

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MAY 2010

ISSUE 464

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

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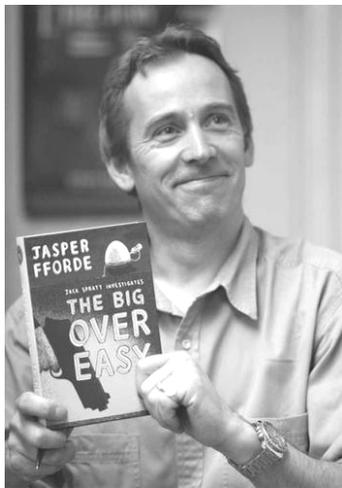
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Friday 14th May **JASPER FFORDE**

Jasper Fforde has visited the Group on one previous occasion – a very memorable occasion for me as it is the **only** time in the whole 40-year history of the Group that an author's talk has persuaded me to purchase one of their books at cover price. Yes, purchase!!! Yes, cover price!!! That doesn't happen very often – trade discount is usually very high on my priorities.

I found his talk not just interesting but incredibly hilarious. The whole idea of a series of books set in a world where the Crimean War is still raging after 100 years and dodos are the main type of pet, instead of cats or dogs, was just fascinating. Set in a world that puts books and book collecting higher in interest and participation than sport has to be my kind of book. The series features

June 11th – SF author PAT CADIGAN is a two-times winner of the Clarke Award (SYNNERS and FOOLS). US born but she now lives in the UK. This is her first visit to the Group.

Thursday Next, a literary detective who, in the first book, **THE EYRE AFFAIR** has to find and recover the character Jane Eyre when she is stolen and erased from every copy of that book, by going into the world of the book – yes, you can do that in this series.... The other books in the series are **LOST IN A GOOD BOOK**, **WELL OF LOST PLOTS**, **SOMETHING ROTTEN** and **FIRST AMONG SEQUELS**.

There is another series – the Nursery Crime series - that I haven't yet tried. The first is **THE BIG OVER EASY**, featuring the murder of Humpty Stuyvesant van Dumpty III.....!! Well, think about it!

The Times reviewer said “Forde offers a cascade of puns, plays on words, surrealism, satire and verbal virtuosity... Astonishing, he is funny for 400 pages.” The second is **THE FOURTH BEAR**.

His latest book, **SHADES OF GREY**, is a stand-alone book that is more SF than fantasy according to some reviewers. Praise from *The Times* again said 'No summaries can do justice to the sheer inventiveness, wit, complexity, erudition, unexpectedness and originality of the works, nor to their vast repertoire of intricate wordplay and puns.'

Jasper is returning to tell us more about his work and I'm sure more of you will be rushing out to buy his books. He has become one of the biggest names in comic fantasy since he last visited us and we've already had several requests for tickets from non-members through his website and for that reason

we are returning to The Old Joint Stock for this Special Meeting.

Hopefully you've already purchased your ticket – if not, there could be a situation where the room reaches its capacity limit and we have to turn people away. Hopefully that won't happen. But, **BE THERE!** *RGP*

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Old Joint Stock in Temple Street West, off Colmore Row, B2 5NY. Walk through the bar to the far back, right-hand side and take either the stairs or the lift to the first floor.

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.

The entrance fee for this meeting is slightly higher than usual - £4 for members, £5 for non-members

STAN NICHOLLS AT WEOLEY CASTLE LIBRARY

Fantasy author (and Brum Group member) Stan Nicholls will be giving a talk at Weoley Castle Library, 76 Beckbury Road, B29 5HR on Thursday 13th May. The talk will be at lunchtime 1.30pm to 2.30pm. The 21 bus from the city centre (Colmore Row) stops outside the Library – it takes about 30 minutes. The

event is free but seats are limited so phone the Library on 0121 464 1664 to book your seat. Or email them at Weoley.castle.library [at] Birmingham.gov.uk

CLARKE AWARD WINNER



China Miéville's *THE CITY AND THE CITY* was announced as the winner of the Clarke Award on April 28 at the opening of the Sci Fi London Film Festival. The award includes a prize of £2010 and a commemorative engraved bookend. The judging panel for this year's award included Chris Hill and Jon Courtenay Grimwood for the British Science Fiction Association, Francis Spufford and Rhiannon Lassiter for the Science Fiction Foundation and Paul Skevington for SFCrowsnest.com. Paul Billinger represents the Arthur C. Clarke Award as the Chair of Judges.

THE BSFA AWARD WINNERS

The winners of the BSFA Awards were announced at Eastercon.

Best Novel 2009: *THE CITY AND THE CITY* by China Miéville

Best Short Fiction 2009: "The Beloved Time of Their Lives" by Ian Watson and Roberto Quaglia

Best Non-Fiction 2009: "Mutant Popcorn" by Nick Lowe

Best Artwork 2009: Cover of *DESOLATION ROAD* by Stephen Martinière

WHAT IS SCIENCE FICTION? – Rog Peyton

A strange question, you might think, to find in a science fiction group's own newsletter. Shouldn't we all know what it is? *I* know what SF is and so do each of you reading this. But do we actually agree? I think it more than likely that we will agree about 90% or more of the time. We will agree on the core but when we get to the boundaries is where the disagreement starts. And that's as it should be because SF is a literature of ideas that should always be changing and stretching the mind. And because of that, those boundaries will always be vague.

But what of the opinions of those in the outside world? Margaret Atwood claims that she doesn't write science fiction – yet *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* most definitely is. We see reviewers claiming that certain books are not SF because there are no spaceships, aliens and suchlike. To the vast majority of those 'outside' our genre, the trappings of *STAR TREK*, *STAR WARS*, *BATTLE-STAR GALACTICA*, *DR WHO* and suchlike are the 'real' components of SF. But we know better.

How do we, the people who claim to be in the know, explain why such books as *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* are SF? This question has rolled around in

my mind for some time now. I look at the heading on our newsletter – The Birmingham Science Fiction Group and then I look at the mounds of review copies we receive - 90% is out and out fantasy. When I speak to publishers and request the SF titles but not the fantasy, the girls responsible for sending out review copies generally reply something like “What’s the difference? It’s all sci-fi isn’ it?” To them, ‘sci-fi’ is the overall term for science fiction and fantasy.

Of course, the answer is that we need a definition of science fiction. That little chestnut has fascinated us all for years and has aggravated me all the years since I started reading SF. Recently I came up with a definition that is simple and short and, at the moment, ticks all the boxes. Quite simply – “Science fiction is a fictional vision of a scientifically possible future.” No? Let me know what you think.
RGP

THE HUGO AWARD NOMINEES

AussieCon4 has announced the nominations for the 2010 Hugo Awards. Members of AussieCon4 are eligible to vote for the awards by 31 July 2010. A total of 864 ballots were cast.

Best Novel

BONESHAKER by Cherie Priest

THE CITY & THE CITY by China Miéville

JULIAN COMSTOCK: A STORY OF 22ND-CENTURY AMERICA by Robert Charles Wilson

PALIMPSEST by Catherynne M. Valente

WAKE by Robert J. Sawyer

THE WINDUP GIRL by Paolo Bacigalupi

Best Novella

“Act One” by Nancy Kress

THE GOD ENGINES by John Scalzi

“Palimpsest” by Charles Stross

SHAMBLING TOWARDS HIROSHIMA by James Morrow

“Vishnu at the Cat Circus” by Ian McDonald

THE WOMEN OF NELL GWYNNE’S by Kage Baker

Best Novelette

“Eros, Philia, Agape” by Rachel Swirsky

“The Island” by Peter Watts

“It Takes Two” by Nicola Griffith

“One of Our Bastards is Missing” by Paul Cornell

“Overtime” by Charles Stross

“Sinner, Baker, Fabulist, Priest; Red Mask, Black Mask, Gentleman, Beast” by Eugie Foster

Best Short Story

“The Bride of Frankenstein” by Mike Resnick

“Bridesicle” by Will McIntosh

“The Moment” by Lawrence M. Schoen

“Non-Zero Probabilities” by N.K. Jemisin

“Spar” by Kij Johnson

Best Related Work

CANARY FEVER: REVIEWS by John Clute

HOPE-IN-THE-MIST: THE EXTRAORDINARY CAREER AND MYSTERIOUS

LIFE OF HOPE MIRRELES by Michael Swanwick

THE INTER-GALACTIC PLAYGROUND: A CRITICAL STUDY OF

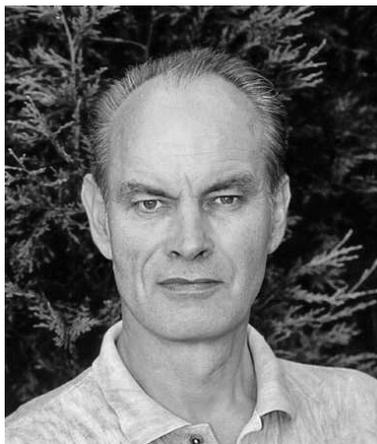
CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' SCIENCE FICTION by Farah Mendlesohn

ON JOANNA RUSS edited by Farah Mendlesohn

THE SECRET FEMINIST CABAL: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF SF FEMINISMS

by Helen Merrick

THIS IS ME, JACK VANCE! (OR MORE PROPERLY THIS IS "I") by Jack Vance



THE DAVID GEMMELL AWARD Nominees

The nominees for the second Gemmell Awards for fantasy have been announced. The Gemmell Awards are popularly voted awards. Anyone can vote and voting will open in the near future.

The David Gemmell Legend Award for Best Fantasy Novel 2010:

BEST SERVED COLD by Joe Abercrombie

THE GATHERING STORM by Robert

Jordan & Brandon Sanderson

EMPIRE by Graham McNeill

THE CARDINALS' BLADES by Pierre Pevél

WARBREAKER by Brandon Sanderson

The Morningstar Award for Best Fantasy Newcomer:

THE SAD TALE OF THE BROTHERS GROSSBART by Jesse Bullington

THE ADAMANTINE PALACE by Stephen Deas

THE DROWNING CITY by Amanda Downum

THE CARDINALS' BLADES by Pierre Pevél

LAMENTATION by Ken Scholes

The Ravenheart Award for Best Fantasy Cover Art:

Didier Graffët and Dave Senior for illustration and Laura Brett for art direction for the cover of BEST SERVED COLD by Joe Abercrombie

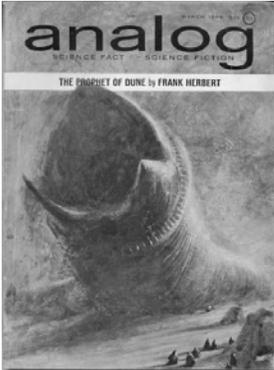
Jackie Morris for illustration and Dominic Forbes for art direction for the cover of THE DRAGON KEEPER by Robin Hobb

Larry Rostant for illustration and Loulou Clarke for art direction for the cover of FIRE by Kristin Cashore

Jon Sullivan for the cover of EMPIRE by Graham McNeill

Jon Sullivan for illustration and Sue Michniewicz for art direction for the cover of THE CARDINALS' BLADES by Pierre Pevél

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .



.... Artist **John Schoenherr** (b.1935) died on April 8. Schoenherr was the recipient of the Hugo Award and illustrated numerous books and magazines, both within the field and outside it. Among his best known works were his covers for *Analog* that illustrated the serialization of “Dune World” and “Prophet of Dune” which became parts of the novel DUNE. Schoenherr’s illustrations were often influenced by his knowledge of zoology Editor, publisher, and fan **George H Scithers** (b.1929) died on April 19, two days after suffering an heart attack. Scithers entered fandom in 1957 and began publishing the Hugo

Award-winning fanzine *Amra*. In 1969, he published his first short story in *If*. Scithers founded Owlswick Press in 1973, and four years later was named the first editor of *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*, which he left in 1986 Comic editor **Dick Giordano** (b.1932) died on March 27. Giordano began working on comics in 1951 and worked for DC, Marvel, Dell, Valiant. He was also the editor in chief at Charlton, overseeing the period when Charlton created several iconic superheroes, including The Blue Beetle. When he moved to DC in the late 60s, he brought much of the Charlton talent with him. Giordano inked several comics, perhaps most notably SUPERMAN VS. MUHAMMED ALI Author **Gene Wolfe** underwent open heart surgery on April 24 after suffering shortness of breath. An echocardiogram showed a leaking mitral valve and Wolfe underwent double bypass and valve repair surgery. He is recovering well and his family hopes to move him to a rehab facility Author **Norman Spinrad** has been diagnosed with stomach cancer. Doctors have recommended he treat the cancer with chemotherapy as it is currently inoperable **Frank Frazetta** has agreed to drop trademark infringement charges against his son, **Alfonso Frank Frazetta, Jr.** The suit alleged that the younger Frazetta had appropriated the Frazetta trademark and artwork without older Frazetta’s permission. According to a statement made by the family, “all the litigation surrounding his family and his art has been resolved. All of Frank’s children will now be working together as a team to promote his remarkable collection of images that has inspired people for decades.” **C.L. Anderson’s** novel BITTER ANGELS won this year’s Philip K Dick Award. The Philip K Dick Award honours books published originally in paperback (mass market or trade) Congratulations to Brum Group member and Novacon stalwart **Alice Lawson** on being the 2010 recipient of the Doc Weir Award London has launched a bid to host the Worldcon in 2014. A **London Worldcon** would be held 14-18 August in the new International Convention Centre, part of the London Docklands Another copy of **Action Comics #1** has now been sold for \$1,500,000. The

newly sold issue was discovered tucked into another magazine in the late 1980s and is in better condition than the one sold earlier this year. *RGP*



BOOK REVIEWS



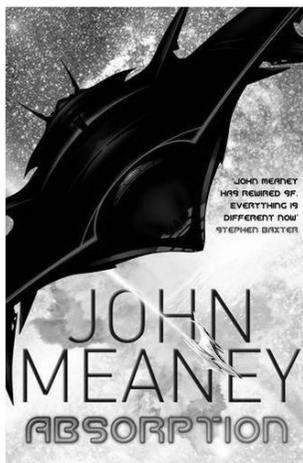
(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

***ABSORPTION* by John Meaney**

Gollancz / 404pgs / £18.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0575085336

£12.99 trade paperback ISBN: 978-0575085329

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



John Meaney is a clever and complex writer. He weaves seemingly unrelated stories together to make a greater whole.

In this novel there are at least five strands scattered throughout time, each with their separate characters but with the hint of a common theme. Ulfr is a warrior of a Northern clan in 777AD. He believes in the trickery of the Norse gods. He perceives the travelling bard Stigr as touched by darkness even though his oratory entrances the rest of the tribe. Gavriela Wolf, a German Jew and a physicist in the 1920s sees the same phenomenon when she spies on a local meeting and observes Hitler entrancing the crowd.

In 2146, Rekka Chandri is the member of the human exploration team that makes contact with the sentient natives on an unnamed planet. The local people communicate by scent and transfer knowledge directly by tasting each other's flesh in ritual situations. One of her friends back home is a pilot who, in order to navigate mu-space, has had her eyes replaced.

Further in the future in 2603, Roger Blackstone is just starting college on Fulgor. He notices a darkness lingering around his tutor but is too busy making friends and studying to let it worry him. His father, Carl, is a descendent of the pilots of 22nd century Earth but is genetically adapted to operate in mu-space. He has been a spy on Fulgor for twenty years.

Roger, Gavi and Ulfr each dream that they inhabit crystal bodies in some far future place. They occasionally get waking visions of each other.

Most of the action takes place on Fulgor as one of the Luculenti hierarchy, Rashella Stargonier, discovers an artefact buried on her estate. When

she opens it, she is infected by a vampire code which eats its way into her neural paths. She and all the other Luculenti are connected to the Skein, the communications web of the planet as are all the services of the city. She finds that she can connect with and devour the neural information of others, leaving them dead. The hunger to gather this knowledge accelerates putting the whole city in peril.

By the end of this volume, the first of three, it is possible to see loose connections between the disaster played out on Fulgor and the characters in the past. The links, however, are not yet strong enough to see the true pattern emerging. Possibly Meaney has introduced too many strands, too quickly, to do the overall shape full justice. Buy this book, but save it until the subsequent volumes are published before reading them. *PM*

***FARLANDER* by Col Buchanan**

Tor / 388 pgs / £17.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-023074481

Reviewed by William McCabe



This is the first novel from a new author who is still learning. He's got a few things right: the pace is fair and the characters aren't entirely stereotypes but there are obvious good guys and obvious bad guys; the plot runs smoothly and doesn't drag anywhere. The characterisation is reasonable but could do with more depth.

Let's start with the good stuff...

Ash is a trained ninja assassin working for a sect that exacts retribution when any of its clients are murdered. He's getting old and his even older master has decided he should take an apprentice.

Nico has been living on the streets of Bar-Khos since he ran away from home. It's hard enough on the streets but Bar-Khos has been under siege for

the last 10 years and many of the people are starving. Nico finally resorts to theft but in choosing Ash to steal from he has chosen the wrong person. Suddenly he finds he has two options – go to jail or become the assassin's apprentice.

Kirkus is the heir apparent to the Empire of Mann. His mother is the Matriarch of the religious order that controls most of the world. The order is based on some pseudo-Nietzchean ideal that actually encourages senseless casual violence and murder. He's just become Ash's next target.

The story takes Ash and Nico on a mission to kill Kirkus who is protected by the best that the empire can provide.

Where the story fails is in the background which is a bit of a disaster. The siege on Bar-Khos takes up a great deal of the book even though it doesn't merit it once the central characters have left. The siege is much like something from our Middle Ages. The city is protected by multiple large earthworks that would stop a frontal assault and keep all but the biggest guns far enough away to render them useless. Since there is some kind of restriction on supplies of gunpowder, no-one could build any gun powerful enough to be effective against that. There are enough details of the various attempts to undermine the walls to explain why these fail. When Ash and Nico leave the city it is by airship. This kind of airship appears to work like a 15th-18th century warship complete with cannon that flies. During the voyage it is explained that the Empire of Mann has a whole fleet of these warships and that the strategic importance of Bar-Khos lies in it being both an active seaport and an active airport. There is no explanation at all as to how a city under siege manages to remain an open port or why an empire with a major air fleet should be bogged down in a ground assault on a city that has no protection from above.

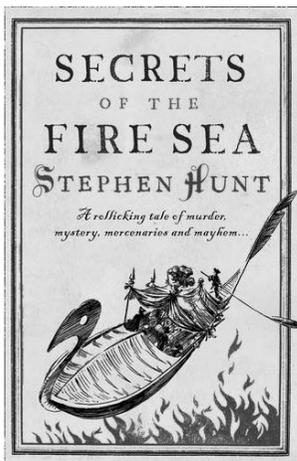
This is far from the only detail that hasn't been properly thought out. The story opens with something set in a frozen wasteland that is shown on the map as coastal and halfway up the map. Places further up and down are described as temperate so this seems wrong. Maybe some of this is to be explained in later volumes of the series but I can't really see how.

This is an adequate novel if you don't pay too much attention. Think about it too much and it falls apart. WAM

SECRETS OF THE FIRE SEA by Stephen Hunt

Harper Voyager / 439pgs / £17.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0007289639

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



Love it or loathe it, the term 'steampunk' now defines a category of science fiction. Anyone who was at the last Eastercon would have seen the wonderful costumes worn at the Steampunk Ball on Sunday night and seen the inventive accoutrements. Victorian SF such as that written by Verne would have been classed as steampunk as exponents of the genre write with a level of technology roughly equivalent to mid-Victorian.

This is the fourth of Stephen Hunt's novels set in a world where steam is the principal motive force and electricity is a wild, dangerous beast. There are clues that once, millennia ago, there was a highly technological civilisation that tore itself apart. Very little evidence of it remains.

One familiar character plays a part in this novel: Commodore Jared Black. He is captain of a u-boat hired to take passengers to the island of Jago in the Fire Sea: Ortin urs Ortin is the new ambassador from Pericur, a nation of bear-like sentients; Nandi Tibar-Wellking is a student going to Jago to consult the archives; Jethro Daunt is an ex-parson turned detective going to pay respects to the Archbishop of the Circlist church (they deny the existence of gods) and Boxiron is a steamman, a sentient humanoid being whose body runs on steam. They arrive at a crucial time. Trade with the island is declining because there are easier trade passages that involve not crossing the Fire Sea, the First Senator appears to be becoming unhinged and the Archbishop has been murdered. Caught up in these events are Hannah Conquest and Chalph urs Chalph. Hannah is the ward of the Archbishop, left behind when her parents were killed. It is their work in the archives that Nandi particularly wants to complete. Chalph is Hannah's friend. Both are shocked when Hannah is drafted to the turbine halls, a place where emanations from the machines cause deformations in the workers.

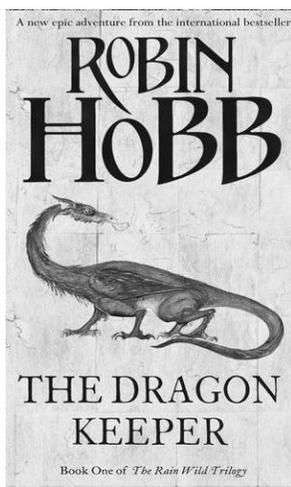
Jago is a disputed island. All the settlements have been at the fringes, near the warmth of the surrounding magma sea. The ursine Pericurians claim it is holy land while the humans claim it by right of occupation and have the defences to assert that.

It would be easy to pick holes in some of the concepts and to find familiar elements in the text but the overall effect is a good solid adventure in an unusual setting. PM

***THE DRAGON KEEPER* by Robin Hobb**

HarperCollins / 553pgs / £8.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0007342594

Reviewed by Jim Pearce



This is the first of a new trilogy set in the world of the *Farseer*, *Live Ships* and *Tawney Man* trilogies. It is set in the Rain Wild River where a tangle of sea serpents have made a perilous journey to the cocooning grounds, the first in generations. Many have died along the way. But the creatures which emerge from the cocoons are not the powerful, shining dragons of old. Stunted and deformed, they cannot fly and become an intolerable burden to the Rain Wilder River inhabitants.

Not only are the dragons changed by the hostile conditions of the area, so too are many of the human inhabitants. One of which is Thymara who should have been exposed at birth and left to die. She is fascinated by the return of dragons and when

there is a call for Dragon Keepers to aid them to find their lost ancestral home, she and a group of other mutant misfits volunteer.

The other main character is Alise Finbok who due to an unhappy childhood and even more unhappy marriage has devoted herself to the study of artifacts relating to dragons. Invoking a clause in her marriage contract, she journeys upriver to study and talk to the dragons arriving just in time to join their expedition. Accompanying her as an aid, companion and chaperon is Sedic, a longtime friend and now secretary to her husband. He has his own agenda.

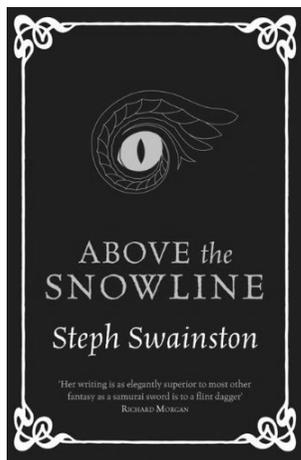
Supporting the travellers is the liveship Tarman, and its captain, Leftrin who is developing an amorous interest in Alise.

While the book is a completely new and standalone adventure, and as such it is unnecessary to read the previous books, it does follow on from events in the previous series and as such knowledge of these could add to the reader's enjoyment. However, that said, the book is very enjoyable and I look forward to reading the next part of their stories in volume 2. *JTP*

***ABOVE THE SNOWLINE* by Steph Swainston**

Gollancz / 311 pgs / £12.99 trade paperback ISBN 978-0575081598

Reviewed by William McCabe



This is the Swainston's fourth novel and is a prequel to the previous trilogy. It is set around a century before the start of her first novel. It is still a first person narrative but it is now split between multiple narrators instead of the same one throughout. This manages to give a stronger sense of the different characters than she had managed previously although her usual voice, Jant, is still by far the strongest. This also helps to cover the fact that there seems to be a lot less going on this time around

The story begins with the death of a Rhydanne hunter at the hands of a farmer. The farmer is only protecting his stock but that is not how the Rhydanne see it. There are no farmers in their territories and the concept is alien to them. So Dellin, the dead hunter's partner, takes the matter to 'the silver man' (the emperor) who assigns Jant, his messenger, to negotiate with the new force that has arrived in their lands. The story expands to include political intrigue, an attempted coup, guerilla warfare and even a love story. There are complicated relationships, commercial negotiations and a suicide. All of these plot lines are built up slowly and any more detail than this could be taken as spoiling the plot. Even some of the things I have mentioned, aren't fully realised until very late on

The writing is up to Swainston's usual, fairly high, standard and adds some depth to one or two of the regular characters. There are a few times where the background could do with more explanation for new readers but, since this was issued at the same time as the omnibus of the previous trilogy, that probably isn't an issue.

The thing most likely to put off fantasy/science fiction readers is that there is nothing new to the background. In fact, the SF/Fantasy elements here are all but irrelevant. Change a few details here and there and you could have an historical novel or something very like it. The series' regular genre ingredients are all but absent. The insect war is mentioned once but plays no part. There is a little more about the nature of the immortals but nothing that hasn't been in the previous books. This is still a very good book but not the place to start and the one least likely to appeal to the SF reader. *WAM*

***ANGEL'S BLOOD* by Nalini Singh**

Gollancz / 339pgs / £6.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0575095924

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



This is one of Gollancz's new line of erotic fantasy romances. Americans at the present have twin fascinations with vampires and angels. *ANGEL'S BLOOD* manages to combine both.

Elena Deveraux is a vampire hunter. She doesn't stake them but captures them and returns them to the angel that is their owner. In this world, there is a symbiosis between angel and vampire. Only angels can Make vampires. In return they serve a hundred year indenture to the angel, unless sold on. Angels are possessive and do not like their property running away.

Elena is hunter-born. She can scent and track her quarry and has gained a high reputation. As a result, when Raphael, the archangel of New York, needs a hunter, he demands her services. Her task is to hunt down the archangel of Eastern Europe who has gone rogue. Angels are not human: Raphael is powerful and arrogant but is fascinated by the human hunter who seems to have a death wish, refusing to be submissive in the presence of creatures that could crush the life out of her in an instant.

This would be enough to form the basis of a good supernatural thriller, but as the purpose of this line of books is titillation, the archangel Raphael is portrayed as an exceptionally beautiful specimen of maleness so every so often

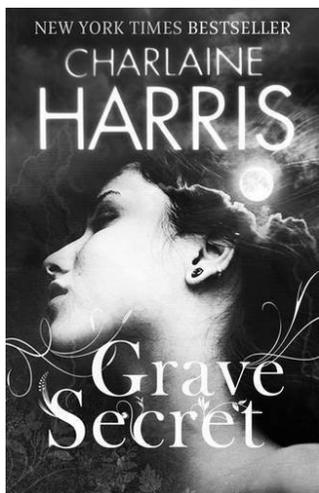
the action has to pause so that Elena has the opportunity to try and resist his sexual charms. Later, the novel becomes sexually explicit.

By preference I would have liked to see this as a second or third book in the series in order to understand better the work of the Hunter's Guild and build Elena's character before her meeting with Raphael. Also there is a sense of "stop the action, we haven't had any sex for xxx pages". The action and romance do not always dovetail neatly enough. PM

***GRAVE SECRET* by Charlaine Harris**

Gollancz / 306 pgs / £12.99 hardcover ISBN:978-0575085534

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



Charlaine Harris has a big following and it is easy to see why. Her books are easy to read page turners told as a straightforward, first person narrative. GRAVE SECRET continues the adventures of Harper Connelly and there is not a vampire in sight. (Her other series featuring *Sookie Stackhouse* features vampires strongly).

This novel is basically a crime thriller, with added extras. At fifteen, Harper was struck by lightning. This has left her with the ability to find bodies. The dead are eager to tell her how they died. The body she cannot find is that of her sister, Cameron, who disappeared eight years previously. Harper is sure she is dead because she would not have left her sisters. At the time Cameron disappeared, they were living in a

rundown trailer. Harpers mother and her new husband were both junkies, out of their skulls most of the time and incapable of looking after their children, especially the two babies.

At the start of GRAVE SECRET, Harper and her stepbrother, Tolliver Lang, are on their way to Dallas after a difficult job in North Carolina (see AN ICE COLD GRAVE). Although they have grown up together and work together - Tolliver is Harper's manager - they are not related by blood and have become lovers, something their relatives cannot get their heads around. Their purpose for going to Dallas is two-fold. Harper has been asked to do a grave reading for a wealthy rancher family and to visit their younger sisters who have been adopted by Harper's aunt, Iona.

During the reading in the graveyard, Harper not only discovers that the grandfather of the Joyce family died of an induced heart attack, but that his caregiver died in childbirth. Then three things happen: first, Tolliver's father, recently released from jail, turns up wanting a reconciliation with his son and to

see his daughters (something everyone concerned is sceptical of); then Tolliver is shot; the third thing is that an anonymous caller claims to have seen Cameron. Harper has to try and cope with the things that bring back bad memories as mayhem escalates around her.

This is a light, enjoyable book that stands up well without having to read the others in the series, though you will probably want to afterwards. *PM*

“Whenever a fledgling horror or fantasy writer comes up to me, at a convention or somewhere else, and asks me how they can get their work published, I invariably advise them that their first step should be to join the British Fantasy Society.”

Stephen Jones

Members of the British Fantasy Society currently receive four issues of *Prism* a year, two of *Dark Horizons*, two of *New Horizons*, and various special publications. They can vote in the British Fantasy Awards, join our writing group, Whirlpool, get free entry in the BFS short story competition, and get a £10 discount for FantasyCon. Non-members are welcome on our forums and at our open nights.

www.britishfantasysociety.org



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.

Future books to be discussed will provisionally be...

TRANSITION by Iain Banks; FLASHFORWARD by Robert Sawyer; COALESCENT by Stephen Baxter; DIVERGENCE by Tony Ballantyne; LET THE RIGHT ONE IN by Jon Avide Lindquist; HUNTER'S RUN by Martin, Dozois & Abrahams.

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

THE WRITE FANTASTIC is celebrating its 5th Anniversary on May 8th with a special one day event at the Jacqueline Du Pré Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford. Guests confirmed so far are Stephen Deas, Ben Jeapes, Geoff Ryman, Mike Shevdon and Ian Watson. New members will be Kari Sperring, Ian Whates, Freda Warrington and Liz Williams. More details at www.thewritefantastic.com/anniversary.html

ALT.FICTION 2010 - Derby's annual science-fiction, fantasy and horror writing event,. Alt.Fiction brings together some of the biggest names in the genre from around the UK for a fantastic day of panels, workshops, launches and readings which are sure to interest both readers and writers. We are also pleased to announce new additions to the programme this year in our Alt.Fiction auction, giving you the chance to buy some rare items, as well as a late-night film screening, comedy improv session and a full dealers' room with a great range of books to buy on the day. Leading authors confirmed for this year's event include Tony Ballantyne, Ramsey Campbell, Mike Carey, Mark Chadbourn, Paul Cornell, Graham Joyce and Rob Shearman as well as a range of agents, editors and publishers to complete a superb line-up. Alt.Fiction 2010 takes place on the 12th June from 10am to midnight at Derby Quad, Derby's new multimedia arts centre, and tickets cost just £25 for full access to all the day's events. We are happy to offer group rates to the event for groups of 10 or larger. For information about the day visit either <http://altfiction.co.uk/> or <http://www.derbyquad.co.uk/> or for tickets call the QUAD Box Office 01332 290 606.

FANTASYCON 2010 will be held over the weekend of September 17-19 at the Britannia Hotel, 1 St James Street, Nottingham. Guest of Honour will be Lisa Tuttle. Master of Ceremonies will be James Barclay. Website is.... <http://sites.google.com/site/fantasycon2010/>



NOVACON 40 – the Brum Group’s own convention and the longest-running regional convention in the UK, will be once again held at The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG5 2BT. Dates are November 12th to 14th November. Guests of Honour are **Iain M Banks** and our Co-President **Brian Aldiss, O.B.E.** Regretfully, Harry Harrison has had to caqncel due to a recent fall. Full details at <http://novacon.org.uk/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

July 9th – SF/fantasy author STEVE FEASEY

August 13th – Summer Social – meal at The Black Eagle

September 10th – tba

October 8th – SF, fantasy author and satirist ADAM ROBERTS

November 5th – SF author CHARLES STROSS

December 3rd – Christmas Social

BRUM GROUP NEWS #464 (May 2010) copyright 2010 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