

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

DECEMBER 2008

ISSUE 447

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

COMMITTEE: VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN);  
VICKY COOK (SECRETARY); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);  
ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR); WILLIAM MCCABE;  
NOVACON 38 CHAIRMAN: HELENA BOWLES

WEBSITE:  
[www.birminghamsgroup.org.uk/](http://www.birminghamsgroup.org.uk/)

EMAIL:  
[bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk)



Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December

# CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Once more the Group has arranged a social Christmas evening where we play various, possibly illegal, variations on the old medieval game of skittles. Plenty of food is available, buffet style, and we even allow you to buy alcoholic beverages from the bar. Real ale is available as well as cider, wine and I do believe, but can't confirm, that various non-alcoholic drinks are also served. 'Non-alcoholic' drinks? Do they really exist....? Naaah!

This is **ticket only** and you should already have your tickets if you're hoping to go to this event. If you've forgotten to get your ticket and want to go, contact me on 477 6901, and I will put you on a waiting list for the possibility of any cancellations.

*RGP*

**January 9th 2009– The Annual General Meeting followed by The Auction. Venue for this to be announced as the Briar Rose will be closed in January.**

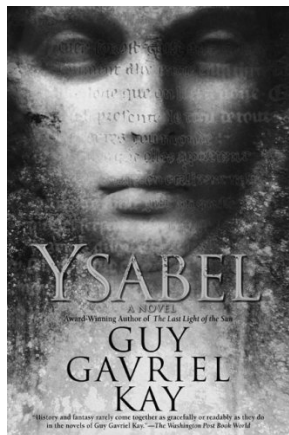
## ***THE NOVA AWARDS***

The Nova Awards for British fan writing, art and publishing were presented the weekend of November 14 at Novacon 38

**Best fanzine:** PROLAPSE edited by Peter Weston

**Best writer:** Claire Brialey

**Best artist:** Alison Scott



for PS Publishing

**Special Award, Non-Professional:** Midori Snyder & Terri Windling for Endicott Studios Website

## ***WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNERS***

The World Fantasy Awards were announced at the World Fantasy Convention in Calgary on November 2. The winners are listed below.

**Life Achievement:** Patricia McKillip and Leo & Diane Dillon

**Novel:** YSABEL by Guy Gavriel Kay

**Novella:** "Illyria" by Elizabeth Hand

**Short Story:** "Singing of Mount Abora" by Theodora Goss

**Anthology:** INFERNO edited by Ellen Datlow

**Collection:** TINY DEATHS by Robert Shearman

**Artist:** Edward Miller

**Special Award, Professional:** Peter Crowther



## ***INTERNATIONAL HORROR GUILD WINNERS***

The winners of the International Horror Guild Awards have been announced. The judges for this year's awards were Edward Bryant, Stefan R. Dziemianowicz, Ann Kennedy, and Hank Wagner, with award administrator Paula Guran.

**Living Legend:** Peter Straub

**Novel:** THE TERROR by Dan Simmons

**Long Fiction:** "Softspoken" by Lucius Shepard

**Mid-Length Fiction:** "Closet Dreams" by Lisa Tuttle

**Short Fiction:** "Honey in the Wound" by Nancy Etchemendy

**Illustrated Narrative:** THE NIGHTMARE FACTORY by Thomas Ligotti

**Collection:** DAGGER KEY AND OTHER STORIES by Lucius Shepard

**Anthology:** INFERNO edited by Ellen Datlow

**Non-Fiction:** MARIO BAVA: ALL THE COLORS OF DARK by Tim Lucas

**Periodical:** POSTSCRIPTS edited by Peter Crowther

**Art:** Elizabeth McGrath for “The Incurable Disorder”

## ***THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Jan 2009***

NOW is the time to be thinking about the Group’s activities during the forthcoming year. At next month’s AGM the 2008 Committee will stand down and elections will be held to elect the 2009 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.

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 organise, prepare and supervise the annual Christmas Social.

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 about collection of membership fees etc.

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 BSFG 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!**

## ***...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 [<>](mailto:rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)

## ***NEWS IN BRIEF . . .***

.... Author **Michael Crichton** (b.1942) died on November 4. Crichton was best known in science fiction circles for his novels JURASSIC PARK, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN and WESTWORLD. Many of his novels were turned into successful films and he also created the television series ER, which debuted in 1994 and is currently in its final season .... **Christopher Lloyd**, who played Doc in the *Back to the Future* films, and **Bob May**, who played the Robot in LOST IN SPACE, both lost their homes to the wildfires raging in California .... Despite his death being wrongly reported on the internet last month, **Forrest J Ackerman** celebrated his 92nd birthday on November 24<sup>th</sup> .... For a variety of reasons, ASFA President **Elizabeth Humphrey** has tendered her resignation, which was accepted. Secretary **Jannie Shea** has also tendered her resignation. **David Hardy** is currently the organization's acting President and the Secretary position remains vacant for the moment .... The first Warwick Prize nominations list has been announced. The award, which is to be given every other year for substantial pieces of writing in the English language, in any genre or form. The theme for the 2009 prize is 'Complexity'. This year, the twenty items on the long list include **Ian McDonald's** science fiction novel BRASYL. The judging panel for the prize is chaired by **China Miéville** and includes journalist **Maya Jaggi**; novelist, translator and academic **Maureen Freely**; Britain's first book blogger **Stephen Mitchelmore** and University of Warwick mathematician Professor **Ian Stewart** .... SPACESHIP AWAY is now a 48pg magazine devoted to **Dan Dare** and the **Eagle**. Issue 16 is now available. Full details from

www.spaceshipaway.org.uk .... Podiobooks is a website that hosts free mp3 downloads of various books. These are usually readings by the original authors of material that is not published anywhere else. These are recorded in parts and uploaded over a period of time. Among those currently being recorded and uploaded are SPIRAL & WAR MACHINE by **Andy Remic** who spoke to the group last October and gave out free copies of Quake (another book in the same series). The completed parts are available at [www.podiobooks.com/title/spiral](http://www.podiobooks.com/title/spiral) and [www.podiobooks.com/title/war-machine](http://www.podiobooks.com/title/war-machine). The site also has titles available from **Mercedes Lackey** and **Cory Doctorow** - the latter is read by the author ....

RGP



## BOOK REVIEWS

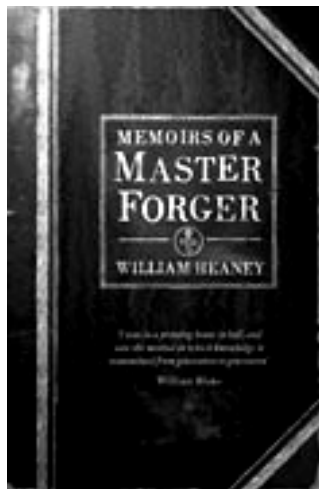


(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at [rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk)) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

### ***MEMOIRS OF A MASTER FORGER* by ‘William Heaney’**

**Gollancz / 308 pages / hardcover / £9.99 / ISBN: 978-0575082977**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**



The word ‘memoirs’ in the title and the first-person narrative suggest that this is a work of autobiography, but it is actually a novel pure and simple (although in truth it is neither pure nor simple). Graham Joyce has told us that he wrote it in reaction to an increasing current trend in the publishing world to make big profits from fake memoirs and celebrity fake novelists. He has produced a novel which looks on the surface like one of these fake memoirs, with no mention of his own name.

The titular William Heaney lives a life of chicanery and double-dealing, organising illicit activities by other people, one of whom produces superb forgeries of rare first edition novels worth tens of thousands of pounds (although it is to Heaney’s credit that the profits of this activity are funnelled into a shelter for homeless people). And he sees demons – not the traditional horns-and-wings variety but manifestations of the negative aspects of his own and other people’s lives. These visions of the supernatural influence how he deals with the events recounted in the book.

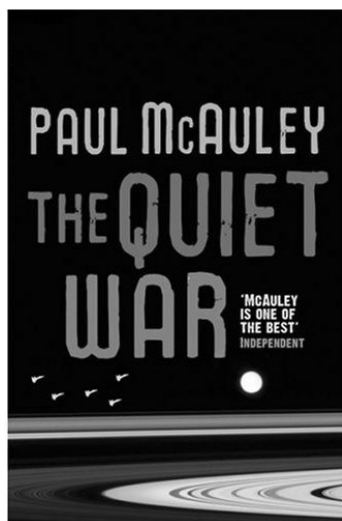
It becomes apparent however that he is a charlatan and his life is all smoke and mirrors. He appears at first not to be at all the Master Forger he claims until one realises (helped by a hint dropped by Graham to the BSG) that Heaney himself is probably a forgery. To have forged himself he must be a Master Forger indeed! So nothing can be depended upon and perhaps the demons are mere delusions along with much else. One or two others can see the demons, but can they be believed?

Thus the supernatural element of the story remains somewhat ambiguous and the book remains on an uncertain boundary between fantasy and realism. Even the ending, while seeming to provide a resolution for both Heaney and his story, fails to provide an answer. This is a complex and multi-layered work to which everyone must bring his or her own interpretation. Excellent. *Mj*

### ***THE QUIET WAR by Paul J. McAuley***

**Gollancz / 439pgs / hardcover / £18.99 / ISBN: 978-0575079328 / trade pbk / £12.99 / ISBN: 978-0575079335**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**



In the Twenty-third Century the Earth has been virtually destroyed by a combination of climate change, pollution and overpopulation. A fractured humanity has split into two factions. On Earth, the prevailing ethos is Green, working to restore the human race to the best of what it once was while minimising its footprint on a restored planet. On the other hand the Outers have colonised the moons of Jupiter and Saturn and use genetic manipulation techniques wherever these will help to further their ends. The activities of the Outers are resented on Earth and although the story opens with a serious-minded attempt at Peace and Reconciliation, a combination of clandestine manoeuvres and shifting political allegiances leads to a situation where war is inevitable.

The book is well-written and the story well-told. Passages describing habitats on the moons of the Outer Planets are particularly evocative, displaying the author's background as a biologist, the technological side shows his mastery of the themes of hard SF and the people through whose eyes the story is seen unfolding are interesting and well-rounded characters.

Unfortunately it takes rather too long to get anywhere and the true theme emerges only slowly so that for most of the time it has remained difficult to see where it is going. The various threads one has been following are subsumed

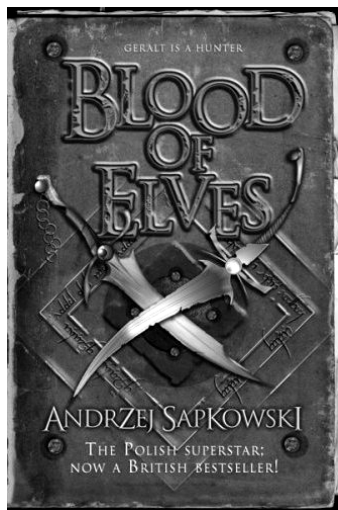
into a commentary on the influence of genetics on the complex inter-relationship between evolution and basic human nature. Meanwhile, for the several important characters, there is no final resolution except for those overtaken by death. The remainder are left dangling as loose ends whereas one would have liked to know what happened to them in the fullness of time.

In conclusion therefore, this is found to be a complex and interesting book which would have benefited from being either shorter or longer. If shorter its principal themes and objectives might sooner have become more readily apparent; if longer its eventual conclusions could have been more neatly tidied up. By falling between these two stools it remains a lesser book than it might have been, although it is still a grand and sweeping tale. *Mj*

### ***BLOOD OF ELVES by Andrzej Sapkowski***

**Gollancz / 315pgs /hardcover / £18.99 / ISBN: 978-0575077843 /  
trade pbk / £12.99 / ISBN: 978-0575083189**

**Reviewed by Dave Corby**



BLOOD OF ELVES, by Andrzej Sapkowski, has been translated by Danusia Stok from the original Polish. I must admit to not having read too many fantasies not originally written in English, so this comes as something of a change. I understand that Sapkowski is somewhat popular as a fantasy writer in Poland; BLOOD OF ELVES was originally published in 1994, and forms the first volume in a series of some 5 books. Beware, however, that the sequels remain published in Polish only at the present time.

On first impression the text is unintentionally hard going, mostly due to an almost total lack of character description. This may be because the series concerns certain characters who have previously turned up in Sapkowski's short story collection *THE LAST WISH* (Gollancz, 2007). Anyone unfamiliar with the short stories, however, will find their imagination working overtime at the start to form mental impressions of these characters merely from their names and actions. Once this is established, however, the text settles down into a comfortable, familiar feeling fantasy mode.

The background and setting seem almost stereotypically Tolkien-inspired; the setting would not seem out of place in a *Dungeon & Dragons* game, replete with clichéd elves, dwarves, etc., and many of the main characters seem to fit comfortable-feeling stereotypes as well. It may be that Sapkowski is skilfully tapping into well-liked examples of popular fantasy, but the book also feels a little

redundant as a result – what is *BLOOD OF ELVES* doing that you have not read before?

Thankfully the story seems to have a bit more bite to it, weaving, as it does, quite an interesting and encouraging first part to a saga. Sapkowski seems to have a knack for parcelling out bits of the plot in a way that keeps the reader guessing without irritating, while hinting at greater depths and ominous deeds yet to come. So neatly is this done that it reminded me of Terry Pratchett's writings, which is surely no mean feat.

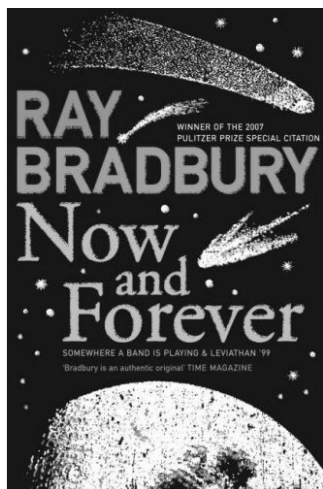
In fact, the story being rather nice and the plot seeming so promising has heightened my anticipation for the sequels (assuming they ever arrive). In part this distresses me, as in trying to conclude I can only describe the book as fun, yet redundant. It is an enjoyable romp, yet a total waste of time; it will not challenge the reader, nor introduce any new ideas into fantasy (yet?), but it is written well enough to be enjoyable. If you want a well written piece of stereotyped Tolkien-esque 'high fantasy' then you could well get some enjoyment out of this. However, if you are looking for something new, then you may want to look elsewhere.

DC

### ***NOW AND FOREVER by Ray Bradbury***

**HarperCollins / 233pgs / paperback / £7.99 / ISBN 978-0007284733**

**Reviewed by William McCabe**



When I was young, I was told there were 3 great SF writers: they were Asimov, Heinlein & Bradbury. As I grew older, I saw how mechanical Asimov was and the overwhelming ego that was Heinlein. I found those two almost unreadable after a while. Bradbury had his problems too. There was a sort of over-romantic view of rural life that hung over so many stories. He didn't do that often enough to make it unreadable. They say he still writes. I wonder about that.

You could say that these two stories represent his best and worst. One of the high points of his career was working on the script of *MOBY DICK* with John Huston in 1956. He's already written a fictionalised account of his experience (*GREEN SHADOWS*, *WHITE WHALE*) and "Leviathan '99" is his SF version of *MOBY DICK*. This isn't the first appearance of the story. It's been written for the radio and was broadcast by the BBC with Christopher Lee. It was rewritten for the stage and played only once. Since then it's been heavily cut to produce the 89 page story included here. It works well. It's as good as anything he wrote in the 50s and feels just like it was



written then. If there are any complaints it's that the story has a dated feel and isn't original but these are just trivial.

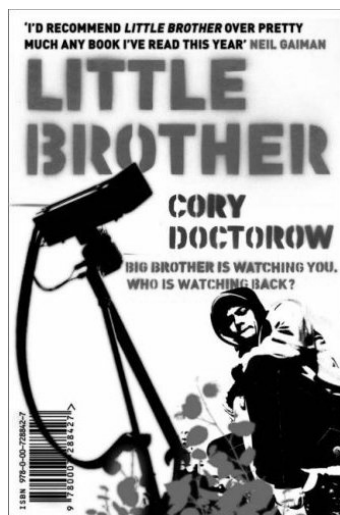
"Somewhere a Band is Playing" is something else entirely. Although this, too, was written as a screenplay many years back, it has never been produced. Bradbury says that he rewrote the script many times over the years to suit the age of the actress he had chosen to play in it (Katharine Hepburn). He does not say how much trouble he took to rewrite it for print. It still needs a good editor. There are times when he reveals some point of plot more than once and expects surprise each time. He seems to repeat some things too much. The plot seems too predictable. At it's worst, it lays on the sentiment as much as he ever did. Admittedly it's written as a romance with a twist that comes between SF and classical fantasy but he still lays it on too thick.

Here you have a great writer at his best and worst. Golden age pulp SF and sickly-sweet sloppily edited romantic fantasy. WAM

### ***LITTLE BROTHER* by Cory Doctorow**

**HarperCollins / 374pgs / paperback / £7.99 / ISBN 978-0007288427**

**Reviewed by William McCabe**



There was a time when SF stories were written so that young people would read them and develop some kind of enthusiasm about the science that was involved in the story. This is like that. It does that quite well. This time the science is all about computer data security, codes, and how to keep yourself anonymous on the internet. There is enough plot involved to make it interesting and the science is kept simple enough (although there are pointers for further reading) to prevent alienating the audience. All this is most important as this is a book for teenagers. The central characters are at high school, all of the bad guys are adults in a position of authority. The situation makes youthful rebellion into a very good thing. Everything is tailored for a particular age

group.

This is not entirely a good thing. There are times when the plot seems overly contrived. The necessary incompetence of adults who should be more capable brings a cartoonish quality that reduces the dramatic impact.

In the wake of a terrorist attack on San Francisco, more severe than anything the US has seen before, the Department of Homeland Security takes over making the city into something like a police state. People are arrested for keeping any kind of secret and imprisoned without trial. Marcus and his friends

use all kinds of internet communications methods that were designed for people living under violent totalitarian regimes to raise group protests against the new society they live in. Can they stay ahead of the Keystone Kops DHS spies?

Supposedly the internet/cryptography science is all real and accurate and you can look it up on the internet. That and other things are explained in the 3 chapters of the afterword at the end. You can also find a list of recommended books on hacking, cryptography, hippies and the odd SF novel. There's even a recommendation for a record that was deleted 40 years ago and has never been reissued. Doctorow is a capable writer but I wonder if he really knows what he's doing.

WAM

## ***FORTHCOMING EVENTS***



**THE ILLUSTRATORS: THE BRITISH ART OF ILLUSTRATION 1800 – 2008.** A new exhibition organised by the London-based Chris Beetles Gallery is to feature art from the very first Dan Dare comic story, drawn by Frank Hampson. The exhibition opens Saturday 15 November is described as the world's largest selection of original illustrative artwork for sale, with a display of over 1000 pictures detailing over 200 years of "a nostalgic and cultural significant artform". Included is art by iconic children's illustrators such as Mabel Lucie Attwell and Quentin Blake, Express cartoonist Giles, Daily Mirror editorial cartoonist Sir David Low and many others. Line illustrations by Helen

Jacob featuring King Arthur are just some of the delights of the exhibition. The Dan Dare pages by Frank Hampson are taken from the first 'Venus' story that ran in the original editions of Eagle comic in the 1950s and command a substantial asking price of over £6000. The Chris Beetles Gallery in St. James's, London, has been famous for promoting the art and history of illustration and specialises in over two centuries of English art. Chris Beetles, who owns the business, has been dealing for 25 years. Accompanying the exhibition is a sumptuous 140 page catalogue containing biographies, notes and 342 illustrations it is available from the gallery for £15 + p&p (£2 UK, £5 Europe, £10 Rest of the world). The Exhibition opens Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 November 2008: 10.00am - 5.30pm and continues until 3 January, 10.00am - 5.30pm Monday – Sunday.



THE amazing **Batpod** bike from Batman blockbuster THE DARK KNIGHT will be a major feature at the **Carole Nash International Motorcycle and Scooter Show**, to be held at the NEC, Birmingham, UK, from Saturday, November 29 to Sunday, December 7.

This awesome machine will be on display every day in Hall 2 of the exhibition centre and Bike Show fans can catch up on the amazing machine in action, in an exclusive THE DARK KNIGHT DVD competition. Batman's bike was designed by production designer Nathan Crowley and director Christopher Nolan, then built by special FX supervisor Chris Corbould and his team. The machine was ridden for the movie by legendary stuntman Jean-Pierre Goy.



## LX2009

**the 2009 Eastercon.**

April 10-13, 2009 – Cedar Court Hotel, Bradford.

Guests of Honour: Tim Powers, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, David Lloyd



Fan Guests of Honour: Mary and Bill Burns.

**Website is [www.LX2009.com](http://www.LX2009.com)**

## ***FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG***

**January 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and AUCTION**

**February 13<sup>th</sup> – QUIZ** against Birmingham University SF Group

**March 13<sup>th</sup> – SF author TONY BALLANTYNE**

**April 3<sup>rd</sup> – to be announced**

**May 8<sup>th</sup> – to be announced**

**June 13<sup>th</sup> – to be confirmed**

**July 10<sup>th</sup> – JO FLETCHER returns with more editor's tales**

**August 14<sup>th</sup> – Summer Social**

**September 11<sup>th</sup> – to be announced**

**October 9<sup>th</sup> – to be announced**

**November 13<sup>th</sup> – to be announced**

**December 4<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Social**

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #447** copyright 2008 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email [rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rgp@rogpeyton.fsnet.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.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS  
& A HAPPY NEW YEAR  
TO ALL OUR READERS**

**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