

Brum Group News

The *Free* Monthly Newsletter of the
BIRMINGHAM
SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

NOVEMBER 2003 ISSUE 386

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+ Steve Jones & William McCabe

NOVACON 33 Chairman: Martin Tudor

Friday October 31st at 7.45pm **DOCTOR WHO 40th Anniversary** **DAVID HOWE**

40 years ago, the BBC started a regular science fiction series on a Saturday evening, called DOCTOR WHO starring William Hartnell in the title role. Unfortunately, to a large extent, it got lost in the programme reshuffling caused by the assassination of President John F Kennedy the previous day. The whole world was talking about the assassination and the start of a new series on TV was hardly major news.

But DOCTOR WHO survived and continued into the 90s and even now, persistent rumours abound concerning a 'resurrection' and which actor - or even actress - will play the good doctor.

David Howe is well-known around the SF and Fantasy world attending many conventions over the years. He has been a DOCTOR WHO fan for many years and is currently the owner of Telos Publishing who have been producing limited edition volumes of brand new DOCTOR WHO novels.

Come and celebrate 40 years of DOCTOR WHO and recall the Daleks, the Cybermen, etc., etc. *RGP*

This month we are again at the Britannia Hotel in Corporation Street. The entrance to the hotel is Union Passage almost opposite the Odeon cinema. Our meeting room will be shown on the display board in the foyer but will almost certainly be the Lichfield Room.

December 5th Meeting - our Christmas Social/Party. You need tickets for this meeting - **HAVE YOU GOT YOURS YET?** (see inside for details)

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Date: Friday 5th December 2003
Time: 7.30pm onwards (till approx. 11pm)
Place: The Lighthouse public house, Coombs Road, Halesowen
Cost: £10 per person
Programme: Meal, 9-pin skittles, prizes, a good time

Getting there - we meet at the #9 bus stop in Colmore Row at 6.30pm. We will travel to Halesowen (about 30mins). At Halesowen we will get a taxi to the venue which should be under £1.50 each presuming 4 sharing a taxi.

The return transport is all included in the price of your ticket.

Please send your cheques made out to the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, together with your name and address (AND YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER), whether you want the coach back and your meal choices to Pat Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, B73 5JH. or pay Vernon at the October meeting. PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT ALL INFORMATION SENT.

For all other information see September or October newsletters.

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... we've just heard the sad news of the death of Beryl Mercer at the age of 79. Beryl (then Beryl Henley) was a member of the old Birmingham SF Group from the 60s. She was an avid letter-writer who met Archie Mercer at a convention and the pair moved away to Cornwall and virtually became recluse the BBC top 100 books got reduced down to the final 21 of which there were 8 SF/fantasy books

RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

RGP

***THE WELL OF LOST PLOTS* by Jasper Fforde**
Hodder & Stoughton / 360pgs / £10.99 / trade paperback
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.
Rating: * * * *

As a speaker, Jasper Fforde is entertaining and a good salesman for his books. Whether you like his writing or not will depend much on your taste in written humour. As the title suggests, there is a degree of reliance on puns. There are a lot of lasting images and interesting throwaways.

This is the third of the series starring Thursday Next, a jurisdiction agent. Her job takes her into fictional worlds to solve crimes. This fictional world is a dimension which underlies our own. She is in the awkward situation that her husband was eliminated as a child, by time travelling criminals, so theoretically she should never have met him. Although no-one else remembers him, she does, and she is pregnant. At the start of this novel, she is hiding out in an unpublished crime thriller, having done a swap with one of the characters. This means that at intervals she has to act out the scenes from the book which is so dreadful that it is likely to be demolished. Humour is added by the presence of the pet Dodo, which has laid an egg, and by having billeted on her two Generics – unformed characters who have to go to school to learn roles in order to get a job working as a character in a novel.

An added complication is that jurisdiction agents are being bumped off. Thursday has to find out why as she is likely to be next.

The plot is actually pretty thin and this novel relies on the readers' knowledge of books and characters that are mentioned and the way they are manipulated. Fortunately, there is internal consistency or it could all get a bit too silly. One problem I had was with the character Harris Tweed. Despite being told that he is from the Outworld, like Thursday, and a real person, I kept seeing the fictional Harris Tweed – the rotund, monacled detective from THE EAGLE comic.

PM

***VAMPYRRHIC RITES* by Simon Clark**

Hodder & Stoughton / 504pgs / £18.99 / hardcover

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Rating: * * *

When so few novels are being published under the horror banner these days, it is good to see the occasional one gracing the shelves. There is a market for them out there. The problem is who are they aiming it at, and do they care?

This is the sequel to VAMPYRRHIC in which a group of people were brought together in the town of Leppington to either join or vanquish the vampires who had been waiting over a thousand years for the direct descendent of their original Viking leader to direct them in a war against humanity.

Now the threat is back. Beneath the waters of Lazarus Deep, the vampires are adding to their number and these modern recruits have retained their intelligence. Once they have the right person to lead them, they can begin their campaign to rid the world of warm, living creatures. This time they have a choice. Either David Leppington who rejected their proposal of supremacy last time, or the half brother he didn't know he had.

This is almost a good book but it treads a well worn path. The nasty killings start and the main characters are brought together but it is the factors they are initially unaware of which will spell success or disaster and a high body count. If you are looking for a quick, filmic read, this is fine. It is slow to get going and the characters do not have quite enough depth for my taste. Also, I get put off a book when factual things are wrong. Here, a raven has a yellow beak and an albino has green eyes. Where a deviation from the norm is essential to the plot it is very easy to qualify. Not doing so is a sign of sloppy editing. Other readers may not notice, or care. Someone always does.

PM

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

FANTASYCON 2003: 21-23 November, Tillington Hall, Stafford. Guests of Honour are **Christopher Fowler** and **Catherine Fisher**. Tillington Hall Hotel is conveniently situated just off M6 Junction 14, or a short taxi ride from Stafford station.

For further details go to www.britishfantasysociety.org.uk, or send an A4 SAE or 2xIRC's to FantasyCon 2003, Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8PQ.

The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group meets on Thursdays at 5.30pm 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 meetings are on Nov 13th and Dec 11th

NOVACON 33 - the Birmingham SF Group's very own convention will be held over the **November 7/11** weekend at the Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. Guest of Honour - Jon Courtenay Grimwood. Cost of registration is £35 - send to NOVACON 33, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. email - x15@zoom.co.uk

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses.

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

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

December 5th - Christmas Party - Skittles & Social evening.

January - Annual General Meeting

February - astronomer Andy Lound - illustrated talk

March - SF artist Dominic Harman - interviewed by Stan Nicholls (with slides)

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Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue

The BRUM GROUP Website address is www.bsfg.freesevers.com

NEW! ----The email address is bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk ---- **NEW!**

Contributions, ideas, etc. always welcome.

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 Treasurer, Pat Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH