

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

APRIL 2009

ISSUE 451

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

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Friday 3rd April

DAVID A HARDY

"Faces of the Moon"

There can't really be anyone in the Group who doesn't know who our speaker is this month. He's been a member of the BSFG since 1973 and is one of the regular attendees each month. He is a past Chairman of the Group and is also a past Editor of this Newsletter and I'm reliably informed that he is the person responsible for

changing its name to BRUM GROUP NEWS.

I'm also reliably informed that in his spare time he dabbles in painting pictures. Not just any pictures but ones that feature planets and moons and rocks

May 8th – JOHN JARROLD is a long-time SF fan who was fortunate to turn his hobby into a job when he became an SF Editor. He then became an author's agent...

and suchlike - the kind of thing that we SF fans tend to like. He's even sold one or two to paying customers over the years. This hobby of painting planetary bodies stems from his huge interest in astronomy and space travel.

David tells us that he actually remembers the Moon Landing – yes, apparently that happened way back in 1969 – forty years ago. Before many of us were born! I remember my grandfather telling me about it...

Seriously though, to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Man's Landing on the Moon, Dave has prepared a visual presentation entitled "Faces of the Moon" which looks at all aspects of the Moon and will include clips from old movies, early SF ideas, artists' ideas (eg. Chesley Bonestell) and a review of the US and Soviet probes that led to the first Moon-landing and Apollo, and into the future, with photos, paintings, magazine covers, etc.

Over the years Dave has given several presentations to the Group and they have all been first class, fascinating talks. This one will be no exception. In fact, I have a feeling that it is going to be one of the best and possibly even *the* best. You don't want to miss this month!
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. Members' admission is £3.00; non-members' is £4.00.

THE ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD NOMINEES 2009

The nominees for this year's Arthur C Clarke Award have now been announced and are:-

SONG OF TIME by Ian R MacLeod (PS Publishing)

THE QUIET WAR by Paul McAuley (Gollancz)

HOUSE OF SUNS by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz)

ANATHEM by Neal Stephenson (Atlantic)

THE MARGARETS by Sheri S Tepper (Gollancz)

MARTIN MARTIN'S ON THE OTHER SIDE by Mark Wernham (Cape)

The winner will be announced on Wednesday 29th April at an award ceremony held on the opening night of the SCI-FI-LONDON Film Festival.

SCI-FI-LONDON 2009

The 8th London International Festival of Science Fiction and Fantastic Film will take place Wed 29th April to Mon 4th May 2009 at several London venues including The Apollo West End Cinema, London's most luxurious cinema. Full details can be found at <http://www.sci-fi-london.com/festival/>

THE HUGO AWARD NOMINEES

The Awards will be presented at the 67th Worldcon, Anticipation, August 6-10, 2009 at the Palais de Congrès in Montreal, Canada

Best Novel

ANATHEM by Neal Stephenson (Morrow; Atlantic UK)

THE GRAVEYARD BOOK by Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins; Bloomsbury UK)

LITTLE BROTHER by Cory Doctorow (Tor Teen; HarperVoyager UK)

SATURN'S CHILDREN by Charles Stross (Ace; Orbit UK)

ZOE'S TALE by John Scalzi (Tor)

Best Novella

"The Erdmann Nexus" by Nancy Kress (Asimov's Oct/Nov 2008)

"The Political Prisoner" by Charles Coleman Finlay (F&SF Aug 2008)

"The Tear" by Ian McDonald (Galactic Empires)

"True Names" by Benjamin Rosenbaum & Cory Doctorow (Fast Forward 2)

"Truth" by Robert Reed (Asimov's Oct/Nov 2008)

Best Novelette

"Alastair Baffle's Emporium of Wonders" by Mike Resnick (Asimov's Jan 2008)

"The Gambler" by Paolo Bacigalupi (Fast Forward 2)

"Pride and Prometheus" by John Kessel (F&SF Jan 2008)

"The Ray-Gun: A Love Story" by James Alan Gardner (Asimov's Feb 2008)

"Shoggoths in Bloom" by Elizabeth Bear (Asimov's Mar 2008)

Best Short Story

"26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss" by Kij Johnson (Asimov's Jul 2008)

"Article of Faith" by Mike Resnick (Baen's Universe Oct 2008)

"Evil Robot Monkey" by Mary Robinette Kowal (The Solaris Book of New Science Fiction, Volume Two)

"Exhalation" by Ted Chiang (Eclipse Two)

"From Babel's Fall'n Glory We Flew" by Michael Swanwick (Asimov's Feb 2008)

Best Related Book

RHETORICS OF FANTASY by Farah Mendlesohn (Wesleyan University Press)

SPECTRUM 15: THE BEST IN CONTEMPORARY FANTASTIC ART by Cathy & Arnie Fenner, eds. (Underwood Books)

THE VORKOSIGAN COMPANION: THE UNIVERSE OF LOIS

MCMASTER BUJOLD by Lillian Stewart Carl & John Helfers, eds. (Baen)

WHAT IT IS WE DO WHEN WE READ SCIENCE FICTION by Paul Kincaid (Becon Publications)

YOUR HATE MAIL WILL BE GRADED: A DECADE OF WHATEVER, 1998-2008 by John Scalzi (Subterranean Press)

Best Editor, Short Form

Ellen Datlow

Stanley Schmidt

Jonathan Strahan

Gordon Van Gelder

Sheila Williams

Best Editor, Long Form

Lou Anders

Ginjer Buchanan

David G. Hartwell

Beth Meacham

Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Best Professional Artist

Daniel Dos Santos

Bob Eggleton

Donato Giancola

John Picacio

Shaun Tan

The John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer

Aliette de Bodard

David Anthony Durham

Felix Gilman

Tony Pi

Gord Sellar

ODD BOOK TITLES by Robert Day

Every year, the trade magazine of the book trade, THE BOOKSELLER, hosts the Diagram Prize for the Oddest Book Title of the Year. The rules for nomination are simple: a book has to have a remarkably odd title and have been published during the year in question. And the title has to be genuinely odd – books published with deliberately odd titles are excluded in the shortlisting process. Previous years' winners (PROCEEDINGS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON NUDE MICE, SCENES FROM THE HISTORY OF CONCRETE and HOW GREEN WERE THE NAZIS?) were collected last year in a slim volume enticingly titled HOW TO AVOID HUGE SHIPS (another past winner); the organisers report that the economic gloom seems to have restricted publishers' lists in general and odd titles in particular. However, some promising contenders missed the cut; EXCREMENT IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES, for example; and SKETCHES OF HULL AUTHORS was ruled out because it was published in 1879 but is still available due to the wonders of 'print on demand'.

So here is this year's shortlist:

BABOON METAPHYSICS by Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth (University of Chicago Press, £12.50) ["From the team that brought you former odd-title nominee VERSAILLES; THE VIEW FROM SWEDEN)

CURBSIDE CONSULTATION OF THE COLON by Brooks D. Cash (SLACK Incorporated) ["...this 208-page epic offers 'quick and direct answers to the thorny questions commonly posed during a 'curbside consultation' between

surgical colleagues', which suggests there is a flash mob-esque team of rogue gastroenterologists currently roaming the streets."]

THE LARGE SIEVE AND ITS APPLICATIONS by Emmanuel Kowalski (Cambridge University Press, £50)

STRIP AND KNIT WITH STYLE by Mark Hordyszynski (C&T Publishers)

TECHNIQUES FOR CORROSION MONITORING by Lietai Yang (Woodhead Publishing, £160) ["Eyes? Check. Pencil? Check. Notepad? Check. Or so I thought. Not according to this unputdownable 'comprehensive analysis of the range of techniques for corrosion monitoring'. It has 712 pages...and examines 'corrosion monitoring in special environments'....(this book) is Woodhead Publishing's second successive shortlist nomination in a row following McSweeney's CHEESE PROBLEMS SOLVED last year..."]

THE 2009–2014 WORLD OUTLOOK FOR 60-MILLIGRAM CONTAINERS OF FROMAGE FRAIS by Professor Philip M Parker (Icon Group International, £700) ["...(this) title is doubly strange, given that it appears to contain a gross error. Fromage frais is normally available in 60-gram containers, not 60-milligram. The 'world outlook' for 0.06-gram fromage frais containers probably ain't that great."]

You can vote for your favourite at www.thebookseller.com and the winner will be announced on 27th March.

RD

...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 and regular reviewer **Pauline Morgan**:- "Regarding the snippet in the last Newsletter about Charlaine Harris: one reason why the books are so popular in America at present could be that HBO have made a TV series based on the books. The series, TRUEBLOOD, is due to hit our screens, on Channel 4 sometime later this year."

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... UK **Games Workshop** plans to sell off their Solaris publishing line, edited by **George Mann**. Over the past several years, Solaris has published numerous science fiction, fantasy, and horror anthologies and novels **The Fine Books Company** is offering a package of all 126 books to have won the Hugo and Nebula Awards. For \$116, 530, the package includes first editions of all of the books with 95% of them autographed by the authors [Note: I've seen this list and some of the cover scans and they most definitely are *not* all First Editions. Some, like Walter M Miller's A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ are the UK edition which followed the US Edition - RGP]. *Realms of Fantasy* Saved! Tir Na Nog Publications has announced that it has purchased *Realms of Fantasy* from Sovereign Media. The editorial staff is being kept intact with **Douglas Cohen** receiving a promotion to non-fiction editor. The move means that **Warren**

Lapine will not be re-launching *Fantastic Stories*, instead focusing on the continuation of Realms of Fantasy, which is expected to publish its next issue with a July date. Former DNA subscriptions will be filled with *Realms of Fantasy* **Harlan Ellison** has filed a lawsuit against Paramount Studios and the Writers Guild of America over the merchandising, publishing, or any other exploitations of his script to the classic Star Trek episode “The City on the Edge of Forever” **The SciFi Channel** has announced plans to change their name to Syfy. The rebranding is an attempt to more fully own the channel's name,



which can't be done with the current 'Sci Fi Channel' name since sci fi is in too widespread use to be trademarked. According to new Sci Fi President Dave Howe, Sci Fi was too limiting and didn't include fantasy, paranormal, supernatural, action, or superheroes A mint condition, unretouched issue of **Action Comics #1**, which introduced the world to **Superman**, sold at auction for \$317,200 to John Dolmayan, the drummer for the band System of a Down. The previous owner had purchased the comic second hand in the 1950s for 35 cents. Dolmayan is also a rare comic dealer and says he purchased it for an unidentified client. ... *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.**

***GOING UNDER* by Justina Robson**

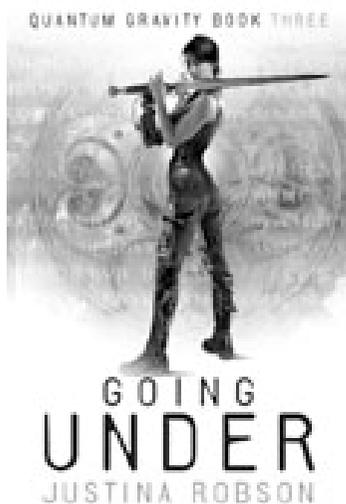
Gollancz / 281pgs / £18.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0575078666 /

£12.99 trade paperback ISBN: 978-0575078673

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

This is a series of books that is getting darker. In the first, KEEPING IT REAL, we were introduced to Lila Black and the world after the Quantum Bomb. In this event, the dimensions had split open revealing access to places such

as Alheim, Daemonia and Faerie. After an accident in Alheim, Lila was rebuilt as part cyborg. That made her the perfect bodyguard for Zal. He is an elf and the lead singer in a rock band who has been threatened with death. The resolution involves a journey into Alheim, and the revelation that Zal has somehow become a demon. Lila has also acquired the soul of a dead elf which has become part of her.



In volume two, *SELLING OUT*, Lila is sent to Daemonia to try to discover how an elf can also be a demon. This is a complex world where vendettas are commonplace and through no real fault of her own, Lila finds herself the focus of one. By the end of this book, she has acquired a familiar, Thingamajig, and two husbands, Zal and Teazole, a demon.

As this third volume, *GOING UNDER*, starts, Lila is trying to find some answers, like why the cyborg parts of her are merging with her flesh and their reaction times are getting faster. In the middle of her honeymoon, Malachi, a black fairy, turns up and asks her to come back to Otopia, the human world to investigate the Mothkin which are turning up there in increasing numbers and scaring the natives even though they seem harmless. Before she can do that, she has to dispose of the latest two demons that want to kill her, and find Teazole who has disappeared on a dangerous outing to duel with wild demons. Amongst the ensuing mayhem, Lila loses friends and gains more problems, the solution of which takes her into Faerie. In the struggle that ensues, she faces losing everything she cares about.

The characters are real, the writing is slick, the pace and tension excellent, but to understand all the nuances of the situations Lila finds herself in, it is better to read the previous two volumes than to start here. *PM*

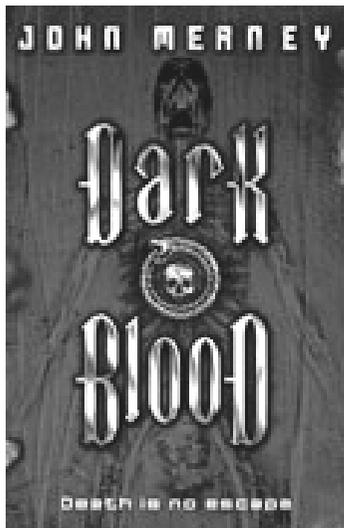
***DARK BLOOD* by John Meaney**

Gollancz / 344pgs / £7.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0575084155

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Dark Blood is a direct sequel to Meaney's excellent Bone Song. In the latter, police officer Donal Riordan has discovered that he had been set up to fail in the protection task he had been given. At the end, both Donal and Laura Steele, his boss and lover, are killed but for Donal, death is not permanent. Laura was a zombie and now he has her heart keeping him functioning.

Donal's is a strange world where sorcery is apparent, spells are a useful tool in everyday life. It is a world with all the technological trappings of our own, such as cars, guns, telephones and all the other necessities of modern civilisation. The system though, is powered by the residual energy in bones. The bones of the dead are processed in huge vats. At least that is better than the system in Illuria, a country across the sea, where living children are tapped for their energy.



Back at work after his recovery, but still grieving for Laura, Donal finds her department leaderless but determined to solve some of the outstanding issues from previous events. They know that there are strange things going on but lack the authority to tackle them head-on. Tangled with the desire to catch those that escaped after the debacle that cost Laura her existence, are a plot to subvert the citizens of Tristopolis via ensorcelled phone lines, and politics. The rise of the Unity Party after a massacre at the Town Hall, which zombies are framed for, leads to an intent to legislate against non-humans and cast them out of society. This will include Donal and some of his colleagues. They take it on themselves to hunt down the black mage behind the Unity Party in an attempt to restore the equilibrium.

Complex and fast paced, Meaney paints a believable society populated with unforgettable characters. Is this Science Fiction? Who cares? It is a thoroughly enjoyable, though dark, romp through an alien world.

😊😊😊😊 **FILM ROUND-UP** 😞😞😞😞

BY VICKY COOK

***IRON MAN* (2008), directed by Jon Favreau**

Starring Robert Downey Jr., Terrence Howard, Jeff Bridges, Gwyneth Paltrow,

Tony Stark is the heir to a weapons manufacturing dynasty. Handsome, suave, charming, he captures the public imagination and adds glamour to the industry. He enjoys his fame and lavish lifestyle. However on a promotional trip to Afghanistan, he is captured by enemy soldiers after suffering near-fatal injuries, who fix him up but in such a way that his life will never be the same again...

The story takes a while to get going to the Iron Man bits – there is quite a slow build up before the action scenes get going. I found the film overall a little long and with too many storylines for one film – it seems to feature the story of

him escaping from enemy hands, then launches into another plotline featuring enemies closer to home. It doesn't take a genius to work out the bad guys either but then comic book stories can be predictable – that can be part of their appeal.



However, Robert Downey Jr. is great in the lead role, in one of his first major roles for a few years. Gwyneth Paltrow is also good if not given a tremendous amount to do as his loyal assistant, Ms Pepper Potts, and Jeff Bridges steals scenes as the partner in his business. There is a good amount of humour as well – the themes in the film are quite dark and the comedy therefore quite black, but it was kept light by, for instance, the banter between Stark and his assistant. The CGI is also good – it backs up the real armour suit made for the film, rather than replacing everything, which adds a good amount of realism and looks more impressive. I also felt emotionally for the characters – they had real feelings and seemed like real people. This was impressive for a film made from a comic book – Spider-man went along the same vein, trying to make the audience emote with the characters, and this is a factor I liked in both these films.



Interestingly, Marvel made this film themselves rather than farming their characters out to other studios. Despite the over-long plotline and the rather slow build-up, I think they've done a good job and would recommend the film.

<<For those wondering where IRON MAN comes from, here is the cover of the original comic from 1963 – Marvel Comics' TALES OF SUSPENSE #39. He continued in TALES OF SUSPENSE sharing many issues with CAPTAIN AMERICA until 1968 when IRON MAN #1 appeared. – RGP>>

TRANSFORMERS (2007), directed by Michael Bay
Starring Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox

Now this is a film that far exceeded my expectations! I grew up around the same time as the cartoon series was showing on television, and the first animated film came out during my youth, but I was never completely entranced...I was not quite sure therefore how I would get on with this film...

Teenager Sam Whitwicky lives in a remote American town, growing up like any normal lad, but little does he realise that his unreliable car is not quite what it seems. He is drawn into a battle between two extraterrestrial clans over a talisman called the Allspark.

The excellent cinematography (you can really feel the heat in the desert town they live in, and the scenery is gorgeous), and excellent CGI used to create the immense Transformers combine to create a film worth watching for visual effects alone. The acting is fairly standard (this sort of film is never going to make many demands on an actor, being for the most part full of car chases and CGI battles), and the robots are characterised for the most part well enough that by the end of the film you've got to know and can distinguish them well.

Don't expect it to be a children's movie – it was far more grown-up than I was expecting. Beware also – it is loud and with various car chases and battles throughout, so don't watch if you are expecting a quiet, thoughtful film! But I've watched it twice now and it does grow on you. I think I appreciated the comic timing and the acting from the two leads the most – they stood up well against the CGI and portrayed their characters well, so you could sympathise with them. Transformers fans may feel a little let down by the storyline – for the sake of the movie they've removed a lot of the back-story built up for many years by the Transformer cartoons, and changed some things (one example was that the humans are much more capable of defeating the bad guys than in the original cartoon where they were basically helpless and had to rely on the good guys). But, as a non-devotee of the original, this didn't particularly affect me, and overall I enjoyed it as a good piece of escapism. Films number 2 and 3 are coming out soon, so I may watch to see how they progress the idea further. *VC*

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:-

23rd April - tba

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 meeting is on 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/>



NOVACON 39 – the Birmingham SF Group’s own convention - will be held at the Park Inn, Nottingham over the weekend of 13-15 November 2009. Guest of Honour is JUSTINA ROBSON. Full details from 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or email alice@altair-4.co.uk

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

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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 #451 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.

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