

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MARCH 2009

ISSUE 450

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

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Friday 9th March

Tony Ballantyne

With his first book published in 2004 (RECURSION), Tony is a relative newcomer to the SF world. Previously he had his first sale in PRIVATE EYE, his first short fiction was a romance to a women's magazine and his first SF sale was to INTERZONE magazine – the short story “The Sixth VNM”. The BSFA's magazine VECTOR described his first novel as 'An exceptional first novel. A new British star has arrived to join the likes of Hamilton, Reynolds and Banks.'

Feeling happier with the SF scene, Tony continued writing SF novels with CAPACITY (2005) and DIVERGENCE

April 3rd – “Faces of the Moon” – a visual presentation by DAVID A HARDY to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Man's landing on the Moon.

(2007). His fourth novel TWISTED METAL will appear in May, in hardcover. He is currently working on the sequel to TWISTED METAL.

He grew up in County Durham and studied Maths at Manchester University. After leaving university he spent ten years in London teaching Maths and then IT. He is now married with two children and living in Oldham. He says his hobbies are walking, cycling, playing boogie woogie piano and playing the accordion in a folk group.

So come along and learn how to boogie – ooops, sorry, I meant learn how a new SF career unfolds. If you're a fan of Peter Hamilton, Alastair Reynolds or Iain M Banks, you could find yourself with a new author to follow and collect. *RGP*

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of the Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill just off New Street. The entrance to the hotel is adjacent to Wetherspoon's on the right.

At the bottom of the ramp from New Street Station, turn left and walk up New Street. Bennetts Hill is the third road on the right.

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.

LAST MONTH'S QUIZ

Congratulations to Eileen & Peter Weston and Pat & Mike Meara who, as a team, won the Quiz at the last meeting. They won with 73 just one point ahead of two other teams each with 72 points. I'm afraid I don't have any other details of runners-up or who came last as Vernon failed to make any announcements. Part of the problem was that it went on far longer than intended and time ran out. So much so that everyone cleared the room very quickly leaving me realising I had a huge bag of review copies, none of which were handed out!

Well done Vernon for organising yet again an excellent quiz with a great spread of questions covering books, magazines, movies and even that awful TV stuff..

NEBULA NOMINATIONS

These are the nominees for the 2008 Nebula Awards. The awards will be presented at the 2009 Nebula Awards® Weekend, April 24-26, 2009 in Los Angeles, California.

Novels

LITTLE BROTHER - Doctorow, Cory (Tor, Apr08)

POWERS - Le Guin, Ursula K. (Harcourt, Sep07)

CAULDRON - McDevitt, Jack (Ace, Nov07)

BRASYL - McDonald, Ian (Pyr, May07)

MAKING MONEY - Pratchett, Terry (Harper, Sep07)

SUPERPOWERS - Schwartz, David J. (Three Rivers Press, Jun08)

Novellas

"The Spacetime Pool" - Asaro, Catherine (Analog, Mar08)

"Dark Heaven" - Benford, Gregory (Alien Crimes, ed. Mike Resnick, SFBC, Jan07)

"Dangerous Space" - Eskridge, Kelley (Dangerous Space, Aqueduct Press, Jun07)

"The Political Prisoner" - Finlay, Charles Coleman (F&SF, Aug08)

"The Duke in His Castle" - Nazarian, Vera (Norilana Books, Jun08)

Novelettes

"If Angels Fight" - Bowes, Richard (F&SF, Feb08)

"The Ray Gun: A Love Story" - Gardner, James Alan (Asimov's, Feb08)

"Dark Rooms" - Goldstein, Lisa (Asimov's, Oct/Nov 07)

"Pride and Prometheus" - Kessel, John (F&SF, Jan08)

"Night Wind" - Rosenblum, Mary (Lace and Blade, ed. Deborah J. Ross, Norilana Books, Feb08)

"Baby Doll" - Sinisalo, Johanna (The SFWA European Hall of Fame, ed. James Morrow & Kathryn Morrow, Tor, Jun07)

"Kaleidoscope" - Wentworth, K.D. (F&SF, May07)

Short Stories

"The Button Bin" - Allen, Mike (Helix: A Speculative Fiction Quarterly, Oct07)

"The Dreaming Wind" - Ford, Jeffrey (The Coyote Road: Trickster Tales, ed. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, Viking, Jul07)

"Trophy Wives" - Hoffman, Nina Kiriki (Fellowship Fantastic, ed. Martin H. Greenburg and Kerrie Hughes, DAW Books Jan08)

"26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss" - Johnson, Kij (Asimov's, Jul08)

"The Tomb Wife" - Jones, Gwyneth (F&SF, Aug07)

"Don't Stop" - Kelly, James Patrick (Asimov's, Jun07)

"Mars: A Traveler's Guide" - Nestvold, Ruth (Asimov's, Jan 08)

CHARLAINE HARRIS BOOKS SELLS LIKE CRAZY!

Charlaine Harris's vampire books (see recent issues of this newsletter for several reviews) are outselling everything else in the USA. The two big chains – B&N/B Dalton and Borders/Walden – published their bestsellers recently. In hardcover, her new book FROM DEAD TO WORSE was No 2 in both chains, beaten only by another vampire book, Stephenie Meyer's THE HOST. Charlaine Harris's DEAD UNTIL DARK, LIVING DEAD IN DALLAS, CLUB DEAD, DEAD TO THE WORLD, ALL TOGETHER DEAD DEFINITELY DEAD and DEAD AS A DOORNAIL placed nos 1,2,3,4,5,6 and 7 bestselling paperbacks in both chains! An incredible feat that I don't think has ever been done before. Vampires rule, for sure!

RGP

THE CHRIS MORGAN POETRY SHOW

is the modestly titled radio programme that Chris Morgan, Birmingham Poet Laureate and loyal Brum Group member, has recently started up. It's a weekly

show, 6-7pm every Wednesday, on Unity FM, a community radio station located by the Camp Hill roundabout. You may be able to receive this on 93.5 FM, but you may find it easier to tune in to the website www.unityfm.net where you'll discover that it's a programme consisting of poems and interviews with local Birmingham poets. Chris Morgan says: "Rog Peyton taught me everything I need to know to be able to do this show - except about poetry and broadcasting."

<<Sad but true. – *RGP*>>

Coincidentally we also received an email from leila khan l_ansa@yahoo.com It reads as follows:-

"Unity FM is a community radio station broadcasting in Birmingham. We are based in the Bordesley Centre on Stratford Rd. Camp Hill. We have a weekly book show which takes place Tuesdays at 6pm Each week we try to get guests on to review some of their favourite books. I would like to invite your reading group on to the show as we would like to discuss books in the ... [SF*]... genre. Please let me know if you are able to participate and which dates are convenient."

Does anyone want to volunteer to go on this show? If so, please contact our Secretary at the BSFG email address.

And here's another poem from our own Chris Morgan, Birmingham's current Poet Laureate...

DEMOLITION MAN

(Jacob Epstein's "Rock Drill" sculpture 1913-15)

Visiting Walsall, this early version of Asimov's
robots or Giger's aliens, less cuddly;
head and reptilian torso above me.
Man-machine interface--a pre-World War I
vision of the late twentieth century, threatening
and poignant. Man trapped by machine
into being inhuman, industrial, insane;
predictor of *Modern Times* in film and reality.
Anthony Gormley might have created regiments
of these, and they may reproduce themselves.
The phallic tool is splitting apart Planet Earth,
cutting nature into the building blocks
for Mechanopolis, city from hell. First trump,
unheeded alarm-call for the beginning of the end.

Chris Morgan

BACK ISSUES OF THE NEWSLETTER

I have spare copies of the Newsletter. although not all issues, going back to 2005. If you need to fill gaps in your collection please email me details via BSFG address or by post via The Secretary, address back page. I will post them or bring them to this months meeting - tell me which you prefer. - *Vernon Brown*

ADVERTISING THE GROUP

If you will be attending any SF orientated events and would not mind taking a few back copies of the Newsletter to leave lying about to advertise the Group, would you please send me details via BSFG email or post via the Secretary, address back page - don't forget to let me know how to get them to you. I did this at NOVACON 38 and it produced results. - *Vernon Brown*

...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@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk >>

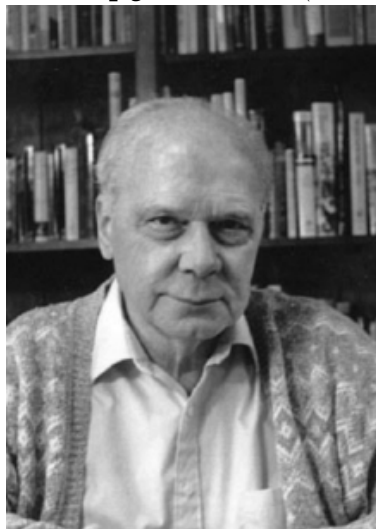
From member **ROBERT DAY:-** "Can I offer comments on Vicky's film reviews? On I AM LEGEND: I was quite taken by this film. I've only ever seen THE OMEGA MAN once, many years ago when I was still a callow teenager. I didn't like it because it had a too depressing end (or so I thought). I would have to watch it again, although now as a politically-alert adult, I'd be seeing gun lobby subtexts all the way through every time I saw Charlton Heston. For those who criticise this film for 'dumbing down' or putting a Hollywood-acceptable ending onto it: get hold of the DVD and look at the alternate ending. The happy one. Then consider yourself lucky that there is still some smidgen of artistic sense in Tinseltown.

"On THE ILLUSIONIST: I won't dwell on comparing it with THE PRESTIGE; Chris made a perfectly good job of that when he spoke to the group last year and in a way, as the two films were conceived fairly independently, such comparisons are pointless. There is, however, one glaring problem with it, and that is the political background. Put very simply, there could never be any possibility of any coup d'etat against the Emperor Franz Josef in 19th century Austria. Franz Josef's sons were in very much the same situation as Prince Charles is now; their monarch parent seems likely to live almost forever and they may not get the chance to get their shot at the throne. But Franz Josef was -and still is, to some extent - held in such reverence by the Austrian populace that any attempt to topple him would have been unthinkable. The military in particular would never have mounted any sort of coup; their positions of status and privilege were far too dependent on Imperial patronage. Franz Josef had seen revolution in the streets in 1848; he wasn't going to do anything to allow it to happen again, and that was drummed into the military. Of course, this left his sons kicking their heels trying to find a role in life; Maximilian went off to found an empire in

Mexico and ended up in front of a firing squad; Rudolf shot his mistress and then put his revolver to his own head in a hunting lodge; and Franz Ferdinand, probably the best of the lot, took too much interest in matters military and ended up on a tour of inspection in Sarajevo in 1914... (His bloodstained tunic and the car he and his wife were travelling in when they were shot can still be seen in Vienna today). Still, the story is fun, Giametti as the police inspector is, indeed, excellent; and the film as a whole (shot in Prague, as Vienna is too modernised these days, even though it has almost no high-rise buildings) looks gorgeous.”

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Philip José Farmer** (b.1918) died in his sleep on February 25. Farmer is best known for his *Riverworld* series, but also had several other successful series. His *World of Tiers* series has been used for psychiatric treatment. Farmer is also known for breaking taboos with his novel **STRANGE RELATIONS** and the story “The Lovers” as well as exploring the works of other writers with **THE OTHER LOG OF PHILEAS FOGG** and various works featuring Tarzan and Doc Savage. His Wold Newton stories attempt, somewhat tongue in cheek, to tie together all the Victorian and pulp popular characters. Farmer won the Hugo multiple times and was an SFWA Grand Master and received the World Fantasy Life Achievement Award The April 2009 issue of ***Realms of Fantasy Magazine*** will be the last. The



bimonthly magazine had been edited by **Shawna McCarthy** since its introduction in 1994 Author **Richard Gordon** (b.1947) died on February 7. Gordon, who wrote under the pseudonym **Stuart Gordon**, began publishing SF in 1972 and wrote at least ten science fiction and fantasy novels through 1990. In addition, his non-SF novels, written as Alex R. Stuart, often included elements of speculative fiction Following discussion of a potential future European Worldcon bid, **Steve Cooper** has announced a bid has formed to hold the Worldcon in Europe in 2014. The bid is scheduled to officially launch at Eastercon in 2010. Although the final venue has not yet been selected, Cooper has indicated it will likely be either London or Glasgow. The last time London hosted a Worldcon was 1965, and Glasgow hosted one in 2005 **Iain M Banks** has sold a new SF novel to Orbit. **TRANSITION** is set in our own world and in parallel worlds and concerns an organisation dedicated to protecting humanity from itself and outside threats. But you’ll have to wait until early 2010 to read it! Novacon 39 Guest of Honour, **Justina Robson** has handed in

CHASING THE DRAGON, the fourth volume in her Quantum Gravity series While the SF magazine *Thrilling Wonder Stories* ended its run more than eleven years before the



original *Star Trek* series premiered in 1966, the second volume of the revived anthology is just in time for its rebirth in the new *Star Trek* feature film **reboot**, coming out May 8th 2009 in the USA. Heading up the volume are new stories by **Norman Spinrad, David Gerrold, Larry Niven, Diane Duane, Michael Reaves, Melinda M. Snodgrass** and **David R. George III**, all of whom wrote original *Star Trek* stories over the past 40-odd years. And there are previously uncollected stories by **Ray Bradbury** and **Isaac Asimov**. It's a huge 252pg collection **K A Bedford's** science fiction novel **TIME MACHINES REPAIRED WHILE-U-WAIT** has won Australia's Aurealis Award The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) have announced the

creation of the Solstice Award, presented for significant impact on the science fiction or fantasy landscape. The award may be given to anyone who has not already received the Damon Knight Grand Master Award or been named Author Emeritus by the SFWA. The award's first three recipients include **Kate Wilhelm, Martin H. Greenberg**, and the late **Algis Budrys**. The awards will be presented at this year's Nebula weekend in Los Angeles The SFWA has announced that director/writer **Joss Whedon** will win this year's **Ray Bradbury Award**. The award was created in 1992 by **Ben Bova**, but only sporadically presented since then and recognizes a substantial and superior body of work. Beginning in 2010, the award will be presented annually SFWA President **Russell Davis** announced Jan. 6 that **Victoria Strauss** will be honored with 2009 SFWA Service Awards during the Nebula Awards Weekend. The award is made at the sole discretion of the President, and has previously been called the 'Service to SFWA Award'. Strauss is receiving the award for work she had done with Writer Beware, a publishing industry watchdog group which 'shines a light into the dark corners of the shadow-world of literary scams, schemes and pitfalls' US publisher **Viz Media** is launching a new science fiction novel imprint called **Haikasoru**, which aims to publish contemporary Japanese science fiction and fantasy stories for English-speaking audiences. This

is the first time an imprint with a dedicated focus on Japanese SF has launched in the USA. Apparently, Haikasoru translates as ‘High Castle’ – a nod to Philip K. This is your chance to acquire a collection of top-quality science fiction!



ANALOG – (formerly ASTOUNDING) - the ‘Grand-daddy’ of SF magazines

This is your chance to acquire a collection of *Analog* magazine dating from May 1963 to December 1989. That’s a total of 213 issues, including 23 in the rare large-size format, four of which were never distributed in any form in the UK. In these issues you’ll find first appearances of stories such as Frank Herbert’s epic *DUNE*, and original work by Larry Niven, Lois McMaster Bujold, Joe Haldeman, Harry Turtledove, and many, many more. Condition is almost uniformly excellent.

No, I am not getting rid of my own collection (“they’ll pry my *Astoundings* from my cold, dead hands” as someone wrote), but these are duplicates which I am selling VERY CHEAPLY. In fact the money is less important than for the magazines to go to a good home, someone who will get as much pleasure from them as I have done over the years.

So, they’ll go to the highest bidder over a £25.00 starting-price. Think about it – that’s not much more than ten pence per issue! How much more would you pay to a dealer? I’ll close bids on 17th March.

**Get in touch with me now – Peter Weston, 0121 354 6059
(pr.weston@btinternet.com)**

Dick's *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE* in which Japan conquers California. The first four titles will appear in the Summer of 2009 The BBC



has said that **Michelle 'Bionic Woman' Ryan** and funnyman **Lee Evans** will guest star in the forthcoming BBC One *Doctor Who* Easter special which began filming this month in Wales A new British SF movie, **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TIME TRAVEL**, featuring the star of the TV comedy *IT Crowd*, **Chris O'Dowd**. It's about a sci-fi geek, Ray, who has a well-known obsession with time travel, so when Cassie, a woman who claims to be from the future approaches him, he naturally suspects a prank A nearly complete **Columbian mammoth skeleton**, believed to date to 40,000 years ago, has

been discovered on a construction site near the La Brea Tarpits in Los Angeles. The mammoth is believed to have been in his forties and showed signs of having lived with broken ribs and possibly a cancerous growth. The site also contained remains of lions, bison, sloths, lynxes, and other animals **NASA** and the **European Space Agency** have announced plans to team up for two unmanned missions to the outer planets. The Europa Jupiter System Mission will carry instruments to first study the Jovian system before putting satellites into orbit around Europa and Ganymede to monitor the moons and study the Jovian magnetosphere and its interactions with the moons. The Titan Saturn System Mission will include an orbital satellite around Saturn's moon Titan and a probe to explore the conditions on the cloud-covered moon. ... *RGP*



BOOK REVIEWS



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

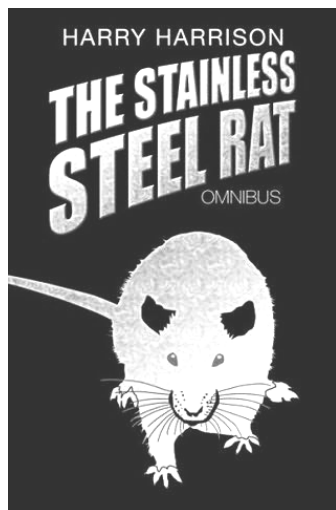
THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT OMNIBUS

by Harry Harrison

Gollancz / 436pgs / trade pbk - £10.99 - ISBN: 978 0575081710

Reviewed by Dave Corby

Harry Harrison's *The Stainless Steel Rat*: probably the most famous SF hero I had never previously read. Somehow I have spent 20+ years reading SF without ever reading a single *Stainless Steel Rat* book – but I have many glowing references. So I approached this volume of the first three books (in published order, if not chronologically for the hero) with both great anticipation and not a small amount of trepidation; can these stories live up to the enormous hype?



This volume consists of *THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT* (1961), *THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT'S REVENGE* (1970) and *THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT SAVES THE WORLD* (1972). Being the first three *S.S.R.* novels published they are an excellent place to start reading about Slippery Jim diGriz, the outstandingly clever, quick-witted master criminal protagonist. After a lifetime of successful criminal activity in an almost crime-free system some 32,500 years into our future, James Bolivar deGriz is finally captured by the Special Corps and immediately put to work fighting the galaxy's greatest threats. And so starts a series of terrific adventures so astonishing that they can only be equalled by the brilliance of the *Stainless Steel Rat* himself.

The blurb on the back of the volume implies that the books are packed with surreal humour; but I disagree. Where the books are indeed sometimes humorous they can be quite subtle, and always clever. If one is after 'The Monty Python of the spaceways' (quoted from the *Daily Telegraph*) I would recommend the reader rather to *Bill, the Galactic Hero*, Harry Harrison's other humorous series, and much more surreal and slapstick than the *S.S.R.*

I am unashamed to admit to having enjoyed these books enormously. Harry Harrison writes with such energy and momentum that the reader hardly has time to sit down and think, which is probably a good thing as some of the amazing situations (and equally amazing escapes) may not stand up to serious examination. Nonetheless the writing is beautifully balanced, with descriptions that evoke the maximum colour while failing to interrupt the break-neck speed action. And being written from a first-person perspective the reader can take great pleasure in identifying closely with the hero; he is so roguishly charming it is impossible to dislike him. If one had to pick a character from SF to actually be, then *The Stainless Steel Rat* has to be somewhere near the top of the list, surely?

If forced to criticise the books then I would have to admit that the stories sometimes jump about a bit too much, taking sudden right-angle turns (and ending the books sometimes as well) based on the *deus ex machina*; a sudden plot-

device where an unexpected event or, literally, device overcomes the insurmountable difficulties faced by the characters. Given the clever way in which the S.S.R. beats all his other problems these sudden 'get out of jail free' cards are slightly disappointing. Still, at least they don't allow the books to get bogged down in one scene at any point, so they probably serve an important function.

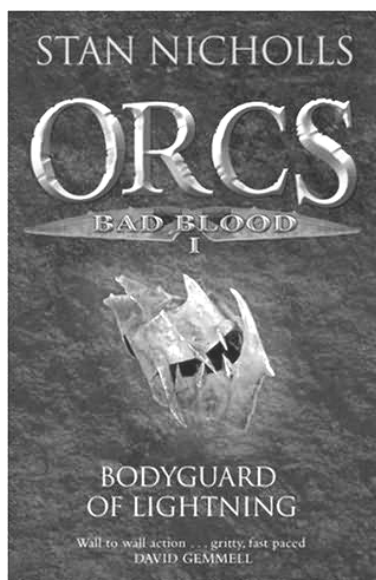
Anyway, that is enough negative – these books are great! In conclusion I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending them, and, if you are like me and have somehow missed out on them for ages, now is an ideal time to correct that oversight – you are in for a treat!

DC

ORCS: BAD BLOOD by Stan Nicholls

Gollancz / 279pgs / hardcover - £18.99 - ISBN: 978 0575078048 / trade paperback - £12.99 - ISBN: 978 0575078031

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



Once again the pages run with blood, intestines flop to the ground and heads are severed. The orcs are on the rampage again. At the end of the first trilogy they had found themselves in a world where there were only other orcs. They did not have to struggle for survival. They could settle down. In fact, Stryke, captain of the Wolverines war band, has taken a mate and fathered two potentially fearsome hatchlings. What the members of the band have not admitted to each other is that they are getting bored. There is no real fighting. Then a human staggers from a cave bearing the instrumentalities that are the key to the other worlds. They learn that their old mistress, the sorceress Jennesta is still alive and is rebuilding her empire in a different realm. This is a land where orcs are the

dominant species, but they are weak and, with only a handful of exceptions, have lost the will to fight. A relatively small force of humans has swept in and subjugated them.

Enter the Wolverines. Prepared to cut a swathe of mayhem through the countryside, their main purpose is to get Jennesta. If they kill a lot of humans and rouse the orcs from their pacifist stupor, then that is a bonus.

Despite the copious quantity of bloodshed and killing, this is a joyous book. The orcs are having fun. Fighting is what they do best and they thrive on it. Back, too, is the ferocious dwarf Jup, now with an equally fierce wife, Spurrall, Haskeer, willing to pick a fight with anyone and anything, and Coilla, the only female orc

with this warband. There are a few new faces including Wheam, a cowardly orc who only wants to be a bard, and Pepperdyne, a human who has allied himself with the orcs in order to be near the instrumentalities. At present he seems to be the only decent human in the whole realm. That is likely to change.

Although it is probably better to have read the first trilogy, a lot of enjoyment can be had if you start here. PM

HATER by David Moody

Gollancz / 192pgs / Hardcover - £18.99 - ISBN: 978 0575084667 /

Trade Paperback - £12.99 - ISBN: 978 0575084674

Reviewed by Ian Allwyn



Hater heralds the mass-market release of a horror novel by an unknown British writer that doesn't feature vampires dating werewolves... Is this a sign that the publishing world is slowly returning to recognizing horror as a genre to encourage rather than treat it as if was toxic debt? It must have helped that Guillermo del Toro (PAN'S LABYRINTH/THE HOBBIT) purchased the film rights when it was originally self-published in small press.

Set in a kitchen-sink provincial British city (unnamed), its first-person narrator is Danny McCoyne, in his late twenties, saddled with debt, and trapped between warring kids and a loveless marriage and a clerical job in the City Council he hates. In between witnessing seemingly random acts of street violence, his resentment of his lot in life grows; in fact, it's difficult to think of a novel with a more depressed and bitter narrator, although after a time, you'll figure out why it's written that way.

The novel is promoted as a cross between 28 DAYS LATER and I AM LEGEND (although in my opinion it's like neither the book nor the film). However, it is so much like 28 DAYS LATER, it could have been marketed as a spin-off novel with a few alterations. Although as it's one of my favourite horror films, I'm not suggesting that as a criticism. Like that film, the violent attacks are orchestrated by a virus of hate which turns a large proportion of the population into violent killers, although there are differences in that the attackers revert back to paranoid individuals.

HATER is a plot-driven novel and there's a danger in the review revealing too much of the very significant twist which makes the final third of the novel worthy of a lucrative film deal. My one criticism is that too many major and

minor characters stories are never concluded. Whilst that makes sense in terms of what does happen, it still feels disappointing to find most of the book's sub-plots are still unresolved at the end.

The novel is easy to read and follow and can be read quickly. It's not the best post-apocalyptic zombie novel, as that remains Simon Clark's brilliant *BLOOD CRAZY* but the fact that it's out there in the bookshops seems to me, a good thing. *LA*

THE NIGHTMARE FACTORY VOLUME 2

by Joe Harris and Stuart Moore with art by Vasilis Lolos, Bill Sienkiewicz, Toby Cypress and Nick Stakal

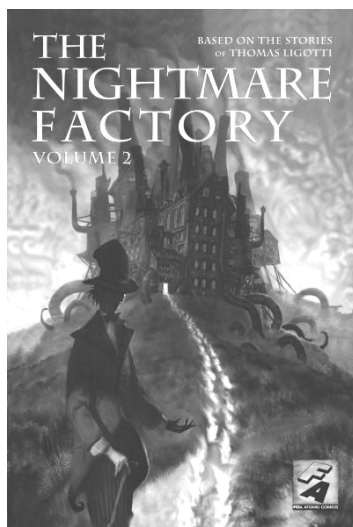
Fox Atomic Comics / 112 pages / £10 / ISBN: 978-000728048

Reviewed by William McCabe

Thomas Ligotti is a cult writer of horror stories in the tradition of the modern followers of H P Lovecraft. He rarely refers explicitly to the mythos but there is usually a common style there. Here you will find the odd sect of not-quite-human worshippers of some creature forgotten by time (see "The Sect of the Idiot"), carnival freaks that seem to have connections to unexplained powerful forces ("Gas Station Carnivals") and the psychopathic killer that believes he is becoming something more than natural ("The Chymist"). Ligotti's record with publishers in his own right has been unlucky so far.

This book is published by Fox Atomic Comics the teenage comics publishing imprint connected to 20th Century Fox. They are best known for the comic version of *28 DAYS LATER*. This volume and the preceding one are based on the stories of Thomas Ligotti and the title is taken from one of his old collections. The company intend to publish one volume in this series every year and hope to develop a movie based on some of the stories in the same mould as *CREEPSHOW* or the movie of *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*. Future volumes may not be based on Ligotti's work.

The writers and illustrators here have a solid record in the US comics market. They have worked on the big names like *X-men* (Moore & Harris), *Spider-man* (Harris), and *Batman* (Harris & Cypress) and critically acclaimed titles (Sienkiewicz on *Elektra: Assassin*). The styles of illustration here drift from cartoonish (Cypress) to near-photographic (Sienkiewicz) on occasions. Only Sienkiewicz shows any real artistic worth here and not really enough to sell the book.



Despite the quoted intent of the publishers, I can't see anything here working on film. The stories are much too thin. There is little more than a character study in each. As an example, "The Chymist" is told as a monologue by the title character. There is only one other character in shot for more than a couple of frames and she is the victim. Although she does speak, we only know that she has done so from the reaction of the chymist. She is only there so that we can see what it is that the chymist does. This might work as the storyteller bit at the end of the film but not for a whole segment. None of the other stories are any more complex. WAM

NOVACON MOVES!!!

After a number of years at the Quality Hotel in Walsall, Novacon is moving. It's still in the Midlands (East Midlands) and NOVACON 39 will be held at the Park Inn, Nottingham, 13-15 November 2009. Chairperson is Alice Lawson who has previously been on Novacon committees for the past 150 years so she should know how to organise a GREAT con.

Guest of Honour will be SF author Justina Robson, author of *SILVER SCREEN* (1999), *MAPPA MUNDI* (2001), *NATURAL HISTORY* (2003), *LIVING NEXT DOOR TO THE GOD OF LOVE* (2005) and the *Quantum Gravity* series – *KEEPING IT REAL* (2006), *SELLING OUT* (2007), *GOING UNDER* (2008).

The Park Inn is situated on the Mansfield Road, which is one of the main roads into Nottingham, and is about a mile from the city centre, so has good transport links. It has 179 rooms, which have all been refurbished and look brand new! As with most modern hotels, there are no single rooms as such, so you'll get a double bed all to yourself (unless you get lucky). There are no family' rooms, but the hotel will put in a z-bed for a youngster. All rooms have a walk-in shower rather than a bath – the exceptions being the rooms for disabled guests which do have baths (only a couple of these though). Double or twin rooms will cost £40 pppn, while singles will be £56 pppn. There is lift-access to all floors.

The main function space is all on the ground floor within easy reach of the bar (very easy for the dealers). Downstairs are 6 syndicate rooms all grouped together where the Artshow and Dave Lally's programme will be. There is also another bar, though we may just use this for lounge area. The hotel has a leisure club with small swimming pool, sauna, jacuzzi and gymnasium, which we can all use. There is plenty of free car parking for guests.

The Park Inn is a No Smoking hotel. This includes the bedrooms. Anybody smoking in the room will be charged extra, and may be asked to leave. You have been warned!

Full details from 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or email fab@zoom.co.uk

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@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

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.

Books to be discussed:-

March 26 - SHADE'S CHILDREN by Garth Nix

Future dates 23rd April

THE MISFiTs are an informal group of SF fans who meet regularly at 7pm at the Wagon & Horses, Oldbury. Real ale, good food, great company. More details from Martin Tudor (empties084@btinternet.com). Next meetings are on 20th March and 17th April.

LX2009, the 2009 Eastercon. April 10-13, 2009 will be held at the 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**

FANTASYCON 2009 will take place on the weekend of September 18-20, at the Britannia Hotel, 1 St James Street, Nottingham. Ian Watson will be the Master of Ceremonies. The guests of honour to be announced. Details from British Fantasy Society website <http://s256537080.websitehome.co.uk/>

DO YOU KNOW OF AN EVENT YOU THINK SHOULD BE LISTED HERE? LET US KNOW!

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

April 3rd – “Faces of the Moon” – a visual presentation by DAVID A HARDY to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Man’s landing on the Moon.

May 8th – fan, editor and now literary agent, JOHN JARROLD

June 12th – “Tolkien’s Roots in Birmingham” – a visual presentation by BOB BLACKHAM.

July 10th – JO FLETCHER returns with more editor’s tales

August 14th – SUMMER SOCIAL

September 11th – to be announced

October 9th – to be announced

November 6th – to be announced

December 4th – Christmas Social

BRUM GROUP NEWS #450 copyright 2009 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). 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.

Anyone out there who writes science fiction and is interested in joining a SF writers’ group that meets about three times a year, contact Alan Cash on trachodog@yahoo.co.uk

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