

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2010

ISSUE 466

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& **HARRY HARRISON**

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Friday 9th July **STEVE FEASEY**

Born and raised in Hertfordshire, Steve Feasey didn't start writing until he was in his thirties. It was while watching a documentary stating that the market for books aimed at male teenagers had all but disappeared, that he had the idea of a reluctant hero that was begrudgingly dragged into a world of demons, vampires and sorcery because he, himself, was a werewolf. That prompted him to sit down and start writing.

**August 13th – SUMMER SOCIAL – a meal at the Black Eagle.
See page 2 for details of how to book!**

His first book was published in January 2009 – CHANGELING 1: DISCOVER THE BEAST WITHIN and has been followed by a further two *Changeling* books – DARK MOON and BLOOD WOLF. A fourth volume will follow later this year. But what prompts someone in their thirties who has never previously shown interest in writing, to suddenly drop everything and start writing bestselling books? Come along to the meeting and discover the truth! We think the revelations will be **very** interesting!
RGP

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, off New Street.

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 £3 for members, £4 for non-members

SUMMER SOCIAL – TICKETS ONLY!

August once again sees our Summer Social and again it will be a visit to the Black Eagle for a meal. **YOU WILL NEED A TICKET FOR THIS!** A deposit of £5 is required to be paid to either by post to our secretary Vicky Stock at the address at the end of this newsletter, or to our Treasurer, Pat Brown, at the July meeting. The food is traditional pub food – steaks, pies, fish, etc plus house specials that change regularly. The Black Eagle has at least three real ales and they know how to keep their ales well, having won several awards over the years for their beer and their food. The table is booked – 7.30 for 8.00pm and it is at the Black Eagle, Factory Road, Handsworth.

If you would like to travel with others, meet at the entrance to Snow Hill Station, Colmore Row at 7.00pm then we will go on by Metro.

If you want to go by bus catch the 74 or 79 in Bull Street. Get off at the second stop past Hockley Flyover, just before St Michaels Road on the left and Villa Road on the right - there are churches on two corners and a temple on another. Walk down St Michaels Road and keep going until you reach The Black Eagle on your right.

If you wish to get there by Metro get off at Soho Benson Road. Cross the tracks (care!) to the exit. Turn right down Benson Road until you see The Black Eagle on your left.
VB

NEW - TERRY PRATCHETT FIRST NOVEL PRIZE

Transworld Publishers and Sir Terry Pratchett have announced the Terry Pratchett ‘Anywhere but Here, Anywhen but Now’ First Novel Prize. This contest, which is open to unpublished authors living in the UK, Ireland or the Commonwealth, is looking for novels which are set on an earth different from

our own in some way. Submissions should be between 80,000 and 150,000 words with a synopsis of less than 600 words. The deadline is December 31, 2010.
TRANSWORLD PUBLISHING, THE RANDOM HOUSE GROUP LIMITED, 20 VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD, LONDON SW1V 2SA

SIDWISE AWARD NOMINATIONS

The nominees for this year's Sidwise Award for Alternate History have been announced. The winners will be announced at ReConStruction, this year's NASFiC, in Raleigh, North Carolina, the weekend of August 5.

Short Form

"Yes, We Have No Bananas" by Paul di Filippo

"The Fixation" by Alastair Reynolds

"Edison's Frankenstein" by Chris Roberson

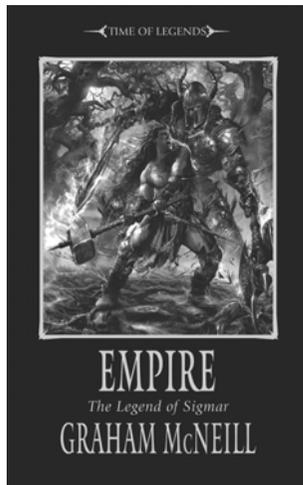
"Black Swan" by Bruce Sterling

"The Persistence of Souls" by Sarah Zettel

Long Form – only one nomination!

1942 by Robert Conroy

DAVID GEMMELL AWARD WINNERS

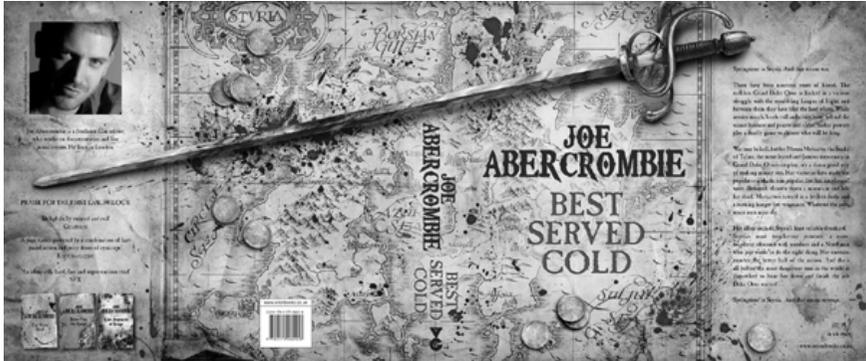


The winners of the David Gemmell Legend Awards have been announced. The awards are popularly selected by internet voters from around the world.

Best Fantasy Novel: EMPIRE: THE LEGEND OF SIGMAR by Graham McNeill

The Morningstar Award for Best Fantasy Newcomer: THE CARDINAL'S BLADES by Pierre Pevél

The Ravenheart Award for Best Fantasy Cover Art: BEST SERVED COLD by Didier Graffet & Dave Senior



...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

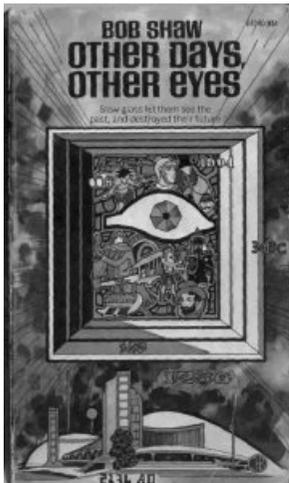
THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS'

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions to me at rog@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk >>

And, continuing our discussion on "What is SF"....

Again, Dave Hardy picks up the thread...

I have to say that what is wrong with your reply is not my definition of SF, but your definition of what you consider fantasy. Any alternate world story has to be fantasy, you say. I think that most SF readers would, like me, consider that what's generally considered to be fantasy has much more to do with totally non-scientific things like magic, witches and wizards, goblins, hobbits, dragons, unicorns -- all that kind of stuff. You challenge me to name some SF that has nothing to do with



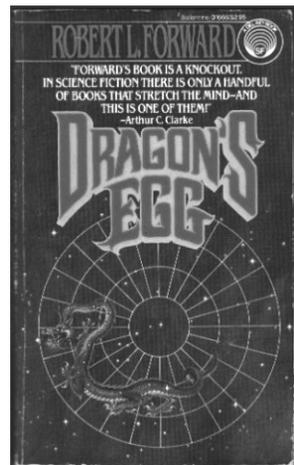
the future. I really don't have time to research this properly, but I'm absolutely sure there are plenty (come on, readers, if there are any - help me out here?) Even if I can't name them I can remember reading stories set in the present day, in which inventions or discoveries are made that change everyone's lives; but they're not made in the future. Anyway, I just scanned my bookshelves and picked out: Bob Shaw's 'slow glass' stories, expanded into OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES. That's an SF concept, which is not dependent upon being in the future, and as far as I recall it was 'present day'. Fantasy, Rog? **TIMESCAPE** by Gregory Benford. Set in 1998, and a scientist discovers a way to send tachyons back in time, where they are picked up in 1962. Fantasy? Time travel not SF? **TWISTOR**

by John Cramer. Again, based in what was the present day (it was published in 1989). A physicist finds a way to access alternate universes. ‘True hard science fiction. . .’ wrote Gregory Benford, and other noted SF writers like David Brin, Greg Bear and Poul Anderson made similar comments. Alternat(iv)e universes/worlds, dimensions, the multiverse - they’re all the same thing. You claim: ‘There is no valid scientific theory for alternate worlds.’ Which alternate world have YOU been living in? Quite to the contrary, modern physics *requires* that there be many other dimensions, and the idea of time branching at certain nodes is widely accepted - and certainly a valid theme for SF. I rest my case. . .

<<Pay attention, Dave! The question was about a definition of science fiction, not fantasy. We’ll come to that later in the year if you insist. And I didn’t really challenge you regards books not set in the future. You came up with that as a reason to remove the word ‘future’ from my proposed definition, but couldn’t name a single example. Now, you’re clutching at straws trying to find ‘exceptions to the rule’. OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES was about an ‘invention’ in an unspecified time, and as slow glass doesn’t exist in our present it has to be set in the *very* near future. If you pushed me hard on the idea of slow glass, I’d have to come down on the side that it is fantasy. A brilliant idea, a brilliant novel but a highly implausible ‘science’. As for TIMESCAPE and TWISTOR, I have to admit to not having read either but, no Dave, time travel is not, in my opinion. SF. I thought I’d made that clear last issue. But onto alternate worlds – I’m perfectly aware of the idea of time branching at certain points in our history. It’s a nice idea that makes for writing (sometimes) readable fantasy novels. But your statement that modern physics *requires* that there be many other dimensions is ludicrous. It’s a far-fetched theory – there has never been one nanosecond of proof of another alternate world impinging on ours. – RGP>>

And, again, from Robert Day...

At last! A real debate! I have to take you up on a few things, one of which is your response to Dave's letter where you reject time travel and alternate universe stories as ‘not SF’ because they're impossible. I have to disagree. Time travel and alternate universes aren't impossible - they're just very, very difficult. Bob Forward described in detail how to make a time machine in the appendices to DRAGON'S EGG (probably the best part of the book, some might say...). The main issue with his proposal is the amount of neutronium you need to generate a really big gravitational field - his 'instructions' start by saying “First compress the Moon until it forms a mass of



neutronium...” and that's easier said than done. As for alternate universes, they are predicted in the many interesting byways of quantum theory. The only issue is how you actually and practically access these universes. (I can explain relativity and quantum theory - if I mug up on it for about a week, and only then if I then explain it to someone immediately afterwards. But then, once I've been to sleep, the knowledge sort of - vanishes - in a truly weird way...) Now, to my definition of SF. I'll start by saying that I only said it was ‘an easy answer’. I never said it was the only one. And as for you saying it was ‘a lazy cop-out’, I have to disagree. It's a cop-out I thought I worked really hard on! If I was being lazy, I'd have said “SF is what SF fans read” and left it at that. Instead, I did try to explain myself at length. I suppose what I was trying to say is that I consider I have a taste for the literature of the fantastic, and that encompasses SF, some fantasy and a range of stuff that falls in between any sort of category. And I can understand publishers and distributors taking that easy way out, because they're only thinking in terms of markets and punters. If I was going to actually answer your question, I'd go with the “SF is a literature that deals with the effects of a scientific or technological change from our current state of knowledge”. I certainly think it defines a lot of hard SF, and probably more ‘soft SF’ than you might imagine. It also excludes bad SF exemplified by the sloppy thinking expressed as “It's science fiction so you can do anything you want”, which I suppose you could take as the best definition of the worst kind of SF. Anyway, it wouldn't be SF fandom if we couldn't have a decent argument over the definition of SF, would it?

<<I have to admit to knowing absolutely nothing about quantum theory but there's one word in there that worries me – ‘theory’. Where's the evidence? On the other hand I do like your definition of SF a lot and I may come back to that later. I think that your use of Robert Forward's ‘instructions’ on how to build a time machine proves that, to all intents and purposes, time travel is impossible – RGP>>

And joining in the discussion is Brum Group News reviewer Michael Jones...

I was interested in the debate in the latest newsletter and couldn't resist throwing in my ten cents' worth . . .

I like to think of a big circle enclosing all literature - anything and everything imagined or dreamed up by anyone, anytime, anywhere, ever. Within that are two more circles, concentric and not overlapping. The larger one represents the limit of scientific plausibility and therefore constitutes a boundary separating Fantasy (outside) from Science Fiction (inside). The smaller (tiny) inner circle represents the extent of current scientific knowledge and is the boundary walling off the mainstream from the broader world of SF (*pace* John Campbell!)

Two points then arise: First, these boundaries are constantly changing as new scientific discoveries and scientific theories cause them to move and expand, shifting the limits of what is or is not believable. Second, everyone should be allowed to set the boundaries wherever they like, in accordance with the extent of

their own knowledge and beliefs. That well-known cliché ‘a sense of wonder’ helps here!

I think you were a bit hard on Robert Day - somebody very well-known, I think it may have been Fred Pohl - is reputed to have said something like “SF is what I am pointing at when I say this is Science Fiction”.

<<That big circle idea is very similar to the one proposed by Jack Cohen at a BSFG meeting over 20 years ago. I liked it then and still like it now, even more so with your amendments.

BUT all three of you are missing the point, I think. My original premise was not to come up with a definition of SF between SF fans (we’re so nitpicking on all the ‘exceptions to the rule’ that only someone *in* the field could come up with) but to have a definition to show to the outside world, the Margaret Atwoods and the various journalists who really haven’t a clue. You can’t go to them with “SF is what I am pointing at when I say this is Science Fiction”. *They* don’t know what SF is and surely, it’s up to us to attempt to educate them, if that doesn’t sound too condescending. We have to show that statements like “It’s science fiction so you can do anything you want” are just simply wrong – that, as you say Michael, is how to produce bad SF. So, just to recap, I’m reprinting here the important bits of my original article:-

“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? Of course, the answer is that we need a definition of science fiction.” Robert has suggested “SF is a literature that deals with the effects of a scientific or technological change from our current state of knowledge”. So, gentlemen, let’s get back to the original discussion and forget about ‘exceptions to the rule’. – RGP>>

THE MANCHESTER POETRY PRIZE 2010 and CHILDREN’S BOOK FESTIVAL

A major international literary competition celebrating excellence in creative writing. Open to writers internationally, this competition will award a cash prize of £10,000 to the writer of the best portfolio of poetry submitted. The competition is open to entrants aged 16 and over. Deadline for entries is 6th August 2010. Terms and conditions apply – see

www.manchesterwritingcompetition.co.uk for further details.

There’s also a Children’s Book Festival but the dates are very close – 1-4 July. Details from www.manchesterchildrensbookfestival.co.uk

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... **Everett Bleiler** (b.1920) died on June 13. Bleiler, who was twice nominated for the Hugo Award for his works *SCIENCE FICTION: THE EARLY YEARS* and *SCIENCE FICTION: THE GERNSBACK YEARS*, was a leading bibliographer of the field. He is also credited with co-editing, with **T E Dikty**, the first year's best anthology series. He won the SFRA Pilgrim Award in 1984 and the World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1988 Author **Jeanne Roberson** (b.1948) died on May 30. Last year, Roberson was diagnosed with a virulent form of biliary cancer which has not responded to treatment. Roberson, the wife of **Spider Roberson**, co-authored the *Stardance* novels and won the Nebula and Hugo Awards in 1978 for the original novella, "Stardance" Illustrator **Al Williamson** (b.1931) died on June 13. Williamson began working on the *Tarzan* comic strips with his mentor, **Burne Hogarth**, in 1948. By 1952, he was working for EC Comics on *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy*, often collaborating with **Frank Frazetta**. In the mid-80s, Williamson worked on comic adaptations of many SF films, including *BLADERUNNER* and *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*. He remained active into the 2000s **Neil Gaiman** has won the prestigious CILIP Carnegie Medal for 2010 for 'the most outstanding book for children' beating out a shortlist that included books by Terry Pratchett and Philip Reeve **Paolo Bacigalupi** won this year's



Compton Crook Award for best first novel for his book *THE WINDUP GIRL*. With *THE WINDUP GIRL*, he becomes one of only four authors in the history of the Nebula Award to win with their very first novel. The others were **Daniel Keyes**, **Alexei Panshin** and **William Gibson** bestselling horror writer **James Herbert** has been awarded the OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List Local author and one-time BSFG

member **Joel Lane** is on the nomination shortlist of the British Fantasy Awards for his collection *THE TERRIBLE CHANGES* And long-time BSFG member **David A Hardy** is on the nomination shortlist of the Chesley Awards for Best Cover with his Nov/Dec 2009 F&SF cover **Philip K Dick's** personal journals will be published in two volumes as *THE EXEGESIS OF PHILIP K DICK* by Houghton Mifflin. They also purchased reprint rights to 39 of PKD's novels The British Library has acquired 15 large boxes of papers from the estate of author **J G Ballard**. The papers, which have been appraised at £350,000, cover a period beginning with the writing of *THE DROWNED*

WORLD in 1962 through MIRACLES OF LIFE in 2008 **John Scalzi** has sold FUZZY NATION, an authorised ‘reboot’ of **H Beam Piper**’s LITTLE FUZZY **John Jarrold** has sold **Eric Brown**’s KINGS OF ETERNITY to Solaris **Jack Vance**’s HARD LUCK DIGGINGS: THE EARLY JACK VANCE will be published by Subterranean Press in July, as will **Ray Bradbury**’s THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES: THE COMPLETE EDITION **J K Rowling**, 44, is one of only 14 self-made female billionaires in the world according to Forbes.com A new **Graham Joyce** novel, THE SILENT LAND, is scheduled for October publication by Gollancz **Sir Terry Pratchett** first developed his vision of a chain of parallel worlds, *The Long Earth*, in an unfinished novel and two short stories in 1986, after writing EQUAL RITES. Now this long-gestating concept is to see the light of day in two as-yet-untitled books written in collaboration with **Stephen Baxter** Bloc Online is sponsoring an annual competition for aspiring science fiction and fantasy writers in memory of **Louise Cooper**. The first year’s entry deadline is July 17. Entrants should be no longer than 2,500 words and can be either short stories or extracts from longer works **Patrick Lundrigan** has won this year’s Jim Baen Memorial Writing Contest with his story “Space Hero”. The contest is sponsored by Baen Books and the National Space Society to promote and reward forward thinking science fiction authors who write exciting and innovative stories about the near future of manned space exploration. Lundrigan’s story will be published on Baen’s website **The Science Fiction Museum** in Seattle has announced that it will host an exhibit on *Battlestar Galactica* in cooperation with Universal Cable Productions and Syfy. The display will open on October 23 and will include props from the recently aired show, including three full sized spaceships and costumes. The exhibit will run till March 4, 2012 **Guillermo del Toro** has announced his resignation as the director of the two films based on THE HOBBIT that **Peter Jackson** is producing as a sequel to his THE LORD OF THE RINGS **Ridley Scott** plans to do two prequels to ALIEN **Birmingham**’s ‘urban environment’ and ‘air of abandonment’ proved perfect for shooting the recent version of the TV series SURVIVORS. Apparently filming took place in Newhall Street, Edmund Street, Brindley Place, the Old Fire Station at Lancaster Circus and the derelict Central Studios. It couldn't have been filmed on a Friday or Saturday! Scientists believe that **asteroid 2010 KQ**, which was discovered on May 16, 2010 by **Richard Kowalski** at the Catalina Sky Survey and passed Earth just outside lunar orbit on May 21, is artificial. Scientists believe the object is less than 10 meters in length and may be the spent stage of an early rocket booster. The object may have been near Earth in 1975

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.**

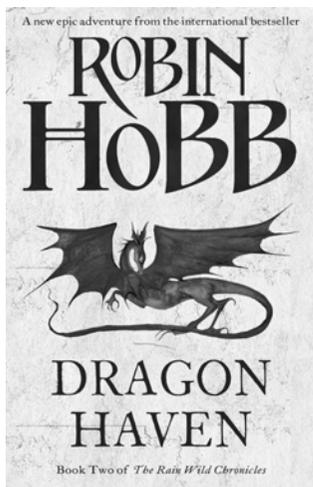
***DRAGON HAVEN* by Robin Hobb**

Book Two of *The Rain Wild Chronicles*

Voyager / 570pgs / hardcover £20.00 ISBN: 978-0007335817

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

The best of Robin Hobb's fantasy novels are internally consistent: they have an internal logic that makes sense within the parameters that she sets. There



is magic but it is subtle, not some powerful force that can be wielded by a practitioner of the dark arts. The magic contained here is possessed by dragons. These dragons are effectively sentient aliens that can have a symbiotic relationship with humans. There is a sense, though, that the world belonged to dragons before there were humans around. But that was a very, very long time ago.

There is a lot that humans do not know about their world, that they are only just beginning to discover: the life cycle of dragons for example. They hatch on islands and the juvenile state of the creature is a semi-aware sea serpent. Then, travelling up the Rain Wild River, they make cocoons on particular beaches and emerge fully formed dragons. At least, that is what is supposed to happen.

In *THE DRAGON KEEPER*, the first book of this particular series, the last dragon, Tintaglia, has rounded up the last sea-serpents and led them to the cocooning grounds. Unfortunately, those that do emerge are deformed, unable to fly or care for themselves. The local people attempt to feed them but they are a burden on the small provincial town. A group of misfits has been detailed to look after the dragons on their way up river in search of the legendary city of Kelsingra, which some of the dragons remember from their ancestral memories.

When *DRAGON HAVEN* opens, they are well on their way and the tensions between the mixed group of travellers is already present. City-bred Sedric wants to gather some dragon parts and head back downriver to make his fortune and elope with Alise's husband. Alise is falling in love with the river barge captain and is torn between her duty and her heart. Gref, one of the dragon

keepers is trying to claim leadership of the party. Jess, a hunter is not above blackmail to achieve his ends.

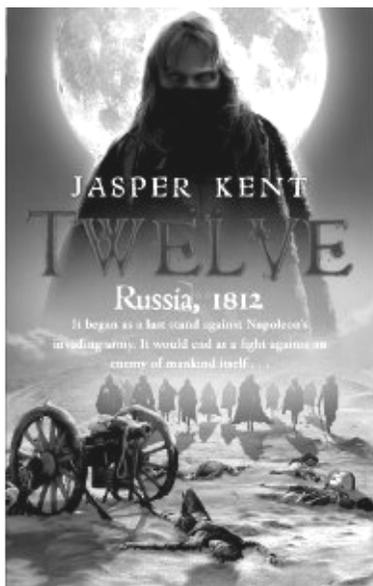
The stresses are compounded when a surge in the river's water sweeps all away. While most of the dragons manage to wedge themselves amongst the trees until the waters subside, dragons and keepers are separated or lost. For several characters, this is a turning point, discovering what they really want. As they travel onwards it becomes clear that not only have attitudes changed, but so have the dragons and their keepers, not just mentally but physically as well.

This is an excellent, fast-paced novel with characters that exist on many levels. It is not just an adventure in a fantasy world, but adds to the knowledge of this world that Hobb has visited many times before – in nine other novels. *PM*

TWELVE by Jasper Kent

Bantam Books / 544pgs / paperback £7.99 ISBN: 978-0553819588

Reviewed by Dave Corby



TWELVE is Jasper Kent's first published novel. Researching Jasper Kent's past reveals he has turned his hand to a variety of callings, having graduated from Cambridge in Natural Sciences: he has worked as a software developer and has composed a number of musicals; clearly he has a rounded talent. However, I hope that his efforts in these other areas are less pedestrian than his authorship.

I realise that we get a lot of variety in the books forwarded to the BSFG for review; nonetheless I did find this one bit of a surprise. It is an historical horror; a vampire novel set against the failed Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812. The plot, told from the first person view of a Russian army officer, concerns a group of Russian special operatives pitting

themselves to stop Napoleon's advance. When a group of mysterious mercenaries offer their seemingly implausibly competent services, the officers are quick to take them up. The secret behind the mercenaries' abilities (they are all vampires) soon causes the protagonist to convert from fighting the French to fighting the supernatural threat.

Given the author's academic background I anticipated that I might learn something of the period from the novel. Unfortunately it felt very light on period detail to me; on reflection, the story might have been told against any military

campaign, and aside from place names the book gives no insight into period specific life or motivations. I did find the specific main characters of the Russian officers, the protagonist's love interest, and the main antagonist to be quite vibrant. However, as this numbers just 5 characters in total, I would certainly hope that the author would give them the effort necessary to make them come alive a little.

The writing itself is very neutral; reasonably easy to read, but lacking in character. The large page count slipped by quite easily, possibly as the font is quite large (enhancing readability) and I suspect that the text could have fitted easily into a smaller volume.

The horror content did not seem to scare me at any point. Maybe this is more me than the book (I cannot recall a time when I was scared reading a horror novel). Certainly it contains gore, as a vampire tale would seem to require, and it is quite creative in the gore's deployment. Luckily this aspect is used in a sparing manner, which gives it the greatest impact; I have read other volumes that liberally waded through blood, and that approach loses its character very quickly.

The action sequences are written snappily, which does help to produce a level of excitement, and, as with the horror, the action is well placed and never overused. These evident skills of authorship, in conjunction with the overall slight character, makes this book seem rather workman-like: competent, but hardly inspired.

I note that the website 'Fantasy Book Review' rates this book highly (currently 8.5 out of 10). I can only assume that this is a damning statement about the field of historical horror, which must be dire indeed if a work as pedestrian as this can claim great praise. *DC*

WHITE CAT by Holly Black

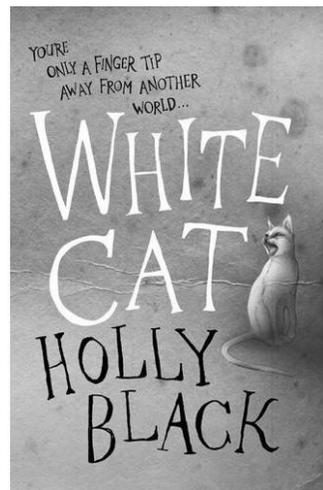
Gollancz / 320 pages / hardcover £18.99

ISBN: 978-0575096707

trade paperback £10.99 ISBN 978-0575096714

Reviewed by Sam Fennell

The world in which WHITE CAT is set is one in which people can be cursed by the touch of a magic worker. Magic working is illegal and magic workers can have one of a limited number of abilities including being able to change someone's memories, charm them or even kill them. Everyone, workers and non-workers alike, wears gloves so as not to curse or be cursed. The ability to work magic doesn't



come without consequences, and workers suffer ‘blowback’ every time they work. We learn early on that the lead character’s brother can change the memories of others but loses his own in the process; his grandfather is a death worker missing the fingers on one hand after working a death curse; and his mother can charm people into believing she is someone else but loses her touch on reality as she does so.

This is a world where a worker’s talents are both feared but desired by many, and are a valuable commodity. Magic working runs in families and some worker families are like the mafia, or alternatively are ‘for hire’- contracted by mobs who need a problem dealt with.

The lead character, Cassell, is a troubled teenager at a private school with his fair share of teen angst and problems, notably a bad relationship with siblings, his mother being in jail, not fitting in at his private school and killing a friend when he was 14. He begins to have strange dreams and sleepwalking episodes featuring a white cat. We then follow Cassell getting involved with a mob trying to uncover the truth about the murder of his friend.

All in all, this book has all the right ingredients to be an enjoyable and involving read- mobsters, magic, memory manipulation and con-artistry. It’s a straight forward quick read, and introduces an interesting world with plenty of conflict that the author can capitalise on. Unfortunately just shy of a third in, it was very clear what the plot was going to be. It was simply very predictable, and even though this is aimed at a teen audience, I think most teens will quickly pick up the plot too. The book in places reads like a script. With such appealing topics this could easily translate into a television series or a film and through the book the reader gets the sense that this is maybe one of the author’s objectives after the success of her SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES, along with a desire to join the current trend in supernatural fiction.

Key themes in this book are memories and misdirection, topics which have the potential to be engaging and intricate, but the reader is left feeling that the simplicity of the plot doesn’t match the nature of the topic. I finished the book somewhat disappointed that I hadn’t been hoodwinked, duped, conned or kept guessing as to what original memories would reveal. *SF*

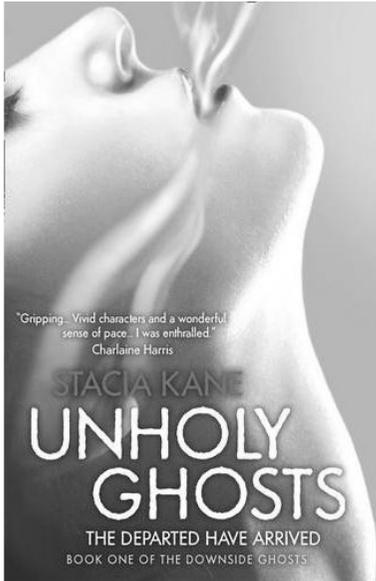
UNHOLY GHOSTS by Stacia Kane

Voyager / 346pgs paperback £7.99 ISBN: 978-0007352814

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

This is the first book in the *Downside Ghosts* series and is set 27 years after the 1997 Haunted Week disaster in which the spirits/ghosts of the dead arose and slaughtered two thirds of humanity. Neither the established religions nor the governments were able to control the ghosts and so they fell. Mankind was rescued by a little known sect, ‘The Church of Real Truth’, which by the use of magic was able to banish the ghosts to the underground ‘City of the Dead’ also

known as the 'City of Eternity'. So confident is the Church of its ability of controlling the ghosts that it pays compensation to any household that becomes haunted. This, of course, provides an irresistible opportunity for fraud in an impoverished world. To counter this, a corps of 'Debunkers' are employed; if necessary they perform exorcisms.



Chess Putnam is a 'Churchwitch' employed as a Debunker. However, she is hiding a secret from the Church as she is a drug addict and owes the local drug lord, Bump, a lot of money. He wants the debt cleared and forces her to investigate the haunting of an old airport he wants to use and either identify the mundane cause of his problem or exorcise the ghosts. Investigation reveals black magic, human sacrifice and puts both her personally and the Church in great danger. To complicate matters she starts to feel a strong attraction to Bump's strong-arm enforcer and also becomes involved with one of Bump's rival drug lords.

UNHOLY GHOSTS is extremely well written introducing the reader to a likeable if damaged heroine trying to survive in an impoverished and dangerous world. The support characters are well defined and the action is non-stop from start to finish, exciting but none of it gross or explicit.

This is a really enjoyable book and I look forward to reading the other books in the series, UNHOLY MAGIC and CITY OF GHOSTS which are to be published in July and August 2010 respectively.

JTP

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...

July 22nd - FLASHFORWARD by Robert J. Sawyer

Forthcoming:- 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 and great company. More details from Martin Tudor - (empties084@btinternet.com).

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/>

DOCTOR WHO LIVE! BBC Worldwide has announced a series of arena dates for the very first production of DOCTOR WHO LIVE which is coming to The NIA, Birmingham, 18 - 20 October 2010. Tickets range from £25 to £38.50 each. The new stage show, based upon the BBC's smash-hit, award-winning series *Doctor Who*, promises to deliver a spectacular audio/visual experience featuring live music, special effects and appearances from the show's most popular monsters. Full details from The Ticket Factory – phone 0844 338 0388 or see their website www.theticketfactory.com

ILLUSTRIOUS is the 2011 Eastercon to be held at the Hilton Metropole Hotel, the NEC, Birmingham over the Easter weekend 22-25 April. Guests of Honour are US author David Weber and UK author Peter F Hamilton. Artist GoH is none other than our own David A Hardy! Fan GoH is Vince Doherty.
More info: <http://www.illustrious.org.uk/>



NOVA CON 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 cancel due to a recent fall. Full details at <http://novacon.org.uk/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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

September 10th – to be announced

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

November 5th – SF author CHARLES STROSS

December 3rd – Christmas Social

Jan 2011 – Annual General Meeting and Auction

Feb – QUIZ with University SF Society

The item ‘**Science Fiction Fandom in the 50s and 60s in London and Birmingham – an interactive talk by STAN NICHOLLS and PETER WESTON**’ announced last month for September unfortunately will have to be rescheduled for 2011 as Pete Weston belatedly realised he will be in Spain on that date. Also on line for 2011 but no confirmed dates yet are visits from **ROBERT RANKIN** and **LIZ WILLIAMS**.

We’re currently trying to fill that September slot.

BRUM GROUP NEWS #466 (July 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 rogp Peyton [at] 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