

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

OCTOBER 2011

ISSUE 481

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

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);**
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NOVACON 41 CHAIRMAN: STEVE LAWSON

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Friday 14th October

DAVID WINGROVE



Born in 1954, in south London, David Wingrove gave up a career in banking to return to college, graduating with a First Class Honours degree in English and American literature. It was whilst working on his subsequent doctorate (on the works of Hardy, Lawrence and Golding) that he set about the daunting task of researching and then writing the eight massive novels which, between 1989 and 1997, were published as *Chung Kuo*.

He has now added to the series and revised the existing eight books – all to be published in a new 20-volume epic! The first two volumes in the new series – SON OF HEAVEN and DAYLIGHT ON IRON MOUNTAIN - are prequels

Nov 4th - SF author, editor and publisher IAN WHATES will be making his first visit to the Brum Group

to the original series – published in February and November of this year. The 3rd volume, **THE MIDDLE KINGDOM** (originally the first volume, now revised), will be published next spring.

Aside from the *Chung Kuo* sequence, he is also author of the *Myst* trilogy, based on what was, at the time the novels were written, the world's biggest-selling computer game. In addition he has produced several works of criticism and, with Brian Aldiss, is co-author of the highly-acclaimed **TRILLION YEAR SPREE: THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION** (1986) – winner of the prestigious Hugo and Locus awards.

Married to scriptwriter and novelist, Susan Oudot, he has four daughters, and lives in north London, where he is currently working on *Roads to Moscow*, an ambitious time travel trilogy. RGP

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, off New Street.

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. The entrance fee for this meeting is £3 for members, £4 for non-members

A VISIT TO SEE HARRY HARRISON – Rog Peyton

On September 22nd, while on a 3-day break down in East Sussex, I got the opportunity to visit our Honorary President and my very good friend Harry Harrison.

As reported here previously, Harry is 86 and now needs 24/7 care and is in a home in Uckfield. A few days before my visit, his daughter Moira, who lives in nearby Ringmer, moved Harry's computer and office files from his flat in Ringmer into his room in Uckfield so that he can keep in touch with people and continue his writing.

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT RETURNS was published in the US at the end of 2010 and appears in the UK from Jo Fletcher Books this month. Since completing the writing of that book, Harry has been writing his autobiography which Harry informed me is now running at 160,000 words!

Harry was in good spirits, still not believing he is not a young man, and we chatted for a couple of hours before I had to leave to return to Birmingham.

Looking forward to that autobiography Harry! RGP

CHANGES TO RULES FOR THE NOVA AWARDS

After nearly four decades celebrating achievement in British fanzines, the Nova Awards are undergoing a major revamp. Eligibility was extended to cover Irish and certain electronic fanzines in 2002, and now voting is being opened up to all UK and Irish fans. Previously, the franchise was restricted to members of Novacon, the convention which has hosted the award ceremony since 1973. This

In addition, ballot forms will be available at the Novacon website, novacon.org.uk, and votes accepted via e-mail.

One condition remains: all voters must have read at least six different British or Irish fanzines during the previous year, to ensure a basic familiarity with the current field. Novacon maintains a 'longlist' of known eligible fanzines on its website; it currently includes details for twenty titles, fourteen of which are available online. *Steve Green, Administrator*

...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS'

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions to me at [rog.peyton \[at\] btinternet \[dot\] com](mailto:rog.peyton@btinternet.com)

From last year's Birmingham Poet Laureate and long-time Brum Group member CHRIS MORGAN: "I found the September meeting fascinating, with some excellent anecdotes from both you and Stan. I'm sure the two of you could have gone on for much longer, or perhaps you should do the same again another month. There were several things I wanted to add to the discussion, hence this letter.

"I want to emphasise the point (you both made) that back in the 1960s it was extremely difficult for readers of SF to discover that fandom existed. In London and Birmingham it was not easy; in Oxford, where I lived, it was nearly impossible.



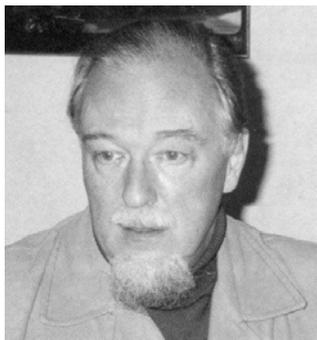
"For a start, buying the paperbacks was a problem. UK publishers put out very few titles, and with no publicity. Copies of some US paperbacks from Ballantine and Pyramid were imported in small numbers by Thorpe & Porter, and could be found, if one was lucky, in independent booksellers. In Oxford it was John's Bookshop in St Michael's Street, where I found titles written or edited by Fred Pohl, collections by Theodore Sturgeon,

novels by Budrys, Blish and Leiber. But I objected to paying the outrageous price of three shillings and sixpence each for them.

"Somehow, I discovered that second-hand SF could be bought mail order from Ken Slater's Operation Fantast, and I received those lists for many years, acquiring many more US titles at lower prices. I'm pretty sure it was one of Ken's lists that mentioned Novacon. I decided to attend, and that was my first con.

"In the sixties, nearly all British SF writers were also fans. They read and wrote about SF before they made their names as authors, and they never forget their fannish roots. So, when I attended Novacon as a neo I spotted Bob Shaw in the

bar and approached him with some inane question like, ‘Are you really the author Bob Shaw?’ to which he replied, ‘I’m afraid so. Would you like to come and meet Jim White and Anne McCaffrey?’ If this sort of wonderful camaraderie doesn’t happen so much today, it’s perhaps the fault of cons and fandom being too large.



“Both of you mentioned the late John Brunner. I found him to be a patient and generous man. He was naturally shy and covered this up with flamboyance and a tendency to show off, though only in public.

“And at one point during the evening, Rog, you said, ‘SF has been much poorer since the 90s,’ which I found myself in agreement with. Yes, few later SF novels have come up to the high standards of *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS* and *THE TIME MACHINE*. But perhaps you meant the 1990s.

“Congratulations to you and Stan for being so wonderfully entertaining.”

<<Thanks Chris for those kind words. It seems that the evening was quite popular – so much so that Stan and I have been invited to reprise last month’s

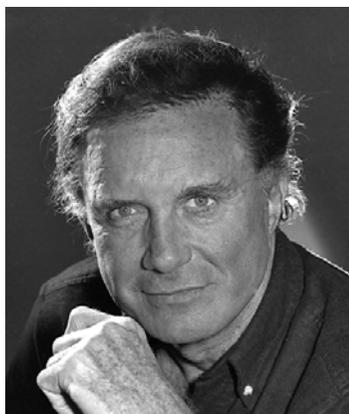
meeting at Novacon 41. As it was totally unrehearsed, the Novacon version should prove to be interesting! I have no idea what I said last month!!!



Apart from talking about the original Birmingham SF Club that ran from the late 40s to early 50s. For those who missed this here’s a photo of the badge (approx 1” diameter) that the small band of post-war fans had. It looks good but it’s so much better in colour – *RGP*>>

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Actor Cliff Robertson (b.1923) died on September 10. Robertson won an Oscar for his portrayal of the title character in the film *Charly*, based on Daniel Keyes’ novel *FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON*. He played the cowboy villain ‘Shame’ in four episodes of *Batman* in the 1960s and also appeared on *The Outer Limits*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers*. He appeared in *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* and among his final role was portraying Peter



Parker's Uncle Ben in three *Spider-Man* movies Australian author Sara Douglass Warneke (b.1957) died on September 26 of ovarian cancer, with which she was diagnosed in 2010. Warneke, who wrote as Sara Douglass, had several of her historical based fantasies published in the US and in the UK, including *The Wayfarer Redemption* series, the *Crucible* series, THE TROY GAME, and THE DEVIL'S DIADEM, published just last month Horror author and editor Mark W. Worthen (b.1962) died on September 19. Worthen began publishing in 1993 and from 1998 to 2005 edited on the on-line zine *Blood Rose*. He served as the webmaster for the Horror Writers of America for several years and sat on the Stoker Committee. In 2007, he received the organization's Richard Laymon President's Award for Service Connie Willis has won the 2011 Robert A. Heinlein Award, presented for outstanding published works in science fiction and technical writings to inspire the human exploration of space Editor-in-chief Betsy Mitchell has announced plans to take early retirement from Del Rey books in December of this year. Mitchell joined Del Rey in 2002 after a long career which included editorial jobs at Baen, Bantam Spectra, and one of the founders of Warner Aspect. Prior to becoming an editor, Mitchell worked on the staff at *Analog* magazine Harlan Ellison has filed a lawsuit claiming that the upcoming FOX film IN TIME is a copyright infringement of his Hugo and Nebula Award-winning story "Repent, Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman". The lawsuit seeks an injunction to prevent the film's release and the disposal of all copies of the film Amazon.com has announced that George



R.R. Martin has sold over a million Kindle e-books. Martin said, "Groucho Marx one said, 'I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member', but even Groucho might have made an exception for the Kindle Million Club. It's a real thrill to be inducted into this one." Martin has been writing professionally since 1971. He is the eleventh author to sell over a million copies, joining writers including James Patterson, Suzanne Collins, and Charlaine Harris Lucas Film

has confirmed that changes will be made to the Blu Ray releases of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, including a re-dubbing of the sound made by Obi-Wan Kenobi when he first approaches Luke Skywalker and the Tuskan Raiders and having Darth Vader scream "Noooo!" when the Emperor is attacking Luke in the third film among other changes. Purists have already indicated their displeasure with the decision

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS

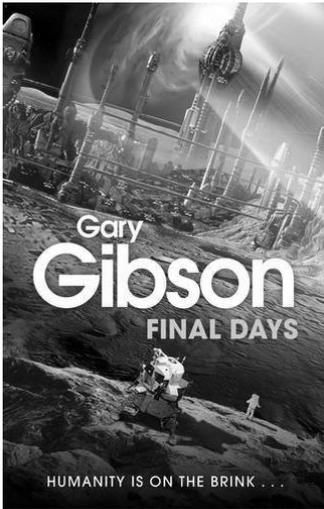


(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

***FINAL DAYS* by Gary Gibson**

Tor / 373pgs / £17.99 hardcover / ISBN 978 0230748774

Reviewed by Michael Jones



It is no exaggeration to say that British writers such as Reynolds, Hamilton, Asher and Banks are coming to lead the world in the production of far-future space fiction and with his latest book Gary Gibson continues his bid to stake his place in this illustrious company.

He has set it in 2235 when, through the advent of wormhole technology, more than a dozen interstellar colonies have been linked to Earth. Most writers employing this kind of scenario either overlook or choose to ignore the fact that, according to the rules of Minkowski Spacetime, two points separated in space by, say, ten light-years are also separated in time by ten years. Gibson however has exploited this principle to enable the wormholes to be used for time-travel into the future; however, the idea that two-way travel will be possible is rather less plausible. Be that as it may, he has here employed the concept in its own terms to good effect in this story.

As well as the colonisation effort, explorations in space have uncovered a huge network of wormholes left by some other intelligent race or races and some investigation has taken place. A site one hundred trillion years in the future has been visited and some future technology recovered. However, it has been discovered that both the Earth and the Moon-based terminal of the local wormhole network will be totally destroyed within ten years. Both things may be connected, but how? And will it be possible to prevent or reverse this course of events?

Leaving aside these exciting and dramatic aspects, the book is generally well-written and provides a convincing and fascinating portrayal of life in a world filled with futuristic communications, transport and weapons. Less happily, the story is told in alternating segments from the point of view of at least four leading characters, one of whom is present in two versions of himself including one from ten years in the future. Keeping track of them all, seeing how they interact and

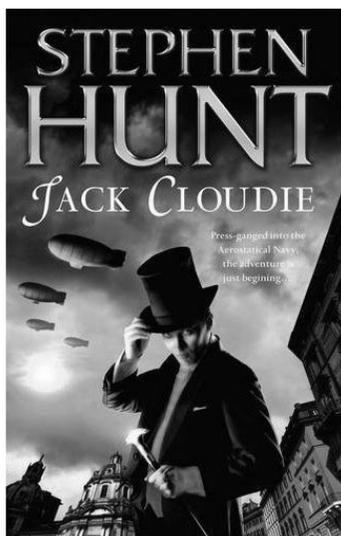
anticipating how they will continue doing so, is not always easy. Each individual story comes to some kind of conclusion by the end of the book, but which of those conclusions will best serve the interests of humanity as a whole remains unclear.

Fortunately, author Gibson is already hard at work on the necessary sequel and hopefully all will be explained. In the meantime, this first part of the story can be recommended as well worth reading. *Mj*

JACK CLOUDIE by Stephen Hunt

**Voyager / 410pgs / £17.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0007289646 /
£12.99 trade paperback / ISBN: 978-0007289707**

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



This is the fifth novel set in a world where steam reigns supreme. At least it does in the Jackelian Kingdom. A Jack Cloudie is a sailor on one of the country's airships. When Jack Keats is condemned to death for nearly pulling off the greatest bank robbery in history, he finds his sentence commuted to service in the Royal Aeronautical Navy. His ship is the Iron Partridge, regarded as the worst and unluckiest ship in the fleet. The ship's mission: to fly into enemy airspace and find out where they are getting their lifting gas for a new fleet of airships.

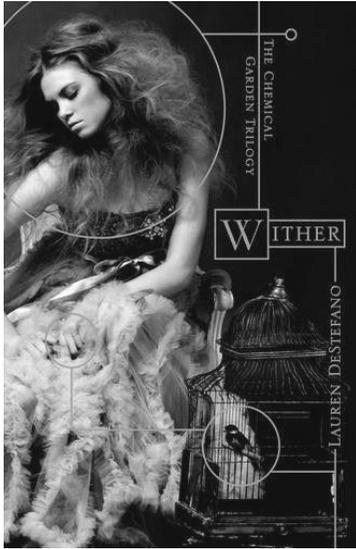
The basic difference between Jackels and the Cassarabian Empire is their attitude to technology. While the former have embraced the steam age and welcome members of the race of sentient steam men for their skills, the latter's technology is biological in nature. Womb mages create strange animals to fulfil the roles machinery would normally take. They are obviously skilled at manipulating DNA. In this novel we begin to get a clearer idea of the history of this world. It has seen, and lost, far more sophisticated civilisations than are currently warring with each other. These are remnants of something long gone. There have been hints in previous novels but here it is rising to the surface.

Although having the same setting as other novels, this one can easily **be** read without prior knowledge. One familiar character, Jared Black (here introduced as John Oldcastle) stalks these pages, running, as usual, straight into mayhem. Written in the tradition of pulp fiction the plot twists can get a little silly at times but ultimately is a fast, furious romp. *PM*

***WITHER* by Lauren DeStefano**

Voyager / 358pgs / £9.99 trade paperback / ISBN: 978-0007425471

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



This is a curate's egg of a novel – good in parts. The image that we have of the future that Rhine Ellery lives in is coloured by what she has been told and since this is a first person narrative, the reader's world view is inevitably the same. Some kind of war has destroyed the rest of the world leaving America isolated. The USA has its own problems, reaping the consequences of a eugenics programme. The first generation to benefit from the scheme are fit, healthy and long lived but their children are doomed to an early death, girls at twenty, boys at twenty-five. One faction of the rich and wealthy want a cure, another faction wants nature to take its course and see the end of the human race.

Rhine's story is a small capsule within the greater picture. She and her twin brother are sixteen and fending for themselves in Manhattan when she is kidnapped by Vaughn Ashby looking for wives for his son. Linden has five years left but his current wife, Rose, is dying. Rhine, Cecily and Jenna are her replacements. Each has a different attitude to the situation. Rhine only wants to escape but is effectively imprisoned in the Florida mansion. She also suspects that Vaughn is carrying out horrific experiments in the basements in the effort to find a cure.

Though the background is suspect, and we only get the one view, there are interesting aspects to this volume if read as a young adult novel. It is probably worth looking out for the second book in the sequence to see if any of the world view issues are resolved. *PM*

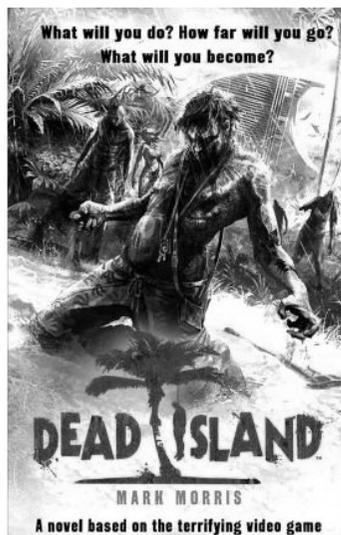
***DEAD ISLAND* by Mark Morris**

Bantam Books / 334pgs / £6.99 paperback / ISBN:

Reviewed by Theresa Derwin

DEAD ISLAND is the eagerly awaited novelisation of the game released on 8th September.

Royal Palms is a luxury vacation resort on the tropical paradise island of Banoi. A plague breaks out on the island and the islanders and tourists are transformed into flesh-eating dead. Four survivors who are inexplicably immune must fight to survive and escape from the island, aided by a mysterious voice on



their mobile phones. Visceral, bloody, gory, rather kitsch (but also fun) DEAD ISLAND fleshes out the game (pardon the pun), creating characters with histories and motivation. Have no illusions, this is pulp fiction but quality pulp; the writing is a class above the norm and imbued with Morris's signature exploration of fear and loss.

Some of the characters are blatant survivor stereotypes but have been designed for the game and brought to life by Morris. The characters in the 'game', or in this case, the novel, become more than simple zombie fodder or avatars. The reader actually cares what happens to these people. There are lots of nods to the tropes of game play; a mysterious benefactor, the choosing of weapons, a martial arts expert and an open ending, but this novel still makes for a tremendously fun read. Finishing with a cliff hanger, I am actually hoping for a sequel, so invested am I in these protagonists. Zombie goodness!

TD

RECOMMENDED SF BOOKS – Rog Peyton

Another selection to take the total to 80. Please note that these 10 books are NOT my favourite ten, or whatever – I've just picked books from the 100 at random. Another 10 next month. Please remember that I may be able to supply most of these titles – just email me and I can bring orders to the Group meetings.

Currently in print and widely available:-

Eric Brown – THE KINGS OF ETERNITY (2011) I've only finished this a few weeks ago but – wow – what a brilliant story. It's been a long time since I enjoyed a book so much. Shifting alternately from the 1930s to the 1990s, it gradually reveals a story of immortality and galactic civilisations that is told in an incredibly original way. (Solaris 978-1907519710 - £7.99)

Jack Finney - TIME AND AGAIN (1970) A true classic as only Jack Finney could write. The story of a 20th century artist/photographer who is sent back to 18th century New York to photograph and sketch. But on arriving his trip turns into something else entirely. (Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks 978-0575073609 £6.99)

Robert Heinlein - CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY (1957) Love him or hate him, when Heinlein creates great characters you remember them – and Baslim the Cripple and his slave Thorby are among his greatest creations. A novel that explores the question of freedom and slavery. (Gallery import 978-1416505525)

Frank Herbert - DRAGON IN THE SEA (1956) Herbert's very first novel and the one that gets lost in the shadow of DUNE. But it's better than DUNE. The story of oil exploration at the bottom of the oceans is memorable. The US paperback was titled 22ND CENTURY SUB and later UNDER PRESSURE. (For import 978-0765317742)

And the out-of-print books:-

Octavia Butler - Patternist series/WILD SEED (1980)/**MIND OF MY MIND** (1977)/**SURVIVOR** (1978)/**PATTERNMASTER** (1976)/**CLAY'S ARK** (1984). OK, 5 books for one choice may be cheating a little but the story of Doro collecting and breeding mutant/unusual humans to create a super-race, that commences in the 17th century and moves book by book through to the far future is one great, wonderful story. All out of print but well worth searching for.

Christopher Priest - THE SPACE MACHINE (1976) An homage to H G Wells and a sequel to both THE TIME MACHINE and WAR OF THE WORLDS, written in Wells's style which Chris studied before embarking on this gem of a novel. (If anyone needs this I have the first edition hardcover for sale - £14.99 – just ask)

Robert Silverberg - THE STOCHASTIC MAN (1975) Lew Nichols is in the business of stochastic prediction. A mixture of sophisticated analysis and inspired guesswork, it is the nearest man can get to predicting the future. Nichols can't actually see the future. However, Martin Carvajal apparently can and he offers to help Nichols do so too...

Cordwainer Smith - NORSTRILIA (1964/1968 – combined 1975). First appearing split into two slim, edited paperbacks – THE PLANET BUYER and THE UNDERPEOPLE, it finally got published in 1975 in its entirety. “The discovery of stroon, a drug that confers near immortality on humans, has made Old North Australia rich. So rich that when Rod McBain has to flee the planet because someone wants him dead, he buys the Earth.”

Kate Wilhelm - THE CLEWISTON TEST (1976) A psychological thriller and a novel of human experimentation. This is Wilhelm at her best and deserves to be reprinted for today's audience.

Jerry Yulsman - ELLEANDER MORNING (1984) If one book deserves to be reissued as a classic it's this. When Lena Morning is left a legacy by her grandmother Elleander, she finds it is a book. But a very strange book – THE TIME LIFE HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II. She has it examined by experts but everyone is puzzled – it's obviously a hoax as everyone knows there has only ever been one World War! There are second-hand copies on Amazon from 1p! Grab one NOW!

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 to be announced

AN EVENING WITH SIR TERRY PRATCHETT. To celebrate the launch of his 50th book, SNUFF, Terry Pratchett will be appearing in conversation at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on Tuesday 18th October. This is a unique opportunity to hear Terry talking about his latest work and the writing process, and to hear an excerpt from the book. Ticket prices include a voucher for one copy of SNUFF (Doubleday - £18.99), to be exchanged on the night. Tickets - <http://www.seetickets.com/Tour/AN-EVENING-WITH-TERRY-PRATCHETT>

THE FESTIVAL OF FANTASTIC FILMS 2011 - The 22nd Annual Convention of the Society of Fantastic Films will be held on the 21st - 23rd October, 2011 at the Days Hotel, Sackville St., Manchester (The Manchester Conference Centre). Website is <http://fantastic-films.com/festival/>

STARMAKER: THE PHILOSOPHY OF OLAF STAPLEDON - 23rd November at the British Interplanetary Society - see their website <http://www.bis-space.com/2011/08/18/2424/starmaker-the-philosophy-of-olaf-stapledon>

OLYMPUS 2012 - The 2012 Eastercon, 6th - 9th April 2012 at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, UK. Guests of Honour: Paul Cornell, George R.R. Martin, Steph Swainston. Fan Guests of Honour: Margaret Austin, Martin Easterbrook. Registration is £55 and increases on Aug 31st so register NOW. Website is <http://www.olympus2012.org/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

Nov 4th – author, editor and publisher IAN WHATES

Dec 2nd – The Christmas Social

Jan 13th 2012 – Annual General Meeting and Auction

Feb 10th – the Annual Quiz

Mar - tba



NOVACON 41 will be held over the weekend of November 11th to the 13th at The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham. NG5 2BT. The Guest of Honour will be SF author JOHN MEANEY. Further details can be found on the website <http://novacon.org.uk/>

BRUM GROUP NEWS #481 (October 2011) copyright 2011 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rog [dot] peyton [at] büninternet [dot] 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 Membership Secretary, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG