christmas Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak, where we have once again hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00pm until 11.00pm on Friday 3rd December. To get there take a 45 or 47 bus from Corporation Street. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - its about 15 minutes ride. PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE FROM OUR 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 and, to judge from past comments, a good time to be had by all.

The meal will be a buffet of a selection of sandwiches, sausage rolls, quiche, chicken wings, pizza, salads etc., plus a separate selection for vegetarians, provided that this requirement is clearly stated when you order your ticket.

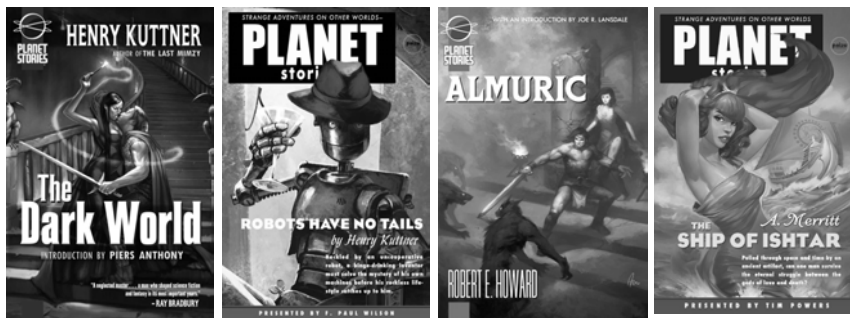
With this newsletter there should be an application form for one or two tickets. Please complete it as indicated and hand it to Pat, with the necessary money, at the November group meeting. Or send it to Vicky Stock, together with a cheque/postal order for the appropriate amount, at the address on the back page of this Newsletter. However, as there are sometimes problems with the postal system if you apply by post please send Vicky an email at the same time in case your application is delayed. **THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS MONDAY 22nd NOVEMBER** because the Tavern needs food numbers that week. However, by that time NOVACON will have happened and there may not be any tickets left – numbers are restricted for safety reasons and we have reached that number every year previously and had to refuse latecomers.

REMEMBER THAT TICKETS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT – GET THEM NOW!

PLANET STORIES LIVES ON!

New publisher, Paizo, have a series of reprints of classic 'science fantasy' novels and stories. Timeless classics from authors like Robert E. Howard (*Conan*

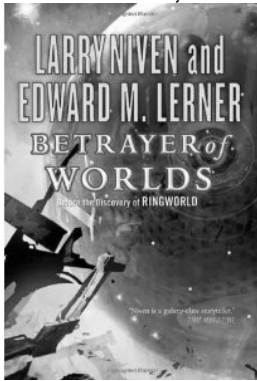
the Barbarian), Michael Moorcock (Elric), and Leigh Brackett (*The Empire Strikes Back*) are being reprinted – some with the old PLANET STORIES logo. Already published are ALMURIC by Robert E Howard, WHO FEARS THE DEVIL?: THE COMPLETE SILVER JOHN STORIES and BATTLE IN THE DAWN: THE COMPLETE HOK STORIES by Manly Wade Wellman, ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS, THE DARK WORLD and ELAK OF ATLANTIS by Henry Kuttner, THE SHIP OF ISHTAR by A Merritt, THE OUTLAWS OF MARS and SWORDSMAN OF MARS by Otis Adelbert Kline, THE SECRET OF SINHARAT and THE SWORD OF RHIANNON by Leigh Brackett, BLACK GOD’S KISS (Jirel of Joiry stories) and NORTHWEST OF EARTH by C L Moore, all three *Mars* books by Michael Moorcock as ‘Edward P Bradbury’, etc.



NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Australian author **Donald H. Tuck** (b.1922) died on October 13. Tuck was Australia’s first Hugo Award winner for his the third and final volume of his study THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY in 1984 Agent **Ralph Vicinanza** (b.1950) died of a brain aneurysm on September 26. Vicinanza represented **Stephen King, Connie Willis, Robert J. Sawyer, Stephen Baxter**, and many other major science fiction and fantasy authors. Vicinanza also had a producer credit on some films and television shows made based on his clients work, including FLASHFORWARD, JUMPER, and the forthcoming THE FOREVER WAR Actor **Tony Curtis** (b. **Bernard Schwartz**, 1925) died on September 29 in his home in Las Vegas. Best known for so many films, not least of which are THE BLACK SHIELD OF FALWORTH, SOME LIKE IT HOT, SPARTACUS, THE GREAT RACE and THE DEFIANT ONES (his only Oscar nomination). He also appeared in some genre works, including ROSEMARY’S BABY, LOBSTER MAN FROM MARS, THE MANITOU, THE MUMMY LIVES and an episode of *Lois and Clark* The First Hans Christian Andersen Literature Prize was presented in Odense, Denmark, the birthplace of the fabulist, on October 19 to **J K Rowling**, author of the *Harry Potter* series. The award includes a 5000 kroner prize and is

given for work that can be compared to that of Andersen Three authors have been named as recipients of the World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Award for 2010. The Awards will be presented on October 31 in Columbus, Ohio at the World Fantasy Con Banquet. The three winners are **Brian Lumley**, **Terry Pratchett**, and **Peter Straub** The October issue of LOCUS has an excellent article on the work of **Harry Harrison** – it’s in **Graham Speight’s** regular series looking at SF carrerrrs, *Yesterday’s Tomorrows* HarperCollins is sponsoring a drawing in honour of the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of **C S Lewis’s** THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE. Five winners of the sweepstakes will receive a copy of a single volume edition of all seven books in the series, including a full-colour map and a timeline of Narnia history. Entries must be received no later than December 1, 2010 Publisher **Warren Lapine** has announced the closing of *Realms of Fantasy*. Lapine notes that the worsening economic climate has made continuing the magazine impossible at this time and has released any stories still held by the magazine. The December issue of the



magazine will be placed on the *Realms of Fantasy* website for download **Larry Niven** and **Edward M Lerner’s** BETRAYER OF WORLDS is a prequel to RINGWORLD and will be published by Tor FantasyCon 2011 has announced its 2011 location at the Royal Albion Hotel in Brighton from September 30-October 2. Guests of honour will include British author **Gwyneth Jones** and Swedish author **John Ajvide Lindqvist** A group of Czech scientists have named a newly discovered species of trilobyte for the Xeelee, aliens found in a series of novels by **Stephen Baxter**. The trilobyte flourished approximately 50 million years ago. Baxter has stated

“It is very cool.” The BBC has officially announced that the two-part opener for the next season of *Doctor Who* will film in Utah. This marks the first time *Doctor Who* has ever filmed in the United States Film/TV rights to **Stephen King’s** seven-book series, *Dark Tower*, has sold to NBC Universal to be developed as three feature filkms and a TV series Astronomers have discovered the most hospitable exoplanet yet found orbiting the star **Gliese 581**, about 20 light years from Earth. The new planet has been named **Gliese 581g**, one of two additional planets discovered orbiting Gliese 581, brings that star’s system to six planets. Gliese 581g has a mass between 3 and 4 times that of Earth and orbits in the middle of the star’s habitable zone. The planet is believed to be tidally locked to its primary A small asteroid (**2010 TD54**) passed around 28,000 miles from Earth on October 12, slightly higher than satellites in geosynchronous orbit. The asteroid, which was only about 6 meters in diameter, passed over Singapore around 6:50 EDT. Had the asteroid hit Earth, it would have vaporized in the atmosphere

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS

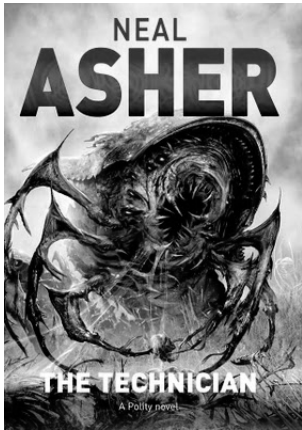


(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

***THE TECHNICIAN* by Neal Asher**

Tor / 502pgs / £17.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0230708747

Reviewed by Michael Jones



Most of this author's prolific output, although divided into identifiable series, is inter-related as parts of an overall future history. This book, despite being identified by the publisher as a 'new standalone novel' is no exception and is to some extent a direct sequel to an earlier work. Having said that, it is not really dependent on previous books and stories, although some knowledge of them may be a help in appreciating it.

The planet Masada has been taken over by the human Polity under its governing AIs. It now comes to light that one of the dangerous species native to Masada is actually the animalistic descendant of a long extinct civilisation, the Atheter, who millions of years ago chose to destroy their own intelligence and put in place a complex mechanism to do so and to prevent intelligence from ever arising again. As a result of the interference of the Polity AIs this mechanism becomes fully activated and a titanic struggle begins, culminating in a space battle which 'Doc' Smith would have been proud of.

The earlier part of the book can be a little confusing as it flips to and fro through a period of twenty years between the Polity takeover and the time when the book is set. Also, events a million and two million years in the past, describing the activities of the Atheter mechanism, are tossed here and there into the mix. This in no way a serious problem and is easily overcome if the reader is prepared to concentrate on how the events fit together. Eventually, however, the storytelling settles down into a more reasonably straightforward narrative, albeit one told from several individual points of view (including that of one of the AIs already referred to) and proceeds more smoothly to its conclusion – a conclusion which is in fact nothing less than a further beginning.

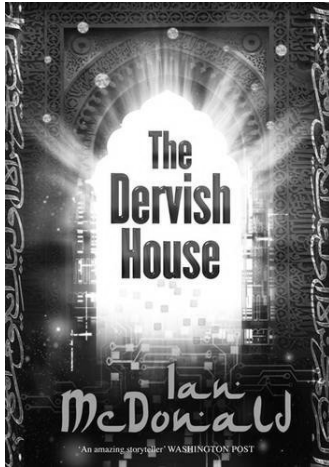
Although unquestionably up-to-date, this is without doubt a book for lovers of old-fashioned Space Opera. Advanced super-weapons, huge space

machines, intelligent computers, powerful and incomprehensible aliens, sex and violence (well, not as much of the former as we sometimes get from this writer) – what more could one ask for? That it should also serve for those not already familiar as a decent introduction to his work is an added bonus. Highly recommended, and any reader who has not previously tried Asher’s work will almost certainly want to seek out more. *MJ*

THE DERVISH HOUSE by Ian McDonald

Gollancz / 463pgs / £18.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0575080522 / £12.99 trade paperback. ISBN: 978-0575080539

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



There are few writers that can conjure up a whole future with only a scattering of well placed words. Ian McDonald is one of them. He also has a gift for seeing inside other cultures drawing an in-depth portrait of them with a minimum of brush-strokes. He has shown us an India reaping the problems of current trends in *RIVER OF GODS*, and a Brazil shaped by past and present that will still be besotted with football in *BRASYL*. Now he leads us to an Istanbul in 2047 where Turkey has just joined the EU.

The plot revolves around the inhabitants of an ancient dervish house – a kind of Islamic monastery – now turned over to domestic residences and shops. The opening sequence is set on a crowded tram as a suicide bomber blows off her head. Miraculously, no-one else dies. Necdet, who has come into Istanbul to live with his brother, was standing next to her. Afterwards, he starts seeing djinn. Leyla was on her way to a job interview when the snarl up of the traffic behind prevented from getting there. However, she is quickly told that Yaşar, a member of her extended family, is in need of someone with her marketing skills. Can (pronounced Jan) Durukan is a nine-year-old with a genetic condition which means that a sudden, loud noise could cause his heart to stop. He sends his toy, a shape-changing robot made of BitBots, to survey the aftermath of the bomb. He sees another robot watching the scene and his creature (it can be monkey, bird, snake or rat) is chased back home. As his parents would be horrified to know that he was exploring the city through the eyes of his toy, he shares what he has seen with his elderly friend, Georgios Ferentinou. Georgios and his three, equally elderly, friends are the only Greeks left on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Although retired, Georgios suddenly finds

himself recruited by an MIT think-tank to discuss the intentions of these bombers.

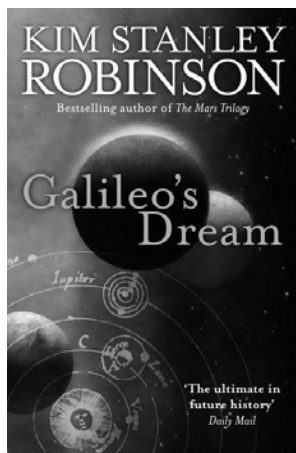
Also part of the dervish house community is Ayşe Erkoç who runs a select art gallery specialising in religious artefacts. She is approached to find the legendary Mellified Man - a corpse preserved in honey. Her husband is Adnan Sarioğlu, a commodities trader for the Özer Gas and Commodities company. A high flyer, he also has schemes to make money illicitly.

In the space of a week, all these lives entwine and change totally in unexpected ways. Despite the short space of time, everything - setting, characters, plot machinations - fit together neatly in a totally believable way. This book is a *tour de force* in the science fiction genre. This shows what can be achieved with a blend of subtlety and boldness. Excellent. PM

***GALILEO'S DREAM* by Kim Stanley Robinson**

HarperVoyager / 584pgs / £8.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0007260324

Reviewed by Dave Hardy



The author is well known for doing his research thoroughly and getting his facts right, and if this was simply a fictionalised biography of Galileo Galilei I should still recommend it. Indeed, to a large extent that's what it is; the SF element plays a fairly minor role, and were this removed the book would be only a centimetre or so thinner, and hardly less enjoyable.

Almost any basic astronomy book will tell you that Galileo invented the telescope in 1609, but in fact he was just the first to turn it upon the Moon and planets. Doubt is even cast upon this here, because it is a mysterious stranger who first tells Galileo about a Dutchman who has been experimenting with lenses to make distant objects seem closer, and then advises him to look at the Moon through it. But it is down to Galileo and his old helper, Mazzoleni, to experiment with concave and convex lenses in order to find the right combination and, of course, his findings cause a sensation. The Moon is shown to be a world, perhaps like our own, with strange circular mountain ranges. Another startling discovery is that there are four star-like objects lined up near Jupiter, changing their position night after night.

But then the mysterious stranger turns up again with his own huge 'spyglass', through which he invites Galileo to look. This is where the SF element begins. Having been set up on a heavy tripod, the instrument turns itself upon Jupiter. In fact: "At the moon you will call Number Two." Galileo is amazed to find himself gazing at a white ball glazed with a network of cracks. Then he feels

himself pulled into the view and falling dizzily upwards and into an icy landscape. He has been taken to Europa. In the sky is the vast, banded giant globe of Jupiter itself.

This becomes just the first of a series of visits by Galileo to the four main Jovian moons, which he is gratified to learn will become known as the ‘Galilean moons’. In the 31st century all of these are inhabited by groups of humans, who have made these worlds their own but have split into factions, disagreeing over many matters but especially over an alien life-form which appears to live in the ocean deep below the European crust. The stranger’s name is Ganymede, and he is the leader of that moon. His reason for bringing Galileo here seems rather flimsy: in the future Galileo is revered as ‘the first scientist’, so his presence and views will add weight to the decisions that need to be made.

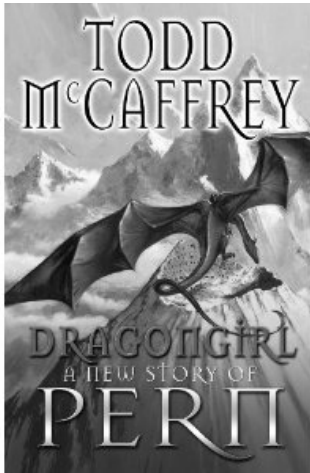
But more importantly, in one of Galileo’s possible futures (for this is indeed a ‘parallel universe’ or ‘alternate world’ type of story) he is burnt at the stake for daring to contradict the Catholic Church’s doctrine that the Earth is the centre of the universe and the Sun, Moon, planets and stars move around it. In ‘our’ universe this did not happen, for Galileo recanted and was instead sentenced to house arrest, so avoiding the fate of Giordano Bruno, who also supported the Copernican model of the universe. Ganymede believes that this ‘reprieve’ set back science and mathematics by centuries, since in the universe where Galileo was burned, it sparked a revolution and acceleration in the study of those subjects, so he wants to persuade Galileo to take this path. Another leader, a woman called Hera who lives on Io, takes Galileo under her wing and guides him. Together they travel to other moons, and even into the clouds of Jupiter itself.

No, Galileo does not really travel, either into the future or to Jupiter. At the same time as he has these adventures his body is still on Earth; for he suffers from a malady called syncope, in which he appears to be essentially in a coma. Time is also condensed, as he ‘awakens’ only hours after falling into one of these episodes. Sometimes he has been given an amnestic, and can remember only jumbled fragments of his experiences; at other times he remembers much more, leaving him in a very confused state of mind. Galileo is well characterised as brilliant, driven, irascible, argumentative. . . He suffers from ill health, including a hernia, and is an insomniac; but he uses this to spend his nights peering through his telescope, writing, and constantly inventing. His family is dysfunctional, with two daughters in a nunnery, a dragon of a mother, a brother who sponges upon him, and a wife with whom he constantly fights until they part. The story of his battles (mainly in writing) with fellow scientists, rivals and religious leaders, and the trials and tribulations of getting his books – notably *SIDEREUS NUNCIUS* – published is recorded vividly and believably. Although somewhat flawed, this is an excellent and original novel, and well worth reading. *DAH*

***DRAGONGIRL* by Todd McCaffrey**

Bantam Press / 482pgs / £17.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0593055878

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



Todd McCaffrey has shouldered the burden of continuing the saga of *Pern* and recounting the stories of the dragonriders that many readers have come to love. *DRAGONGIRL* is a direct sequel to *DRAGONHEART*. The main viewpoint character is Fiona, a holder's daughter who has impressed a gold, or queen, dragon. On Pern, there is a deadly substance called Thread which destroys anything organic. It falls when the Red Star is in the sky. There has been a long interval in which no Thread has fallen. Now it is back. In *DRAGON-HEART*, she and the young, newly hatched dragons go back in time, along with those injured by the Thread. They have three years to grow or recuperate. Now she is back in

her own time, three days later and three years older. Not only do the dragonriders have to fight the menace from the skies, but the dragons are dying from a sickness.

When an entire weyr of dragons and riders is lost as a consequence of the sickness, Fiona is sent to take over the running of the place along with some of the dragons from her old weyr. Fortunately a cure for the sickness turns up just in the nick of time and they only have to contend with the lack of numbers and high casualties.

This novel has a number of problems, not least is that some of the important information, like where the cure came from, is told in another book, *DRAGONSBLOOD*. Much of this is a parallel narrative and for those who have not read it, there are holes in the story; the characters know what has gone on, the reader does not. Choosing Fiona as the main viewpoint character is a mistake. Todd McCaffrey does not write about women very well and the passion in the scenes that should be emotionally charged is considerably underplayed. Also, the women here seem to have an obsession with getting pregnant and spotting who is or is not.

There are many readers who will be delighted to have another *Pern* novel to add to their book-shelf. It is a pity that this one does not match up to the standard of the originals. *PM*

“Whenever a fledgling horror or fantasy writer comes up to me, at a convention or somewhere else, and asks me how they can get their work published, I invariably advise them that their first step should be to join the British Fantasy Society.”

Stephen Jones

Members of the British Fantasy Society currently receive four issues of *Prism* a year, two of *Dark Horizons*, two of *New Horizons*, and various special publications. They can vote in the British Fantasy Awards, join our writing group, Whirlpool, get free entry in the BFS short story competition, and get a £10 discount for FantasyCon. Non-members are welcome on our forums and at our open nights.

www.britishfantasysociety.org



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 rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com

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.

Future books to be discussed will provisionally be...

Forthcoming:- COALESCENT by Stephen Baxter;

DIVERGENCE by Tony Ballantyne;

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN by Jon Avide Lindquist;

HUNTER'S RUN by Martin, Dozois & Abrahams.

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 and great company. More details from Martin Tudor - (empties084 [at] btinternet [dot] com).

ILLUSTRIOUS is the 2011 Eastercon to be held at the Hilton Metropole Hotel, the NEC, Birmingham over the Easter weekend 22-25 April. Guests of Honour are US author David Weber and UK author Peter F Hamilton. Artist GoH is none other than our own David A Hardy! Fan GoH is Vince Doherty. More info: <http://www.illustrious.org.uk/>

YOUR LAST CHANCE!!!!



NOVACON 40 – the Brum Group’s own convention and the longest-running regional convention in the UK, will be once again held at The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG5 2BT. Dates are November 12th to 14th. Guests of Honour are **Iain M Banks** and our Co-President **Brian Aldiss, O.B.E.** Full details at <http://novacon.org.uk/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

December 3rd – Christmas Social

Jan 2011 – Annual General Meeting and Auction

Feb – QUIZ with Birmingham University SF Society

Mar – tba

April 8th – comic SF/Fantasy author ROBERT RANKIN

BRUM GROUP NEWS #470 (November 2010) copyright 2010 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email [rog.peyton \[at\] btinternet \[dot\] com](mailto:rog.peyton@btinternet.com)). 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