

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

OCTOBER 2009

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

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Friday 9th October

ALASTAIR REYNOLDS

“I’m a science fiction writer based in Wales. I’m the author of eight novels and many short stories. I’ve been published since 1990, although I’ve been writing stories almost since I could hold a felt-tip. I spent the twelve years leading up to 2004 as a scientist within the European Space Agency, of which about half that time was spent working on S-Cam, the world’s most advanced optical camera. After spending sixteen years in the Netherlands, I returned to my native Wales in 2008.

“My first published novel was REVELATION SPACE (2000), which was

**WE HAVE MOVED! Please note new
meeting place!!!!!!!!!!!! (see page 2)**

shortlisted for the BSFA and Arthur C Clarke awards. My second novel, CHASM CITY, won the BSFA award in 2002. A number of my other novels and stories have subsequently been shortlisted for the BSFA and Clarke awards. Two independent short story collections, ZIMA BLUE (US) and GALACTIC NORTH (UK) appeared at the end of 2006. My latest book, HOUSE OF SUNS, appeared in the UK in April. An expanded version of the Zima Blue collection appeared in the UK in April 2009.

“My next novel, TERMINAL WORLD, is due for publication in October 2009. It's a far future, steampunk-influenced planetary romance about the adventures of an exiled pathologist, and a city in need of medicine...

“Coming in 2010 and beyond will be the 11K sequence, a trilogy of books dealing with the expansion of the human species into the solar system and beyond, over the next 11,000 years...”

(above taken from Alastair's website - <http://www.alastairreynolds.com/...>)

Alastair makes a very welcome return to the BSFG. The last time he spoke to the Group he was a relatively new writer – now he is one of the big names in the field. He has just signed a contract with his publisher which earns him £1 million for his next ten books!

RGP

*** * * NEW MEETING VENUE * * ***

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of the Old Joint Stock, Temple Street, just off Colmore Row. From the Briar Rose, continue up the hill, take first right, first left and it's about 4 or 5 buildings down on the left.

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 CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

This year's Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak, where we have once again hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00pm until 11.00pm on Friday 4th December. To get there take a 45 or 47 bus from Corporation Street. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - its about 15 minutes ride. PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE FROM OUR USUAL SECOND FRIDAY.

Tickets are £10 each which covers the cost of the skittle alley and the food but not your drinks (we have our own bar). There will be prizes for individual games – you don't have to know how to play skittles because we have our own variants of the game, designed to give everyone a chance, none of which would be allowed at competition or any other level. There will be a free half hourly raffle and, to judge from past comments, a good time will be had by all.

The meal will be a buffet consisting of a selection of sandwiches, sausage rolls, quiche, chicken wings, pizza, salads, etc., plus a separate selection for

vegetarians, provided that this requirement is clearly stated when you order your ticket.

With this Newsletter there should be an application form for one or two tickets. Please complete it as indicated and hand it to Pat, with the necessary money, at the October or November Group Meetings. Or send it to Vicky Stock, together with a cheque/postal order for the appropriate amount, at the address on the back page of this Newsletter. However, as there are currently problems with the postal system if you apply by post please send Vicky an email at the same time in case your application is delayed. THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS MONDAY 23TH NOVEMBER because the Tavern needs food numbers that week. By that time NOVACON will have happened and there may not be any tickets left – numbers are restricted for safety reasons and we have reached that number every year previously and had to refuse latecomers.

REMEMBER THAT TICKETS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT – GET THEM NOW!

THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARDS 2007 ***by Pauline Morgan***

<<As many of you must be aware, Pauline was one of the judges for 2007 and 2008. I asked for this article at the end of her first year but because she was a continuing judge it was felt that it would be better to hold it back until the second year's judging was complete. So here, finally, is the follow-up to her article about the Award itself which appeared back in the July newsletter. All the books are now out in paperback.– RGP>>

For anyone unfamiliar with this award, it is given for the best SF novel in a particular year that has been published in the UK. Publishers send copies of books they believe are eligible to the five panellists and the chairman, who read them. Then a short list of six books are chosen, which are read again and a winner chosen.

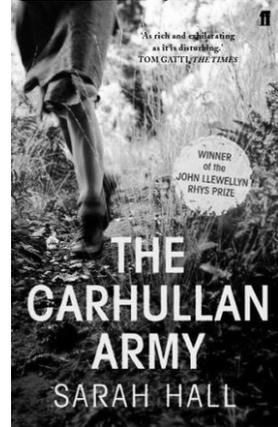


2007 was an exceptional year, not only in the number of books submitted (57) but also for the quality. It was very difficult to select the best six. Many very good books had to be left out. The six short listed books for 2007 show the wide range of material that comes under the umbrella of science fiction.

THE H-BOMB GIRL by Stephen Baxter (Faber) is a young adult novel set in an alternative past. The pivotal point is the Cuba Missile Crisis of 1962. It is set in Liverpool at a time when the Beatles were only just beginning to make their mark locally. Laura is a

typical 14-year-old who has been forced to change schools by her parents' imminent separation. Her new friends include a cross section of Liverpool's youth who help each other through the developing crisis. It is a novel about friendship running through alternative futures and time travel. At the end, the outcome is decided by Laura's choices. The book is also a homage to culture of the times, including *Dr Who*. The characters behave like teenagers and the historical context is excellent.

THE CARHULLAN ARMY by Sarah Hall (Faber) received critical acclaim in the literary field. Set in a near future, Britain's population has been herded into cities and because of the shortages here, they rely on food parcels from America. The population is kept busy manufacturing things that are never used and birth control is rigorously enforced. The premise of the dystopia of the farming society is climate change and specifically rising water levels. The narrator, known only as Sister, escapes to a women-only commune on an isolated in the Lake District; her induction into the group is not pleasant. Life is hard but she is finally accepted. This part of the novel is graphic and powerful and contains scenes that will not easily be forgotten.



THE RAW SHARK TEXTS (say the title aloud) by Stephen Hall (Canongate) is the surreal volume on the shortlist. It has some wonderful concepts, both as plot elements and in the layout of the book itself. The narrator awakes one morning with no memory. He finds notes addressed to him claiming to be from his former self, the First Eric Sanderson. He is told to contact Dr Randle who tells him he has a dissociative disorder caused by the death of his girlfriend. However, he keeps getting letters and packages from the First Eric Sanderson. Eventually he sets off on the trail on which these lead him, following very tentative clues. He discovers that he is being stalked by a conceptual shark which is gradually eating his

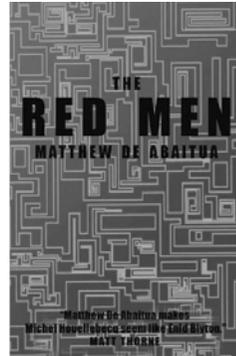
memories. He teams up with a girl called Scout, in the hunt for Dr Fidorus in the unspaces behind bookshelves and walls.

This is a delightfully weird book.

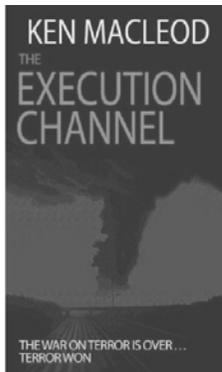
THE RED MEN by Matthew de Abaitua (Snowbooks) is a first novel. It has a delightful beginning and some excellent ideas. It is a near future where the surveillance systems in our society are higher even than now. Nelson Millar works for a software company which has developed a way of turning a person into a

virtual simulacrum of themselves. These are the red men. They can deputise for a busy executive in video conferences. Having your own red man is a sign of how valued you are in your company. The next step is to recreate a whole township and use the red men to anticipate responses to government policies before spending a lot of tax payers' money. This is not as straight-forward as it seems, especially as the project starts being sabotaged by a rival group.

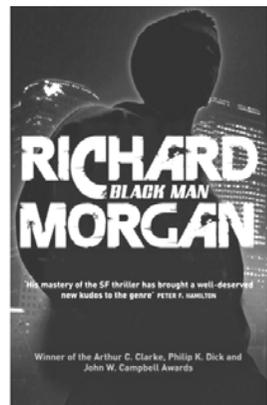
THE EXECUTION CHANNEL by Ken MacLeod (Orbit) is a near future thriller. Like the Baxter, the actual setting of the story is slightly out of the time-stream we are familiar with. The plot revolves around the members of the Travis family. James Travis works for a software company but has been secretly



passing information to the French (the rift between the US and France over the Iraq war deepened). His daughter, Roisin, is a peace activist camped outside Leuchars airbase in Scotland when something blows up. Initially this is thought to be a nuclear strike, but when the M42 in Birmingham and the Grangemouth oil refinery both go up, terrorists are suspected and civil order collapses. Alex, James's son, is in the army and because of his family connections he is questioned and tortured. The Execution Channel of the title is a TV channel which shows the executions of innocent and guilty alike in various parts of the world.



The winner of the award was **BLACK MAN** (published as **THIRTEEN** in the USA) by Richard Morgan (Gollancz). This is a big book in many respects. It tackles a lot of themes, many of which are relevant in our present climate. Carl Marsalis is a hated man. This is not because he happens to be black but because he is a genetically engineered warrior. His kind was bred to fight and is known as Thirteens. Once Marsalis and his fellow Thirteens had served their purpose, it was decided that they were too dangerous to leave at large. They had a choice; they could be shipped to Mars or live on a reservation. They were not allowed to breed. Marsalis, having won a return passage from Mars is now employed to hunt down renegade Thirteens. So he is an outcast from his own kind and from society in general. Everywhere he turns, he faces prejudice.



The story starts when a shuttle returning from Mars crash lands in the sea. It is discovered that a Thirteen has stowed away and survived the journey by eating the cryogenically stored passengers. Marsalis is brought in for the hunt. This is a carefully plotted novel and although it looks long at 647 pages, every part is necessary to build up both the characters and to make the setting an authentic if scary future. All the books on the short list have their merits, but BLACK MAN was the book that the panel of judges felt had all the ingredients necessary to make it the winner. *PM*

BRITISH FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The winners of the British Fantasy Awards were announced on September 20 at Fantasycon 2009 in Nottingham.

Best Novel (*The August Derleth Fantasy Award*): MEMOIRS OF A MASTER FORGER by Graham Joyce writing as 'William Heaney'

Best Novella: "The Reach of Children" by Tim Lebbon

Best Short Fiction: "Do You See" by Sarah Pinborough

Best Collection: BULL RUNNING FOR GIRLS by Allyson Bird

Best Anthology: THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF BEST NEW HORROR 19 edited by Stephen Jones

APOLOGIES FOR ERRORS IN LAST NEWSLETTER

In last month's newsletter I made a couple of errors for which I apologise. I had Alastair Reynolds' meeting as coming on October 11th when it should have been the 9th.

The second error was that I inadvertently repeated the Letter Column on two different pages. It *should* have been two separate items. Because of the way the newsletter is produced there is a lot of pasting and cutting and moving items around and I pasted the same item twice instead of pasting two separate items. The item duplicated was the following letter...

From our longstanding member Dave Hardy: "Shock! Horror!! A friend recently wrote to me asking if I had written some stories for DARK WORLDS magazine. Looking at their website, <http://www.gwthomas.org/darkworldsindex.htm>, I did indeed find two stories (one a historical adventure set in Canada, one a sword-and-sorcery) by 'David A. Hardy'. And they're definitely not mine!

What's this? A *_fake_* David A. Hardy in the SF community (roughly)?

Who IS this pretender? Can any of our readers throw any light upon this travesty?" – Dave (THE David A. Hardy)

The SECOND item should have read...

From our prospective new member David Hardy: "Shock! Horror!! A friend recently wrote to me asking if I had painted some covers for ANALOG and F&SF magazines. Doing some research on the internet, I did indeed find references to artwork by 'David A. Hardy'. And they're definitely not mine!

What's this? Another David A. Hardy in the SF community? Who IS this pretender? Can any member throw any light upon this travesty?" – Dave (THE David A. Hardy)

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Author **Joe Haldeman** was hospitalized in Cincinnati while attending Chilicon, an informal gathering. Haldeman was suffering from chest pains, but a CAT Scan revealed it was a intestinal problem. His situation was exacerbated by pancreatic problems. Haldeman has been placed in a drug-induced coma to improve his recovery Author **Jeanne Robinson**, wife of **Spider Robinson**, is scheduled to start a round of chemotherapy for a virulent form of biliary cancer. A benefit concert for Jeanne was held on Friday, September 18 at Cates Hill Chapel on Bowen Island and an ebay auction has been set up as well as donations through Paypal to help defray the cost of treatment **Joe Haldeman** and **John Varley** are the winners of the Robert A. Heinlein Award for 2009 The **Robert A. Heinlein Society** sponsored a short story writing contest in conjunction with the Heinlein Centennial in 2007. The winners have finally been announced and their stories will appear for a limited time on the Heinlein Society website. First Prize (including a \$5,000 award) - "Under the Shouting Sky" by **Karl Bunker**; Second Prize (including a \$2,000 award) - "In the Shadows" by **Charlie Allery**; Third Prize (including a \$1,000 award) - "Salvage Sputnik" by **Sam S. Kepfield** **Simon R Green** has sold three books in his new *Ghostfinders* series to Ace Books. Other books sold to Ace are **Charles Stross**'s THE FULLER MEMORANDUM and **Allen Steele**'s COYOTE DESTINY **Lucius Shepard**'s secret identity was revealed in the contents of his upcoming collection VIATOR PLUS, which includes stories he published as Sally Carteret **Noel Sturgeon** has delivered SLOW SCULPTURE, volume 12 of the collected short fiction of her father **Theodore Sturgeon** to North Atlantic Books. Series editor **Paul Williams** was too ill to participate. The 13th and final volume will be titled WHY DOLPHINS DON'T BITE and is scheduled for late 2010 **Howard Waldrop** was named the winner of the Jack Trevor Story Memorial Cup. The award is given on an occasional basis for a work of fiction or body of work which best celebrates the spirit of author **Jack Trevor Story**. The award carries a prize of \$1,000 and the stipulation that the recipient spend the entire amount within two weeks with nothing to show for it at the end. When Story, who died in 1992, was in front of a bankruptcy judge, he commented "You know how it is, judge. Two hundred or two thousand. It always lasts a week to a fortnight." British imprint **Solaris Books**, which was facing closure, has been sold by Games Workshop to Rebellion, a computer game developer. Rebellion has also signed a deal with Simon & Schuster UK to provide distribution for their Solaris titles. Until recently, Solaris was an offshoot of Games Workshop's BL Publishing New Line Cinema has reached an undisclosed agreement with the Estate of **J.R.R. Tolkien** and **HarperCollins Books** over royalties from *The Lord of the*

Rings films. The estate alleged that they had not seen a single penny from the successful movie franchise and the dispute was threatening production of the two-film version of *The Hobbit*, scheduled to begin filming in 2010 RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

***CYBERABAD DAYS* by Ian McDonald**

Gollancz / 313pgs / hardcover £12.99 ISBN: 978-0575084070 / Trade paperback £12.99 ISBN: 978-0575084087

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



In his novel, *RIVER OF GODS*, Ian McDonald chose as a setting a future India, dealing with problems that India is likely to face. The impression is of an India at the centre of world events. It is colourful, courageous and utterly convincing.

CYBERABAD DAYS is a collection set in the same time and place. They are stories of the people of this future India, the seven stories each touch on an aspect of this new society. Due to the problems brought on by climate change, India, always prone to drought and the vagaries of the monsoon, has a severe water problem. The country has disintegrated into a number of smaller states, two of which rely on the Ganges river for life support. There are wars between states.

Wars are fought between battlebots, controlled by teenagers via a virtual reality. In “Sanjeev and the Robotwallah”, Sanjeev is a boy who, from the first time he sees a Battlebot, is fascinated. When the robotwallahs offer him a job he is in heaven, even though all he is expected to do is clean up and keep house for them. It is a rite of passage story with Sanjeev discovering that his heroes are also human.

“Kyle Meets the River” is a story about fear of the unknown, including technology. Kyle’s father is a construction engineer. His best friend is Salim, the only Indian boy to attend the International School within a gated community. When things come to a head, Kyle has to make choices and discover what is really important.

“The Dust Assassin” is a kind of futuristic fairy tale with a sting. Two wealthy families are at war, literally, over the control of the water resources.

When one attacks the other, they kill everyone except the daughter. She tries to find a way to avenge her family's honour. Things do not quite work out how she envisaged them.

“An Eligible Boy” looks at the problems that arise from a historic desire to have sons. In the disgraceful parts of India's past, girls have been killed at birth or aborted when their sex was known. Now, girls are a rare commodity. The story exposes some of the pitfalls for young men who are now in surplus. In the marriage stakes, women now have the upper hand.

With the development of AIs, there is a fear that they could supplant humans. The Hamilton Acts decree the destruction of all level 3 and above AIs. Not all states have signed up. In “The Little Goddess” the narrator eventually agrees to smuggle AIs across the border into Bharat. She is a schizophrenic and the condition makes her ideal as she can carry several at a time inside her head. However, the noose tightens on the smugglers and if she is caught, she will be killed.

“The Djinn's Wife” looks at a different aspect of the emergent technology. We are used to seeing people walking around with Bluetooth receivers in their ears. Phones have internet connections. Combine the two and you get an internet connection that is transmitted straight to the brain smuggled behind the ear. Dancer Esha Rathore attracts the attention of A.J. Rao, a level 3 AI. He is also an actor in India's most popular soap *Town and Country*. Through this device, they can communicate, and to her it is as if he is a real as any other person. The story highlights the problems of immersing oneself too much in a virtual reality.

“Vishnu at the Cat Circus” deals with the problems that designer children can have as they grow up. Vishnu is the second child of parents who must have the next best thing. He is born a Brahmin. His genes have been tweaked so that he will live twice as long as a normal person, but he will mature physically at half the rate. At twenty, he has the appearance of a ten-year-old but the mental processes of a young man his chronological age. His brother resents him but is a genius in communication technology in his own right. As the story unfolds, Vishnu realises that his brother's plans are perhaps a step too far.

All the stories here could be regarded as a warning against taking some current strategy too far. They are excellent, well crafted stories, aimed to provoke the thoughtful reader.

PM

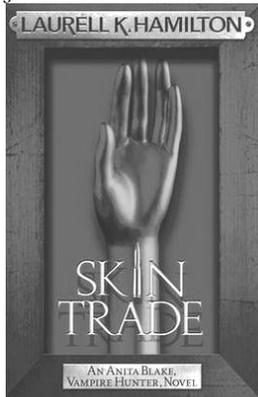
SKIN TRADE by Laurell K Hamilton

Headline / 502pgs / £12.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0755352531

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

This is Hamilton's seventeenth novel featuring vampire hunter Anita Blake. As a Federal Marshal in a world where vampires and were-animals are an accepted part of society, she hunts down and kills the bad ones. To the supernatural species, she is known as the Executioner.

SKIN TRADE begins with a bang. Anita opens a parcel in her office to find a severed head of a cop inside. It has been sent to her by a powerful serial killer who is also a vampire. It is an invitation for her to come and get him - if she dare. Flying to Las Vegas, she is joined by three other marshals, all of whom have joined Anita on cases in previous volumes. This vampire is taken very seriously.



During her career, Anita's character has developed. So too, have her powers, so much so that she cannot be completely regarded as human any more. She is a succubus, which means that she feeds on sexual energy and must do so regularly. To this end, one of her boyfriends (and she has a habit of collecting them) the vampire Jean-Claude and Master of the City of St. Louis, sends a group of his own bodyguards with her. The search for Vittorio, the killer vampire, is hampered by the fact that one of his henchmen appears to be a were-tiger. This makes the situation sensitive as not only is Max, the vampire Master of Las Vegas, married to Bibiana, a were-tiger queen. Anita has developed an affinity for were-tigers, something Bibiana does not like. It doesn't help that a very ancient vampire imprisoned in Europe, known as Mama Noir, is trying to usurp Anita's body and is prone to attack when Anita is most vulnerable.

The book is a highly enjoyable romp. It is full of sex and gore. Although Anita is a complex, well-developed character, some of the others are more sketchily portrayed. This is partly because they have appeared in earlier books. It is worth reading this series from the beginning, but equally, this volume can be read alone.

PM

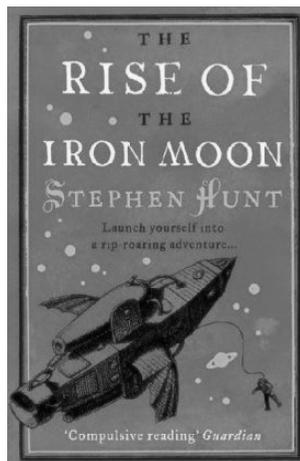
THE RISE OF THE IRON MOON **by Stephen Hunt**

Voyager / 455pgs / paperback £7.99

ISBN: 978-0007232239

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

This the third book set in a strange world where science seemed to have got stuck in the steam age. Electricity is a dangerous substance better not toyed with. At the beginning we rejoin old friends; Molly, a writer of popular celestial fiction, Commodore Black, an under-sea mariner, and Coppertracks, a sentient metal man whose body also seems to run on steam. There are new characters such as Purity Drake, a runaway from the Royal Breeding House and



Duncan Connor, a retired soldier who will go nowhere without his travel case.

Disturbing rumours are reaching the Jackelian city of Middlesteel of neighbouring states being overrun by barbarians from the Northern wastes. Kyorin, who has befriended Purity, warns Molly and her friends that the invaders are actually from his home world, Kaliban. This planet which shares an orbit with their own is a wasteland, destroyed by the masters of the stats – biomechanical creatures that destroy and devour everything in their path. The only hope of saving their planet is for Molly and friends to make a hazardous journey to Kaliban to consult a sage of Kyorin’s people.

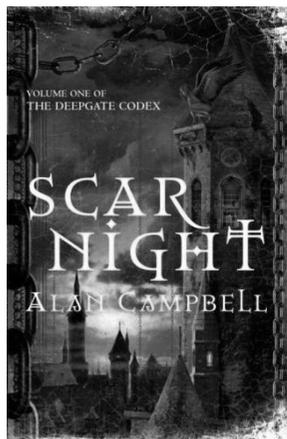
The setting gives a feel of kind of the fantastical tales of the Victorian era but as it progresses, it provides hints that there is a lot more going on in this universe than has yet been divulged. This leaves an intriguing sense of “what next?” by the end of the book. There are excellent ideas but the juxtaposition of steam-powered civilisation alongside advanced technology and gene manipulation does not always sit easily. Also, some of the more interesting characters do not have enough space to be developed fully. Ultimately, it is high adventure of the old-fashioned kind.

PM

***SCAR NIGHT* by Alan Campbell**

Tor / 550pgs / paperback £7.99 ISBN: 978-0330444767

Reviewed by Dave Corby



SCAR NIGHT is Alan Campbell’s first book. Alan has a background in video game design, having worked as a designer for Rockstar Games on the popular *Grand Theft Auto* series. He left this industry several years ago to take up writing and SCAR NIGHT was published in 2007. Since then he has turned this book into a trilogy with IRON ANGEL (also known as PENNY DEVIL) and the recently published GOD OF CLOCKS.

The commendations accompanying the blurb gush the usual hyperbole as if this book was the greatest thing in fantasy to come along since THE LORD OF THE RINGS. Alas, I cannot really agree with that. Neal Asher writes “I haven’t read a fantasy this good in years” by which I can only assume he hasn’t read much fantasy.

From the blurb one might think this is a deeply gothic and dark tale, full of the promise to plumb your darkest nightmares. Except that really it isn’t. Initially, at least, the prose invokes many a ‘dark’ description, drenching everything in blood. Furthermore, the setting, being a city hung by massive chains over a pit, in the depths of which reside the souls of the dead, at first seems improbably steeped in gothic-horror imagery.

However, after a while the description settles down and the book becomes more akin to a common fantasy novel. The characters are well described, and seem to have understandably human motivations, but often are slightly one dimensional, making the whole story sometimes seem over-simple. And the story itself, while taking some pleasing twists (which surprised me at least once) would have fitted quite nicely into a book of half the page count. In fact, given the large number of pages I am not sure where all the words went...

The text is easy to read and only occasionally felt cluttered (increasing my mystery as to why so many words were necessary). One critic writes that Campbell “effortlessly channels... Mervyn Peake”. Having read Peake I find this praise to be poppycock. Peake could stop me on any given page with a word I needed to look up; none of Campbell’s text gave me pause for lexicographical thought. But this is not necessarily a criticism, as I sometimes enjoy a ‘light’ read that I don’t have to work at.

The book makes one or two mistakes; for example, it is set in a city, but character development outside of the 10 or 11 major characters necessary to the story is virtually non-existent. As a result the city feels rather empty; in 550 pages a little more could be set aside to give the city inhabitants some character, surely?

Overall I must say that I don’t think SCAR NIGHT is a bad book *per se*, but it is a first book and I think this shows in the lack of subtlety and occasional heavy-handedness apparent in the text. The twists in the story were pleasant though, and by the time you are halfway through the improbable-seeming setting has resolved itself in a fairly logical manner. If one is intrigued by the idea of a modern fantasy with gothic-horror scenery then this may be a book for you. And now I can look forward to reading IRON ANGEL, the first sequel (review to follow); who knows, maybe with the practice first volume out of the way, Campbell can iron out some of the faults... DC

***THE COLD KISS OF DEATH* by Suzanne McLeod**

Gollancz / 376pgs / hardcover £18.99

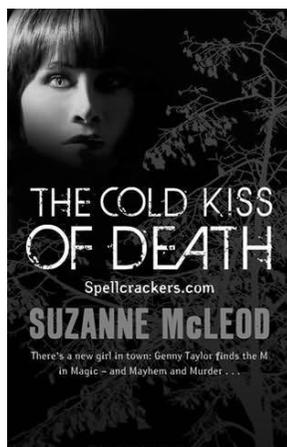
ISBN: 978 0575084254

Trade paperback £9.99 ISBN: 978

0575084292

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe

Suzanne McLeod’s debut novel was highly original in concept and execution and this second in the *Spellcrackers.com* series does not disappoint, indeed in some ways it is even better than the first. Genny Taylor, the only Bean Sidhe employed by Spellcrackers.com, (indeed the only Bean Sidhe in London!) is trying to get on with her life after the events in *THE SWEET SCENT OF BLOOD*. With her complicated personal life in



chaos after the revelation of her background, she doesn't need the added problems of threatened eviction by an ill disposed witch neighbour, propositions from all the Vampires in London, and to top it all, she's being haunted by the ghost of a child. Events escalate quickly and Genny becomes implicated in the murder of one of her Spellcrackers' clients. She quickly finds out that she is central to more supernatural intrigue in both the Vampire and Fae realms.

As with the first book, the story is written from Genny's point of view, but the imagery, pace and language moves the story forward at speed. The cast of characters is varied and fascinating, with more background revealed of some of the main characters in the first book, and the action is fast and furious. Suzanne has invented a complex, well thought out and cohesive supernatural world and seamlessly integrated it with modern day London, inhabited by believable fantasy characters that live and breathe in her novels. Add to this writing talent a highly original take on blending two genres (a whodunit and fantasy) and set it in modern day London, then this novel ticks all the boxes. There is enough explanation of the events in the first novel that it could be read alone, but it is a pity not to catch up with a series that is proving to be well worth reading. *MT*

😊😊😊😊 **FILM ROUND-UP** 😞😞😞😞 BY VICKY COOK

***HANCOCK* (2008) – directed by Peter Berg, starring Will Smith, Charleze Theron, Jason Bateman.**



This is an anti-superhero movie. From the start we see Hancock is a heavy-drinking, supremely strong layabout who doesn't apparently care who he hurts or what he damages when chasing bad guys. A world away from clean-shaven, pants over trousers superheroes though, like them, he can fly, lift trains and all the other superhero stunts you would expect. The plot thickens though as he saves a businessman from impending danger, and soon his life is taken onboard by this guy who is determined to change his image and life... Hancock then meets his wife and son and his life is soon to be changed completely....

The first and second halves of the film are rather different in tone as Hancock discovers and reveals more about himself and his background, and whether he is the only one of his kind. There are plenty of action set-pieces in amongst the introspection. There's no real bad guy, just a few rather stereotypical villains who I found were a bit too two-dimensional. Smith does a great job as Hancock though – at least in the early part of the film - he is vastly different to the joking, comic characters we see in his other films. Theron as the wife is ok, but doesn't have a lot to do to begin with, and I found her rather bland. Bateman is the only other actor with a lot to do as the businessman who takes a strong interest in Hancock's image and he does a good job, being believable even as his own life irreparably changes.

CGI are prominent in this film (they do love tearing up famous American cities these days...) and there are some nice darkly humorous scenes. Pacing is good and the film not too long for the plot. Worth a watch.

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 rogpeyton@hotmail.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:-

Future dates - 15th October, 19th November

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 16th October.

More details from Martin Tudor (empties084@btinternet.com).

OCTOCON, the annual Irish SF Convention will be held 10th and 11th of October 2009 at The Camden Court Hotel, Camden Street, Dublin 2. See <http://2009.octocon.com/> for further details

Novacon is the Birmingham SF Group's own convention. Membership is £39 for an adult, 13-16 year olds £10, 12 years and under is free. These rates are until the end of October.

**NOVACON
39**

Rooms are double or twin £40 per person per night, singles £56 pppn. Children 5-12 years £5 and children under 5 years are free. Please book early! Forms are on the website - <http://novacon39.org>.

The Park Inn Hotel is a new venue for us. It has been fully refurbished and all the main function space is on the ground floor. Bigger bookroom! Two bars! A lift to all floors! Leisure facilities! Beer! Free carparking! The hotel is on a main road about a mile from Nottingham city centre, so no problem with buses.



The hotel is completely no-smoking which will please many and infuriate a few, but that's the way things are now.

We have Justina Robson as our Guest of Honour. We again have two science-speakers and the usual mix of serious and light-hearted programme to keep you entertained.

Full details from 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or email alice@altair-4.co.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

November 6th – to be announced

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

January 8th 2010 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and AUCTION

February 12th – QUIZ versus the B’ham University SF Group

March 12th – Gollancz editor JO FLETCHER returns with more amusing and interesting anecdotes of life in publishing

April 9th – Author and satirist ADAM ROBERTS

May 14th – comic fantasy author JASPER FFORDE

June 11th – to be announced

July 9th – to be announced

BRUM GROUP NEWS #457 copyright 2009 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rogpeyton@hotmail.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