

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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ISSUE 446

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

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**ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR); WILLIAM MCCABE;**  
**NOVACON 38 CHAIRMAN: HELENA BOWLES**

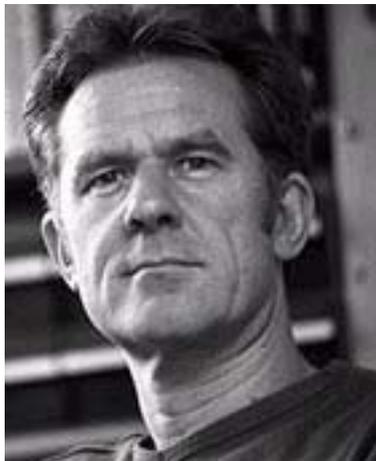
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**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November**

# GRAHAM JOYCE

Graham Joyce has long been a Brum Group favourite speaker being relatively local – Coventry – and he has now spoken to the group on several occasions, the last of which was five years ago.



Graham is the four times winner of the British Fantasy Award for his novels *DARK SISTER* (1993), *REQUIEM* (1996), *THE TOOTH FAIRY* (1997) and *INDIGO* (2000). His novel *THE FACTS OF LIFE* won the World Fantasy Award in 2003. Wikipedia and other sites call Graham a writer of speculative fiction though a writer of 'magic realism' would seem more appropriate. Jonathan Carroll says, "*Graham Joyce writes the kind of novels we keep hoping to find, but rarely do.*" and I've always found that very true. I was fortunate

**December 6th – The Christmas Social. A TICKET ONLY event in the Skittles Alley at the Selly Park Tavern. Have you got yours?**

to read Graham's first book, DREAMSIDE, when it was published in 1991 and have read every adult novel since. In recent years he has written several successful books for younger readers including TWOC and DO THE CREEPY THING.

His latest book is MEMOIRS OF A MASTER FORGER written under the pseudonym 'William Heaney' - it was reviewed here last month.

Graham's visits to the Brum Group have always been fascinating and thought-provoking but above all else they are entertaining. This month's talk will be no exception. RGP

## **LAST MONTH'S MEETING - JO FLETCHER**

**By Mike Jones**

Jo Fletcher took the floor to tell the Group something of what it is like to be an Editorial Director at Gollancz. She began with a light-hearted account of the extraordinary amount of work – checking, designing, meetings, redesigning, rechecking, more meetings and so on ad infinitum – involved in bringing a book to production. Changing tack, she then regaled her audience with extracts from some of the letters received from aspiring authors. These were amazing: ill-written, mis-spelt, unpunctuated and in general tending to destroy any hope for quality or merit in the accompanying manuscripts. Then there was the legendary slushpile; one gathered that to be promoted to the heap under her bed for reading in the next six months was an achievement in itself! It seemed amazing that any new writer should ever achieve publication, the chances of his or her work ever seeing the light of day being no better than one in a thousand, if that. How fortunate that the likes of Alastair Reynolds, to give but one example, occasionally manage it. All this was delivered in such an amusing and entertaining way that none of her listeners seemed to notice that she had gone on far beyond the usual allotted time. A brief and equally entertaining question-and-answer session followed during which the audience learned, among other things, the marketing reasons for Graham Joyce's recent change of identity. This was as successful a meeting as any the Group has had recently. Mj

<< After the meeting Jo confided that she had only touched on a few of the things she wanted to talk about, so we took the opportunity to invite Jo back early next year for another chunk of her life in a publisher's office. She accepted and we are currently arranging a suitable date. – RGP>>



## **CHRIS MORGAN - THE NEW BIRMINGHAM POET LAUREATE**

It is with great pleasure that we report that long time Brum Group member Chris Morgan has been announced as the 13<sup>th</sup> Birmingham Poet Laureate. The official announcement and ceremony took place on October 9<sup>th</sup>. We announced this at the October meeting and Chris read out two poems before the talk. Here is the SF poem he read:-

# THAT WAS THE FUTURE, THAT WAS

By Chris Morgan

In the fifties, when I was a lad,  
the brave new world of the 21st century  
was all technological optimism,  
a belief system worth worshipping.  
Not just science fiction, but science fact:  
coming, coming, coming.  
*Colliers* magazine showed us  
space stations above the Earth,  
jolly family holidays in zero gravity,  
colonising expeditions to Mars.  
For the home, humanoid robots  
would soon perform all chores,  
freeing the housewife from drudgery,  
bringing coffee mornings  
to every class of person.  
World government was round the  
corner, a real united nations (though  
somewhat Americanised, of course).  
Nuclear power would give us all free  
electricity. Science would quickly  
solve those nasty medical problems,  
perhaps even senility and death.  
London would be roofed over,  
miraculously converted into  
a single vast shopping mall.  
We could all work just a few hours  
a week, devoting ourselves to pleasure,  
except of course for Dan Dare,  
dedicated to capturing those awful  
deviants who wanted something different.  
Fifty years on the technology exists—  
at a price—but new problems are  
out of control, and we're still waiting  
for even one of the solutions.

Further details can be found on the internet by googling 'Birmingham Poet Laureate'. Congratulations, Chris!

## ***ERROR IN LAST MONTH'S NEWSLETTER***

In Vernon's article last month on the DAN DARE AND THE BIRTH OF HI-TECH BRITAIN Exhibition, it states that it finishes on October 25<sup>th</sup>. This should have read

October 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 – yes, you have another year in which to visit this event. This was my error, thinking that it read 2008 and therefore was unnecessary, so I deleted it. My apologies to Vernon and to everyone. 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 to me at [rgp@roge Peyton.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rgp@roge Peyton.fsnet.co.uk) >>

From member Dave Hardy... Good meeting last night <<referring to the Jo Fletcher excellent meeting>>. I had asked Vernon if I could have two minutes before the beer break, but because he let it go on so long and then it all broke up, I didn't get the chance. . . What I had wanted to say was that I'd been talking to James Bacon, co-chair of LX, next year's Eastercon, (mainly about the lack of a contact address/e-mail and any mention of the Art Show/Auction or art in general, apart from a note about its opening, and of course stuff about David Lloyd, in the latest PR), and he asked me what people would like. I said I'd ask at the Brum Group. He asked: "Are there any panels you'd like to see us do? What are you sick of seeing being done, and are there any panels you wish would happen again? All input welcomed." Has Eastercon missed some important point about SF art? (I have pointed out how irritating when the Art Auction is scheduled against another programme item esp. a GoH talk etc.) What Eastercon regulars should we be getting onto panels about Art, and are there any technical aspects that we should be looking at or workshopping (no, I'm not quite sure what he means by that, either)?

Anyway, this seems a fairly unique opportunity to make our wishes and ideas known, and Vernon suggested that I asked you to put this in the next GBN.

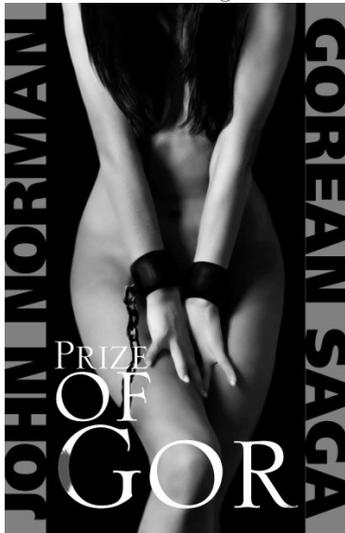
<<So...any ideas? Comments? If so, please send to Dave at [dave@astroart.org](mailto:dave@astroart.org) - or speak to him at the November meeting or at Novacon and I'm sure he'll be more than happy to pass your thoughts on. >>

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



.... British New Wave author, **Barrington John Bayley**, passed away October 14, 2008 following a recent surgery for bowel cancer. He was 71. Bayley was born in Birmingham, England and lived in the UK. Although usually writing as Barrington J. Bayley he also wrote as **Alan Aumbry** and **P. F. Woods**. His first story was published when he was 17 and he went on to publish at least 16 science fiction novels plus numerous short stories and essays between 1954 and 2006. Bayley's novels include COLLISION COURSE, THE SOUL OF THE ROBOT and STAR VIRUS. His 1983 novel, ZEN GUN, was nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award .... Author **James Killus** (b.1950) died on September 23 following a battle with cancer. Killus published his first novel, BOOK OF SHADOWS, in 1983, two years after his first short story, a collaboration, was published in Asimov's .... The Sunburst Awards for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic were won by ANTHEM OF A RELUCTANT

PROPHET by **Joanne Proulx** and THE NEW MOON'S ARMS by **Nalo Hopkinson**. This was Hopkinson's second win; she also won a Sunburst Award in 2003 .... Fox 2000 has acquired rights to **Joe Haldeman's** 1974 novel THE FOREVER WAR, and **Ridley Scott** is planning to make it into his first science fiction film since he delivered back-to-back classics with BLADE RUNNER and ALIEN. Scott intended to follow those films with THE FOREVER WAR, but rights complications delayed his plans for more than two decades .... All seven surviving actors who have portrayed Doctor Who are scheduled to appear together for the 2008 Children-in-Need Christmas program. In the past, skits have included multiple actors, such as last year's "Timecrash," featuring current Doctor **David Tennant** and fifth Doctor **Peter Davison**. The two would be joined this year by **Tom Baker, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy, Paul McGann** and **Christopher Eccleston** .... A Tennessee Court of Appeals has reversed the decision of a lower court, granting copyrights and royalties to **Andre Norton's** works to **Sue Stewart**, Norton's long-time caregiver. A lower court had awarded the rights to fan **Victor Horadam**. In the new ruling, Stewart will control copyrights of all works published during Norton's lifetime as well as royalties on reprints. Horadam will receive royalties on works published after Norton's 2005 death. Horadam has the option of appealing the case to the Tennessee Supreme Court .... While Krypton may be long gone, a crusade by **Brad Meltzer** to raise \$50,000 to help preserve the childhood home of *Superman's* creator **Jerry Siegel** has succeeded in raising more than twice that amount. Meltzer visited Siegel's former home in Cleveland, Ohio while researching his novel BOOK OF LIES and was upset at the state the house was in. Renovation will begin on October 2 with the removal of the roof .... AND



FINALLY .... "What man, in his deepest heart," asks **John Norman**, "does not want to own a female, to have her for his own, utterly, as a devoted, passionate, vulnerable, mastered slave, and what woman, in her deepest heart, does not want to be so intensely desired, so unqualifiedly and fiercely desired, that nothing less than her absolute ownership will satisfy a male, her master?". In a letter about PRIZE OF GOR, the soon to be released 27th novel in his phenomenally popular Gorean Chronicles, Norman reasserts the philosophy that has intoxicated fans and appalled conventional readers. As for the latter, Norman asserts, "Perhaps some people cannot even understand such things, such desire, such passion. Let them then cling to their tepidities. Gor is for those who do understand such

things." <<comments please...>> 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.**

## ***TALES FROM THE PERILOUS REALM* by J R R Tolkien**

**Illustrated by Alan Lee**

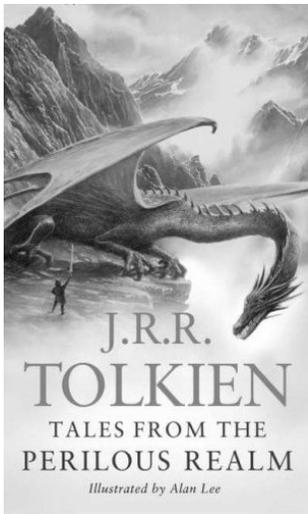
**HarperCollins / 404pgs / hardcover / £18.99 /**

**ISBN: 978-0007257546**

**Reviewed by Dave Corby**

Being a recognised Tolkien fan I am occasionally asked “What other books has Tolkien written, then, besides THE HOBBIT and THE LORD OF THE RINGS?”, and the correct answer is “Many!”, but this needs explaining. Usually the easiest answer is to mention the TALES FROM THE PERILOUS REALM. This is a collection of Tolkien’s ‘other works’ (as usually termed), some written as adult fairytale, some for his children, some as poetry and one as his most autobiographical work. These stories have been collected in the past, but normally without “Roverandom”, which opens this volume.

“Roverandom” was written to comfort J.R.R.’s second son, Michael, who lost his toy dog, Rover, on holiday while aged 5. The tale is a whimsical adventure story describing exactly what the vanished Rover got up to, explaining that Rover was, in fact, a real dog, and not just the lost toy. It is an interesting look at the way fairy tale and imaginative storytelling was integral to J.R.R.’s life in a more personal way than the production of toweringly successful epics. Of course, Tolkien’s talent in writing is chiefly that in the way he writes the fantastic seems solidly real to the reader.



“Farmer Giles of Ham” is maybe the best known of the other works, being an enjoyable tale, seemingly set in a believable historic medieval England, populated by larger than life village characters, cowardly Kings and humorous dragons and giants. It is the kind tale that amuses child and adult alike, having both slapstick humour to amuse the younger audience and more subtle innuendo in the portrayal of the characters for adults. Paradoxically, although I suspect this tale has the widest appeal for the more casual fantasy reader, to myself this tale is, perhaps, the lesser work in the collection, having less commitment to the fairy tale nature that the other stories possess.

“The Adventures of Tom Bombadil” is likely to interest any keen TLOTR reader, delivering, as it does, considerable extra detail for that rather enigmatic character. In fact this tale gives insight into the fact that Tom Bombadil was created quite separately from TLOTR, and he is indeed something of a guest appearance in that book... if this whets your appetite, then I should inform the reader that this ‘tale’ is comprised of a number of Tolkien’s poems. The experienced Tolkien reader

will be aware how complete and informative J.R.R.'s poetry can be, but these are much less weighty than "The Lays of Leithian" or "Turin". The poems also cover other, related aspects of Tolkien's creation ("The Man in the Moon Came Down Too Soon" is included). Overall they have a strong feeling of other-worldly fairy presence.

"Smith of Wootton Major" is probably the strongest adult fairy-tale in the collection, and my personal favourite in this volume. This is an evocative tale of Smith and his encounters with the world of fairy, and like the best fairy tales it follows its own, internally consistent and somehow familiar, yet slightly alien rules. In writing this a previously unnoticed parallel has leapt to mind; considering the sense of another world, alongside our own and only accessible with the correct mystical key, I recall to mind Guillermo del Toro's film "Pan's Labyrinth". Interestingly, of course, it is del Toro who has the job of directing the new film based on THE HOBBIT... As I have written, this is my favourite of the stories here, and I thoroughly recommend it to all.

"Leaf by Niggle" is often considered Tolkien's self-portrait. It concerns the central character, Niggle, a painter who starts by painting a leaf which gradually grows into a much larger tree. The story imparts a strong feeling of an initially simple creation, which grows to become vastly larger and more complex, with a sense that perhaps the act of creation will never be finished, and with sinister forces of criticism and motivation ever bringing the creator to task. The story reportedly came to Tolkien in a dream, and could well represent his own fears: a quite personal story and one that can illuminate the reader with a deeper understanding into Tolkien's creative acts.

Throughout are a series of new black and white illustrations by Alan Lee, as well as the pretty cover depicting farmer Giles and Chrysophylax Dives. I personally find that Alan Lee's illustrations, while being fine and atmospheric, are often a little too grittily realistic, and so I usually prefer the illustrations of John Howe or Ted Naismith. However, the pictures for this volume seem to possess the requisite 'other-worldly' feel, and so seem to compliment the text well.

A recommendation (or not) on buying this book tends to depend on the proposed reader's sense of fantasy; if you like your fantasy to seem to have a solid base in a dependable medieval world, full of practical characters, then this may not be the book for you. I think this is fantasy writing of the highest calibre, but this review must carry the caveat that this volume contains quite a variety of pieces, not all of which may appeal to all readers. But if you want your fantasy to have that indefinable quantity that makes it a genuine fairy tale, or think that perhaps you might want to discover the appeal of a seemingly lost form of writing, then I can heartily recommend the book. *DC*

**REVIEWERS PLEASE NOTE: I am now owed well over a dozen reviews. Some reviews are more than three months overdue. Review books are the property of the Group and only become property of the reviewer once the review has been submitted. If you take a book to review and for some reason are unable to do a review, that book MUST be returned to the Group. Failing that, I look forward to receiving outstanding reviews, ready for the December newsletter, by November 15th. Thank you.**

## ***FORTHCOMING EVENTS***



**NOVACON 38** will be held at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, over the weekend of 14-16 November 2008; the guests are science fiction author Ian R MacLeod and the Brum Group's own Vernon Brown, who chaired the first Novacon back in 1971. Membership costs £38.00, payable to "Novacon 38" at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ; registration forms can be downloaded from the convention website, [www.novacon38.org.uk](http://www.novacon38.org.uk), along with the all three progress reports.

**LX2009 – the 2009 Eastercon.** April 10-13, 2009 – Cedar Court Hotel, Bradford. Guests of Honour: Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Tim Powers, David Lloyd. Fan Guests of Honour: Mary and Bill Burns.  
Website is [www.LX2009.com](http://www.LX2009.com)

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

**6th December – Christmas Social** – Skittles and buffet at the Selly Park Tavern. Tickets will be on sale in September.

**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>, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, May 8<sup>th</sup>, June 13<sup>th</sup>, July 10<sup>th</sup> – to be announced**

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

**September 11<sup>th</sup>, October 9<sup>th</sup>, November 13<sup>th</sup> – to be announced**

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

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #446** 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.

**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