

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JUNE 2009

ISSUE 453

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

COMMITTEE:

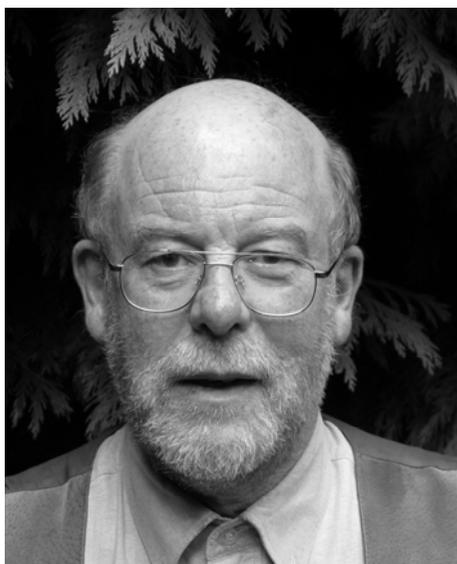
VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);
VICKY COOK (SECRETARY); ROG PEYTON (NEWSLETTER EDITOR);
DAVE CORBY (PUBLICITY OFFICER); WILLIAM MCCABE;
NOVACON 39 CHAIRMAN: ALICE LAWSON

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Friday 12th June

BOB BLACKHAM

Robert Blackham is a long standing fan of J R R Tolkien's works and has become a recognised expert on the life of Tolkien and the influences it had on Tolkien's works of fiction. An active member of the Tolkien Society, Bob has extensively studied not only Tolkien's own works, but also the large body of academic

work dedicated to the study of Tolkien. This supports Bob's own published works highlighting the known and likely influences of the places Tolkien lived on works such as **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**.

"The Roots of Tolkien's Middle-earth" (2006) draws together the materials Bob has researched concerning the impact of Birmingham on Tolkien,

July 10th – to be announced

with particular focus on Kings Heath and Hall Green (Sarehole Mill) where Tolkien spent much of his early life. Sarehole Mill is one of the few inspirational influences on TLOTR that we can be sure of, as Tolkien himself revealed that Sandyman's Mill in Hobbiton is directly based on Sarehole.

As well as the book, Bob has a well acclaimed presentation (of the same title) presenting many fascinating images of Birmingham, both modern and historical, in which he highlights the possible influences on Tolkien very clearly and allows the viewer to draw their own conclusions.

Bob will be presenting “The Roots of Middle-earth” right here on 12th June.

Dave Corby

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.

VINEYARD TRIP By Vernon Brown

In ages past the Group used to organise the occasional day or evening out in addition to our usual monthly meetings although in recent years these have not taken place. However it has been suggested that they be revived, so your Committee has looked into a visit to a (more or less) local vineyard. But before we can go any further with the idea we need to know roughly how many people would be interested.

Buzzards Valley Vineyard lies between Sutton Coldfield and Tamworth and is not easily accessible by public transport so a coach would be necessary to get there and back.

There are three tours of the vineyard available:

Tour One: Tour and talk about the vineyard, weather permitting. Tour and explanation of the winery and video presentation. Wine tasting featuring three of their wine range. Cost £7.00 per person.

Tour Two: As Tour One plus cheese and biscuits, pickles etc. Cost £12.50 per person.

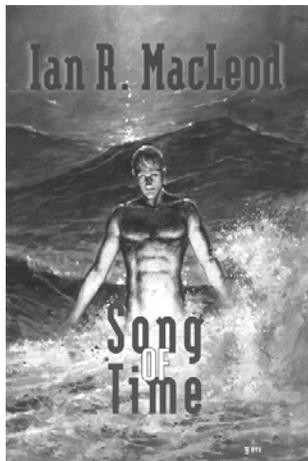
Tour Three: As Tour One plus main course and dessert from the set menu. Cost £15.00 per person.

The winery has a bar, restaurant and tea room as well as a food and gift shop.

Buzzards Valley tell us that a good time to go there is the beginning of September. The basic tour (Tour One) takes about an hour and a half and there are still places left. Saturday September 5th is available – we could meet in Birmingham about 10am to return about 12.30 or meet about noon to return

about 4pm. A minimum of 20 people is necessary for either of these tours. If only a few people are interested we may be able to join others on a type Three Tour on Friday 4th September at 7.00pm. Whichever we do the cost of the coach must be added to the tour cost.

If you are interested and/or would like further information please see Vernon or Pat at this months meeting or contact the Committee via letter or email as soon as possible – we must book soon. See covers of Newsletter for addresses.



2009 ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD – THE WINNER

The winner was announced two days after the last newsletter was printed so you all probably know already. Ian R MacLeod's SONG OF TIME was the winner and it seems to be a popular choice. Published by the small independent PS Publishing, it is unlikely that this winner will have a mass-market paperback edition unless it is picked up by one of the majors

NEBULA AWARDS: THE WINNERS

Novel: POWERS – Ursula K Le Guin (Harcourt, Sep07)

Novella: “The Spacetime Pool”- Catherine Asaro (Analog, Mar08)

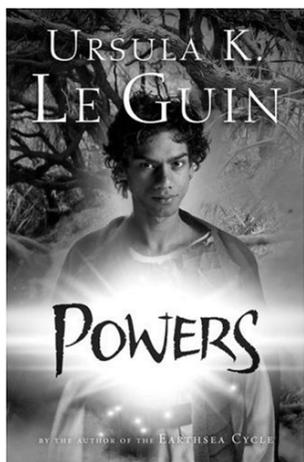
Novelette: “Pride and Prometheus” – John Kessel (F&SF, Jan08)

Short Story: “Trophy Wives - Nina Kiriki Hoffman (FELLOWSHIP FANTASTIC, ed. Martin H. Greenberg and Kerrie Hughes, DAW Books Jan08)

Script: WALL-E - Screenplay by Andrew Stanton, Jim Reardon, Original story by Andrew Stanton, Pete Docter (Walt Disney June 2008)

Andre Norton Award for Young Adult SF & Fantasy: FLORA'S DARE: HOW A GIRL OF SPIRIT GAMBLES ALL TO EXPAND HER VOCABULARY, CONFRONT A BOUNCING

BOY TERROR, AND TRY TO SAVE CALIFA FROM A SHAKY DOOM (DESPITE BEING CONFINED TO HER ROOM) - Ysabeau S. Wilce (Harcourt, Sep08)



Also honored during the Nebula Award Weekend were:

A. J. Budrys -- Solstice Award
M.J. Engh -- Author Emerita
Marty Greenberg -- Solstice Award
Harry Harrison -- Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master
Joss Whedon -- Ray Bradbury Award
Kate Wilhelm -- Solstice Award

2008 SIDEWISE AWARDS: THE FINALISTS

Best Long-Form Alternate History

THE AFFINITY BRIDGE by George Mann. (Snowbooks 2008. Also Tor 2009)
NATION by Terry Pratchett (Doubleday UK 2008 and HarperCollins 2008)
THE DRAGON'S NINE SONS by Chris Roberson (BL/Solaris 2008)
SWIFTLY by Adam Roberts (Gollancz 2008)
HALF A CROWN by Jo Walton (Tor 2008)

Best Short-Form Alternate History

"The People's Machine" by Tobias Buckell (SIDEWAYS IN CRIME: AN ALTERNATE MYSTERY ANTHOLOGY ed. Lou Anders, BL/Solaris 2008)
"Poison Victory" by Albert E. Cowdrey (F&SF July 2008)
"A Brief Guide to Other Histories" by Paul McAuley (Postscripts #15, Sept 2008)
"Night Bird Soaring" by T. L. Morganfield. (Greatest Uncommon Denominator #3 Autumn 2008)
"Sacrifice" by Mary Rosenblum (SIDEWAYS IN CRIME: AN ALTERNATE MYSTERY ANTHOLOGY ed. Lou Anders, BL/Solaris 2008)
"G-Men" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (SIDEWAYS IN CRIME: AN ALTERNATE MYSTERY ANTHOLOGY ed. Lou Anders, BL/Solaris 2008)

...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 >>

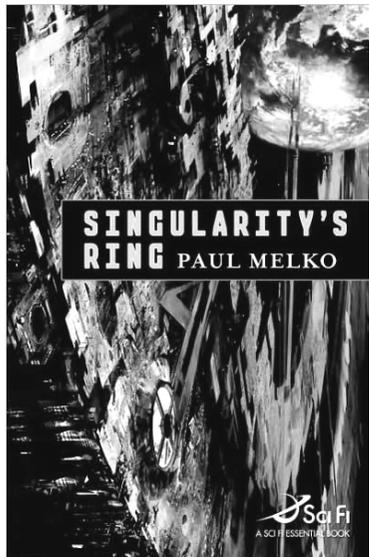
From long-time member David A Hardy:- "Dear Sir, I realise that the event will be long over by the time this is published (if it is), but I have to say that I read the announcement of this year's Middle-earth Weekend with increasing disbelief. Never mind about 'Sarehole-Moseley-Kings Heath': Sarehole Mill is in HALL GREEN, and it is mainly this district that claims Tolkien as its own! It is widely accepted that THE LORD OF THE RINGS was based largely on the green area known as 'The Dingles' - also in Hall Green. But Hall Green does not receive a single mention. Incidentally I shall be there, as usual, as a steward - probably selling programme, or helping motorists to park off Cole Bank Road (Hall Green). . . David A. Hardy Hall Green ((I assume that this was written by Dave Corby, who really should know better! Oh, and there's no apostrophe in 'Kings Heath' even though there should be))"

<<Dear Mr Hardy, Thank you for your letter. It is always most welcome to receive readers' comments on the contents of our newsletter. Your comments have been noted and passed to the relevant department and I can assure you that the matter will be covered in our next issue.

Your second point regarding the apostrophe is also noted. The recent ruling by Birmingham City Council that apostrophes should not be used in addresses has not yet been accepted by this organisation, some members of which also belong to the Society for the Protection of the Apostrophe. Should you wish to join the Society please contact the President of the Society at 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham who is the world expert on the apostrophe and will be happy to answer any queries you have. Oops, I just noticed that's your address! Sorry, Sir! I trust your stewarding at the event goes well. It is most welcome to hear that our readers donate their services to help others. Cordially yours, The Editor>>

And from Dave Corby on the same subject:- “Aaaargh! Alas, I was not the author of the original press release (although I certainly accept it is sensible to assume so), I just passed it on from the original author (I think it was originally written for the Birmingham 13 magazine). I did scan it briefly looking for major errors, but obviously my review was too brief as I failed to spot the lack of reference to Hall Green. And I hope I would have got the apostrophe in "King's Heath" correct, but that is easy to say in retrospect.”

<<Ah! The apostrophe in Kings Heath. There never was one though there **should** have been one. But now, because of the Council's new ruling there shouldn't be one anyway but there isn't so there's not. So you were quite right in the first place! – RGP>>



NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Paul Melko** is the winner of the Compton Crook Award, presented to a new author for the best novel - SINGULARITY'S RING. The Compton Crook Award is presented annually by the Baltimore Science Fiction Society at Balticon

.... **Christopher Priest** won the European SF Society Grand Master Award at Eurocon in Italy **The David Gemmell Legend Award** will be presented at an event-packed ceremony on Friday 19th June 2009, at the impressive headquarters of The Magic Circle, in Euston, London. See last month's newsletter for nominees. For more details of the award go to <http://gemmellaward.com/>

Robert Silverberg's brilliant novel of

overpopulation, *THE WORLD INSIDE*, is to be adapted as a TV miniseries Birmingham writer **Joel Lane**, whose work has received such critical accolades as "Oh no it's him", has a supernatural horror novella, *THE WITNESSES ARE GONE*, just out from horror, fantasy and SF specialist publisher PS Publishing. It's published in a limited edition of 500 signed trade hardbacks (£10) and 100 signed hardbacks with dj (£25). For more details, see www.pspublishing.co.uk **Stephenie Meyers** is the most popular novelist of the 21st century. Her novels accounted for 16% of all book sales in the first quarter of 2009 The final book in **Robert Jordan's** Wheel of Time series, *A Memory of Light*, being completed by **Brandon Sanderson** will now be three books. The first book, *THE GATHERING STORM*, is scheduled for November 2009 publication. Movie rights have been acquired by Universal Pictures **Dave McKean** has



illustrated a set of 6 Mythical Creatures stamps for Royal Mail to be released June 16th. They will feature folklore creatures: unicorns, dragons, giants, pixies, fairies and mermaids. A presentation pack will also feature very short stories by **Neil Gaiman** The IAU has officially named an 84-kilometer wide crater located in Noachis Terra on Mars after **Isaac Asimov**. Asimov Crater can be found at 47.0°S, 355.1°W The Tennessee Supreme Court has refused to hear **Victor Horadam's** appeal to a 2008 ruling, settling a lawsuit over the **Andre Norton** estate rights. Horadam claimed that Norton's will stipulated that he should receive royalties on all Norton works published following her death. **Sue Stewart**, Norton's long-time care giver claimed that the will gave her rights over any posthumous reprints and only gave Horadam rights over works published for the first time after Norton's death. Horadam won the initial trial, which was reversed upon Stewart's appeal. US comics fan **Ralph Chicorel** will be auctioning off 110 comics from his collection, begun when he was a child. Most of the comics were originally purchased by Chicorel for a dime. Chicorel read them once and kept them in good condition. The collection, which includes issues of *Batman #1*, *Marvel Comics #1*, *Bulletman #1* and *Marvel Mystery Comics #9*, is expected to sell for more than half a million dollars *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.**

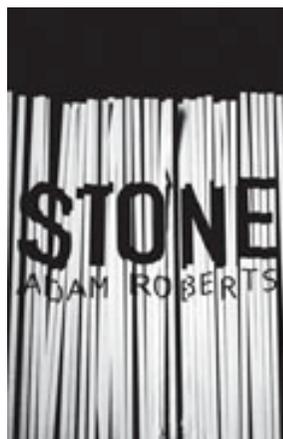
***STONE* by Adam Roberts**

Gollancz / 292pgs / £7.99 paperback /

ISBN: 978 0575082526

Reviewed by Dave Corby

Adam Roberts is a thoroughly modern science fiction author. He has had an SF novel printed every year since 2000 (excepting 2005) and has been nominated twice for the Arthur C. Clarke award; *STONE*, however, is not one of his nominated novels – that honour has gone to *SALT*, his first published novel, and the more recent *GRADISIL*.



The Guardian is quoted on the back of the volume, saying “Roberts is the king of the thought-experiment” and I can see why that quote is applicable to this book. *STONE* examines in some depth what the future of humanity could look like given the technological advancement into advanced nanotechnology. It depicts a society spread amongst a region of space, whereby faster-than-light travel is possible due to a very personal feeling application of quantum atomic orbital theory, and almost any injury can be recovered from, up to and including being beheaded, and life expectancy is over 900 years on average due to the nanotechnology contained within everyone’s body.

In this society technology has virtually groomed out undesirable personality traits, such as criminal activity, and society has forgotten what crime really is. Into this Adams inserts Ae, the murderer and protagonist of *Stone*. Imprisoned in an inescapable chamber inside a star for Ae’s murderous habits, Ae is offered release by a mysterious employer if only Ae will perform a monstrous job in return. Desperate for release, Ae agrees. You will note a lack of reference to Ae’s sex; which is intentional.

The book itself is written in the first person, being Ae’s memoirs following the completion of the mission. As such, the whole text feels very personal; Adams has made Ae’s motivations and actions seem justified from Ae’s admittedly warped point of view. It also allows Adams to hide the relevant secrets until the appropriate time to give revelation. It does also lead to a certain degree of self-referential introspection and soul-searching. Whether that kind of writing appeals is down to the individual’s taste, but luckily Adams does not labour it too heavily.

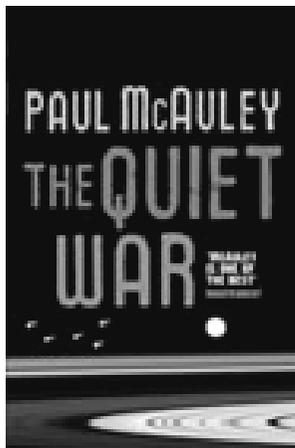
I found this book to be interesting; the concepts seem suitably fresh, and certainly feel up to date. Sometimes the text is light on description of what may be miraculous technology to us, but clearly is commonplace to Ae. This gave me a slight feeling of detachment in reading it, and so I did not find myself as engaged with this as certain other books I have recently read (e.g. TAU ZERO, reviewed last issue). Overall, I found myself reading on to find out how it all ended more than just to enjoy the writing as I went along. I also found that the first person perspective meant that the book gave little insight into any other characters, containing only Ae's musings upon them and no direct examination.

In conclusion I would give a guarded recommendation; this book is fresh, sophisticated and impressively conceptual; but it is also distant, curious and occasionally uncomfortable or challenging. I did enjoy it, but only to a finite degree. Not a book to curl up in bed with; more a book to boldly experience and absorb the potential from... *DC*

***THE QUIET WAR* by Paul McAuley**

Gollancz / 462pgs / £12.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978 0575079335

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



It is always refreshing to read a book where you can rely on the accuracy of the science, or at least, to know that the projected developments are plausible.

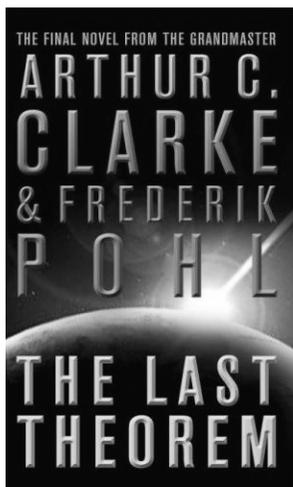
A 'quiet war' is a conflict carried out by propaganda and threat without any actual violence. This is the situation between the peoples of the Inner and Outer systems. Earth has suffered from vast ecological disasters but the balance is gradually being restored, though the biodiversity is unlikely ever to regain its peak of the 19th century. The people of the Outer Planets live in biodomes, relying on their structural integrity and specially designed vacuum organisms to provide everyday needs.

It is the bioengineers that carry the plot forward. Macy Minnot is part of the team sent out from Earth as a diplomatic gesture, to Callisto to help quicken the new biodome project at Rainbow Bridge. Though a relatively passive character, she gets caught up in the attempts to sabotage the goodwill that the project is designed to generate. On Earth, Sri Hong-Owen labours under a different set of pressures. She thinks of herself as one of the best gene-splicers in the business – the best being Avernus who works in the Outer Planets. Some of her clandestine work for the family that rules Brazil – one of the three real powers left on Earth (the others being Europe and China) – is nearing fruition. Among

these are clones, bred and trained to be saboteurs in the run up to the shooting war that some political factions feel is desirable.

There may be a little too much in the way of scientific explanation for some tastes, but the complexities of the situation and the interactions of the characters as well as the individuality of the landscapes combine to form a novel which will not disappoint those who hanker after real science fiction. *PM*

***THE LAST THEOREM* by Arthur C Clarke & Frederik Pohl**
Gollancz / 424 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978 0007290024
Reviewed by Michael Jones



This may perhaps be worth treasuring as Clarke's last book. It is typical of his chatty, informal style of writing, carrying the reader along while throwing in a plethora of fascinating ideas, and Fred Pohl shows himself as an able and appropriate collaborator. Between the two of them they have produced what seems on the surface to be a fascinating and thought-provoking SF novel - who cares if Clarke provided the ideas and Pohl did the writing, or might it have been the other way round?

There are two basic plots going on in parallel. In one of them the only really new thing is the 'discovery' of a new proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, but although its discovery seems to provide the foundation of most of the story (as well as the title of the book) the proof is not actually explained and it provides only a weak foundation. The other plot concerns the decision of the Galactic powers-that-be to wipe out the human race which has just discovered atomic weapons and is therefore adjudged a danger to the well-being of the rest of the Milky Way - hardly a new concept. Anyway, humanity puts its house in order just in time and the sterilisation order is revoked. But so what - nobody on Earth knew what was coming anyway.

In the meantime plenty of subsidiary ideas are tossed in to help these plots along. Unfortunately an awful lot of these ideas are re-workings of previous stories and articles; in at least one case from as far back as 1956. One gets an impression of these two old codgers looking through their 'back catalogues' searching for bits and pieces to put in to help the story along and at the same time disguise the fact that there never was much of a story there in the first place. Not a very exciting, dramatic or even novel one anyway.

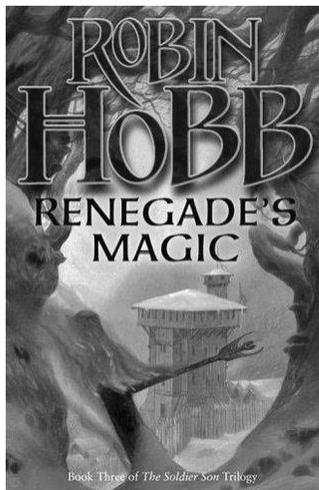
So there are two ways to look at this. On the one hand, it is an entertaining, albeit undemanding, read which any SF fan should have the

capacity to enjoy. On the other, it is not a classic, such as both authors have always been associated with, and it never will be. *MJ*

RENEGADE'S MAGIC by Robin Hobb

Voyager / 760pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN:

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan,



This is the third volume of a trilogy which started with SHAMAN'S CROSSING and continued in THE FOREST MAGE. It is the story of Nevare Burrvelle. As a second son he is destined by law to be a soldier. The first volume follows his training and his first encounters with magic, the second with his fall from grace.

The Eastern boundary of the country of Gernia is a range of mountains inhabited by a people commonly known as Specks. The Great Ones of the Specks are literally that. The fatter you are, the more magic your body can hold. On death they are absorbed into trees and can still communicate with living Great Ones. To build a road through the mountains, the Gernians are cutting down these trees. The magic of the land

objects to this so has turned Nevare into a Great One with the expectation that he will find a solution to the problem. To this end, Nevare's soul was divided so that he was able to learn both Gernian and Speck ways. By the start of Renegade's Magic, the two parts of him have been reunited in one body, but have not merged into one mind. The fight for control of the body by the two parts of him – Nevare the Gernian and Soldier's boy, the Speck - mirrors the conflict between the two peoples. A resolution of either does not seem possible.

Robin Hobb has written some superb, long trilogies in the past. This is not her finest. There are some interesting ideas about magic and the rights and wrongs of conflict but there is too much of the philosophy. The book would have benefited from a good prune. This book, however, should not be read in isolation. It is essential that the previous two volumes are read first. *PM*

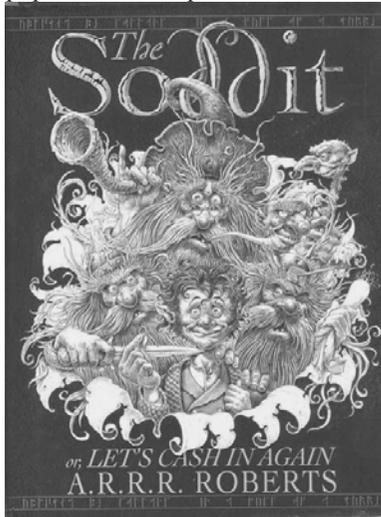
THE SODDIT by A. R. R. Roberts

Gollancz / 343pgs / £6.99 hardcover ISBN: 0-575-07554-6

Reviewed by Steve Jones

Subtitled "or LET'S CASH IN AGAIN", this is a parody by Adam Roberts, better known for writing real science fiction such as SALT or STONE, of a certain well-known and well-loved fantasy novel...oh alright, it's THE HOBBIT.

This is a very small hardback, more paperback-sized, which explains the paperback-sized price. It has the obligatory map, and a few illustrations, which all suitably send up the originals. The book



starts as a fairly straight-forward parody with the description of the 'soddits', including "that they speak with a slight Birmingham accent, oddly." It continues with gay elves (in the modern sense), communist spiders and Goblins who really do gobble because they are giant turkeys.

After the very silly riddle contest between Bingo and Sollum, Roberts appears to tire of the page by page approach, and takes the plot in more original directions. We find out who really did build all those vast dwarven halls, and the strange relationship between wizards and dragons. We learn about the Thing (R) made by the nasty Sharon, which does far

more than just make its wearer invisible.

At the end is an extended appendix of threatened spinoffery, films, computer games ad nauseam. Overall I did enjoy this book, as it was short and did not outstay its welcome. There is a sequel/prequel "THE SELLAMILLION" for the bits of Tolkien which survived this visit. *SJ*

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:-

18th June 2009 - **GOOD OMENS** by **Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman**

Future dates— 16th July, 20th August

THE MISFiTs are an informal group of local SF fans who meet regularly at 7pm at the Wagon & Horses, Oldbury on the third Friday of each month. Real ale, good food, great company. Next meeting is on 19th June.

More details from Martin Tudor (empties084@btinternet.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 confirmed GoHs are: **Jasper Fforde, Brian Clemens and Gail Z Martin**. 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!

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

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

July 10th - to be announced. Regrettably Jo Fletcher has had to cancel due to one of her authors getting married on this day.

August 14th – SUMMER SOCIAL at the Black Eagle, Handsworth

September 11th – Novacon 39 Guest of Honour JUSTINA ROBSON

October 9th – SF author ALASTAIR REYNOLDS (provisional)

November 6th – JASPER FFORDE returns to entertain us

December 4th – CHRISTMAS SOCIAL – skittles, buffet, prizes, fun!!!

January 2010 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and AUCTION

February – QUIZ versus the B’ham University SF Group

March – Gollancz editor JO FLETCHER returns with more amusing and interesting anecdotes of life in publishing

April – Author and satirist ADAM ROBERTS

BRUM GROUP NEWS #453 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