

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2011

ISSUE 478

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

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);**
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VICKY STOCK (MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY);
NOVACON 41 CHAIRMAN: STEVE LAWSON

WEBSITE:

www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/

EMAIL:

bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk



Friday 15th July

Professor

IAN STEWART

Mathematician, science fiction author, co-writer (with Dr Jack Cohen and Sir Terry Pratchett) of the *Discworld* non-fiction books and Brum Group member.

Ian is currently Professor of Mathematics at the University of Warwick. He is well known for his popular expositions of mathematics and his contributions to catastrophe theory and to date has written over 20 books on popular science.

He has written and published several SF short stories for ANALOG and has two SF novels, both co-written with Jack Cohen, titled WHEELERS (2000) and HEAVEN

Friday August 12th – the SUMMER SOCIAL – see page 2.
You must have a ticket for this so make sure you purchase yours asap.

(2004).

Add to this his three books on *The Science of Discworld* co-authored with Jack Cohen and Sir Terry Pratchett and you will see that our speaker has an extremely wide-range of subjects to talk about.

As Ian is a long-time member of the Brum Group, although he doesn't have time to attend regular meetings, he was very aware of the discussion in this newsletter last year regarding my arguments against the existence of alternate worlds. He intends touching on this subject, so I'm about to be 'proven' wrong...! Possibly...

This is definitely one meeting you can't afford to miss!

RGP

2011 SUMMER SOCIAL – Vernon Brown

There's still time to book for the Summer Social - a meal at the Black Eagle in Hockley that will take place on Friday August 12th. As usual a £5 deposit will be required when booking.

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, Hockley, B18 5JU.

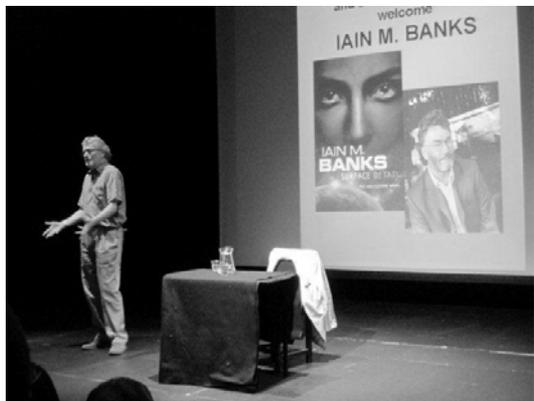
If you would like to travel with others, meet at the entrance to Snow Hill Station, Colmore Row at 7.00pm then we will go on by Metro.

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.

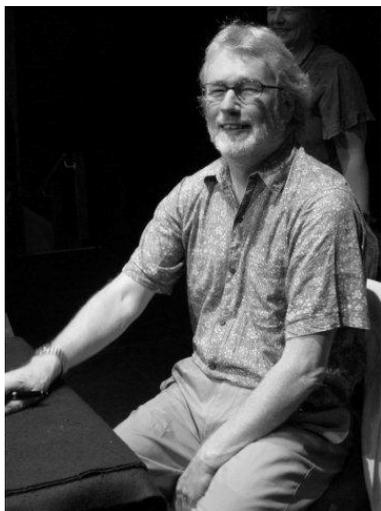
If you wish to get there by Metro get off at Soho Benson Road. Cross the tracks (care!) to the exit. Turn right down Benson Road until you see The Black Eagle on your left. *VB*

OUR 40th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS by Rog Peyton

The Iain M Banks meeting we held in conjunction with Birmingham Libraries was very nearly a disaster. One week before the meeting, we'd sold precisely 31 tickets. Part of the reason for this was that Birmingham Libraries had just been told a couple of weeks before our negotiations started (the week of Eastercon) that in future they could not sell tickets directly – they had to be sold through Birmingham Rep Ticket Office. The setup cost of this was, I



understand, £40 plus the cost of printing the tickets (which was incredibly more than the printing costs we had!). They also weren't sure that it could all be arranged in the short time we had.

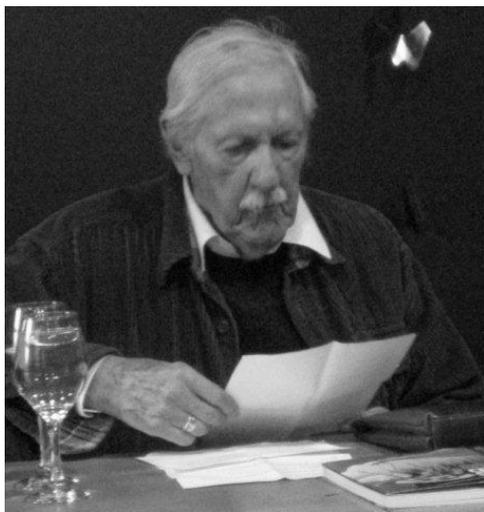


So, we organised it so that people got the tickets direct from us. Despite colour posters going out to every public library in Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Coventry, etc., etc. and being placed in all local bookshops and our usual places of advertising, we got just 31 orders up to one week ahead of the talk. But, typically, orders started arriving in the last few days. I even had seven requests for tickets at lunchtime on the day of the talk!!!

In the end it was quite a presentable attendance with somewhere around 75 seats being taken. Sue Wilkinson of Birmingham Libraries started the evening off giving the obligatory instructions in case of fire, etc. and then introduced me. I gave a brief introduction to Iain.

Iain was on his usual madcap form and talked about his writing of SF including several anecdotes from over the years including the story of one gentleman at the Hay Festival the week before our meeting who after Iain's talk stood up and asked in a very snooty tone why he bothered to write 'that science fiction rubbish!'

Iain answered many questions from the audience and then signed copies of the new paperback, SURFACE DETAIL, and copies of the Novacon 40 Special, THE SPHERES. Several of us then retired to a local Indian restaurant. All in all, an extremely enjoyable evening.



Four days later it was the actual 40th Anniversary Party. And again, this was very nearly a disaster, too. Everything had been organised down to the last detail (so we thought) but there was no way we could have foreseen the circumstances that occurred that evening.

I had arranged to meet Brian Aldiss and Alison at New Street Station, leaving Vernon, Pat and Arline at the OJS to set the room up. Brian's train was due in at 6.18pm. I arrived several minutes before that and was horrified to discover that the trains from Oxford were delayed by approximately 1 hour. In fact, every train on the Arrivals board was delayed! That morning, someone had

been killed on the line and all trains were disrupted right through the day and evening. New Street Station was in chaos.

Earlier, back in Oxford, Brian and Alison had arrived at the station to discover the delays and so decided to travel up to Birmingham by taxi. After much trouble, they managed to phone the OJS who passed on the message to Vernon. Arline tried to phone me to tell me to get back to the OJS but I'd got my phone set on vibrate, not ring, and was leaning against a wall with my jacket pocket hanging loose – and so didn't feel the phone vibrating! Arline tried about ten times before reaching me. If I hadn't changed position just as she rang, I could have been there all night!

I hotfooted it back to the OJS and arrived back there about 10 minutes before Brian and Alison arrived. All was well. And miraculously all still on time.

With everyone milling about, ordering drinks from our designated waiter for the evening and meeting up with past members, etc., it was just past 8.15 when Brian was introduced and started his talk.



After reading out a letter from our other President, Harry Harrison, in which he reminisced about his first contact with the Brum Group back in 1965, Brian talked about the SF Exhibition currently on at the British Library in London called 'Out of This World - Science Fiction But Not As You Know It'. He showed us the exhibition catalogue and several of us decided we must get down to

London to see it (see next item!).

Brian also read out a letter he'd received from a Russian SF fan who was chairman of the Russian Brian Aldiss Fan Club! Dave Corby has taken address details and we're going to try to contact this club and see what transpires.

At the end of his talk the Group presented Brian with an engraved pen to celebrate the event. A similar pen was to be sent to Harry in his absence.

And then – total shock – Vernon and I were presented with engraved silver card cases. Wow! We never expected that. A big Thank You to the Group from both of us.

The buffet was served at about 9pm after which our Celebration Cake with Retro Spaceship scene painted by our very own David A Hardy was cut and distributed.



Excellent food all round and I thought very good value for money. I hope others agree with me.

Brian and Alison left about 10.30 and after 11 the evening closed down and we all went home looking forward to the next 40 years!
RGP

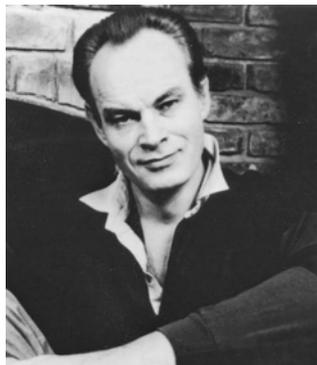
A TRIP TO LONDON by Rog Peyton

Is anyone interested in going to London by train to see the Science Fiction Exhibition “Out of This World” that Brian Aldiss talked about at our Party? (see Forthcoming Events at the end of this newsletter). If we went on the first Thursday of the month (either August 4th or September 1st) we could also take in the monthly meeting of London fans in the Melton Mowbray pub in Holborn. No speakers, no formalities, just drinking and chatting to fellow fans (food is available up to 8pm). These meetings started in 1946 in London at the White Horse and continued at the Globe, the One Tun, the Wellington, etc.

Vernon and I used to go every month to the Globe and the One Tun in the 70s but I think we both stopped going when it moved to the Wellington in the 80s. Is anyone interested – preferably for August 4th? Email me at my address at the end of this newsletter.
RGP

THE GEMMELL AWARDS 2011 by Chris Morgan

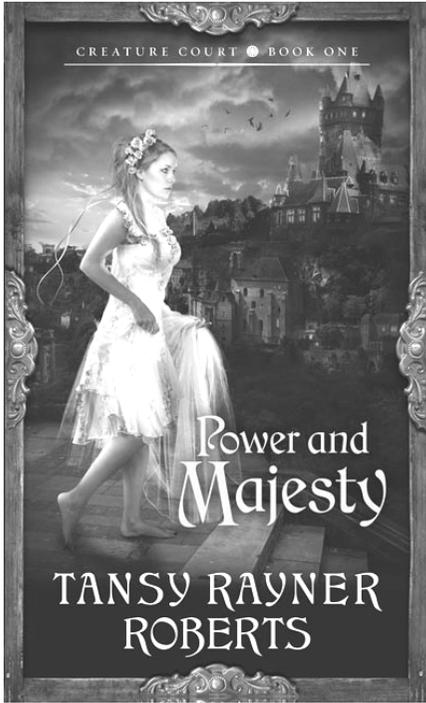
This is the third year of the Gemmell Awards for fantasy, and Pauline & I went along to the presentation ceremony in London on Friday 17th June.



“But aren't there too many of these genre awards?” I hear you cry. Ahh, but these are specifically for fantasy rather than SF or horror. There are some very good reasons why the Gemmells should exist and prosper. One is that they help to perpetuate the name of David Gemmell, fantasy writer, raconteur and all-round nice guy, who died in 2006 aged only 57. Another is that these are democratic awards, depending on the votes of the reading public, more than 1000 of whom took the trouble to get onto www.gemmellaward.com and vote. (There's a clever system to prevent multiple voting.) All much clearer and more above board than juries of people you've never heard of like, erm, Pauline Morgan.

So did you vote for the Gemmells? I'm not asking Rog Peyton; I think we all know his views on fantasy. But I am asking you, the Brum Group members. You could have voted. Make a note of it for next year.

Another plus point is that there are three categories for the Gemmells. Not just the best fantasy novel of the year, but also the best first novel and (often forgotten) the best cover art on a fantasy novel.



included in the tickets).

It was an entertaining evening at a remarkable venue: the Magic Circle building close to Euston Station. In charge of proceedings, doing an excellent job, were Stan and Anne Nicholls. They were helped by James Barclay who did a Gemmell reading and a charity auction.

The Ravenheart Award for Best Fantasy Cover Art (handed over by Anne Sudworth) went to Olof Erla Einarsdottir for her cover on POWER AND MAJESTY by Tansy Rayner Roberts.

The Morningstar Award for Best Fantasy Newcomer (presented by Juliet McKenna) went to Darius Hinks for WARRIOR PRIEST.

The Legend Award for Best Fantasy Novel (given out by last year's winner, Graham McNeill) was won by Brandon Sanderson for THE WAY OF KINGS.

About 100 people attended, professionals and fans. Some were formally dressed, others not. A useful evening for networking or just getting drunk (with unlimited nibbles and glasses of wine

CM

SIDWISE AWARDS NOMINEES 2011

This year's nominees for the Sidwise Award for Alternate History have been announced. The winners will be announced at Renovation, this year's Worldcon, in Reno, Nevada during the weekend of August 17. This year's panel of judges was made up of Stephen Baxter, Evelyn Leeper, Jim Rittenhouse, Stu Shiffman, Kurt Sidaway and Steven H Silver.

Short Form

MAMMOTHS OF THE GREAT PLAINS by Eleanor Arnason

"Alten Kameraden" by Barry B. Longyear

"Sidewinders" by Ken MacLeod

"A Clash of Eagles" by Alan Smale

"Goin' Down to Anglotown" by William F. Wu

Long Form

COLUMBIA & BRITANNIA by Adam Chamberlain & Brian A. Dixon

RED INFERNO: 1945 by Robert Conroy

PINION by Jay Lake

WHEN ANGELS WEPT by Eric Swedin

...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.peyton [at] büninternet [dot] com

From long-time member Dave Hardy – “Several items in the latest BGN (great issue) seem to need comment...

The three items from the 'Founding Fathers' made very interesting reading. Knowing that I'm one of the 'oldest' (as well as probably the oldest) of current regular and active members of the Brum Group, some newer members might wonder why I'm not part of this select and illustrious group. Well, in 1967, having recently gone freelance as an artist, I moved to a cottage in Norfolk, which I could buy and live in much more cheaply than around Brum. As a result, and lacking today's rapid electronic methods of communication, I was totally unaware of the events that were taking place in 1971 back in my home city. It wasn't until 1973 when I came back here as a result of marital problems etc., that I came across a card in my local library saying 'Are you interested in science fiction?' with a contact number for one Peter Weston. Having found this band of (generally) like-minded characters I soon became Publicity Officer, and later Chairman, Newsletter Editor and Secretary, most of these for several years. I was also on a couple of Novacon committees, etc. (Why wasn't I at the 40th party? Way back last year a friend and I decided to go to Italy & Sicily to see the volcanoes of Mt. Etna, Vesuvius, Stromboli; Pompeii, Herculaneum, etc. Being unaware at that time of the significance of that date, we booked our flight for June 10th!)

The three reminiscences were interesting for their approach as well as their content. While Rog and Vernon generally relive their own experiences, Peter chooses to take a look at the changes in SF itself, and not for the better . . . I agree with him wholeheartedly! Look at the reviews in this issue: Review 1: ' . . . all the elements of a fine fantasy.' 2: ' . . . a collection of short fantasy stories and novellas. . . ' 3: ' . . . In post-Buffy days, urban fantasy has been as common as, well, the common cold.' 4: ' . . . the third part of the Dark Swan urban fantasy series. . . ' SF? What SF? If we excluded non-SF there would often be no reviews. . .

When we do read what is supposed to be 'hard SF', what do we find? Even writers like Peter F. Hamilton and Alastair Reynolds now have strong elements of what would once have been defined as fantasy, such as psi powers, dependence upon telepathy and so on (to the best of my knowledge, no scientific investigation has ever proved the existence of these). But I have expressed my own view on all this before in these pages, and in expanded form on Science Fiction Crowsnest. Meanwhile writers like Stephen Baxter may well find that many readers glaze over when they read stuff like: “But there are other sorts of closed timelike curves,” Vala said. “Marshal, our universe of three space dimensions floats in a greater space, which the physicists call the Bulk, of many extra dimensions. . . .” On the other hand I have to admit that I know nothing about 'urban fantasy' and have never read any (about vampires, isn't it? Oh yes, I have read DRACULA), and it's therefore no surprise that readers of the one genre have very little in common with the other.

In his piece, Rog explains that he always wanted, and still does, to get the Group involved in publishing. I know that our coffers contain enough to cover such a worthwhile project. He adds: “All we need is to agree on what to publish – suggestions always welcome.” In his own list of 'Recommended SF Books' Rog always includes several that

are sadly currently out of print; so why don't we try to revive some of those? Eg. Bob Shaw's (a former President of the BSFG) OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES?

<< It's VERY interesting Dave that you class psi powers as fantasy because 'there's no scientific evidence'. Last year when I stated that there was no scientific evidence for alternate worlds, you argued with me that their existence had not been disproved and therefore was still science fiction. The existence of psi powers has not been disproved either – in fact, quite the opposite, there are many recorded instances of telepathy, particularly between twins. Ask Chris Priest!

No, Dave, urban fantasy is NOT just about vampires. It's a term for any modern-day fantasy in an urban setting – vampires, werewolves, fairies, angels and other objectionable characters. DRACULA is not urban fantasy. – RGP>>

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Author **Joel Rosenberg** (b.1954) died on June 2, the day after he suffered a respiratory depression that caused a heart attack, anoxic brain damage and major organ failure. Rosenberg was the author of the *Guardians of the Flame* series, as well as the *Metzada* series and the *Keepers of the Hidden Ways* series plus the stand-alone novel D'SHAI Author **Alan Ryan** (1943) died on June 3. Ryan wrote the horror novels THE KILL, DEAD WHITE and CAST A COLD EYE, as well as numerous short stories. In addition to his fiction, Ryan also edited several anthologies, including VAMPIRES, PERPETUAL LIGHT and NIGHT VISIONS 1. Ryan won a World Fantasy Award for his short story "The Bones Wizard" and was a nominee for the John W. Campbell Award in 1979. In recent years, he has suffered a stroke, a heart attack and pancreatic cancer British author **John Glasby** (1928) died on June 5. Glasby began writing in the 1950s, using numerous pseudonyms and house names for Badger books. In 1971, he published the novel PROJECT JOVE under his own name. In addition to his science fiction novels and short stories, he also wrote numerous horror and ghost stories, including several in the *Chulhu Mythos*. Among the pseudonyms he used were '**A. J. Merak**', '**John E. Muller**', '**Karl Zeigfreid**' and '**Victor LaSalle**' US anthologist and academic **Martin H Greenberg** (b. 1941) died 25 June. He edited and published well over one thousand anthologies – both of fiction and non-fiction SF fan, fan writer and fan artist **Terry Jeeves** died on May 29. He became an SF fan in the early 30s. Jeeves was a founder of the British Science Fiction Association and served as editor of its journal, *Vector* nos 2-4. He also published his own fanzine, *Erg*, for more than forty years and was the co-editor of *Triode* with **Eric Bentcliffe**. Jeeves won the Doc Weir Award for service to British fandom, the Rotsler Award, and in 2010 was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame Actor **James Arness** (b.1923) died on June 3. Arness is best known for his role as Marshall Matt Dillon on the television show *Gunsmoke*, but he also appeared in the science fiction films TWO LOST WORLDS, THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD and THEM!. Arness became an actor after his younger brother, **Peter Graves**, suggested he pursue the career while Arness was recuperating from wounds suffered during World War II Producer **Laura Ziskin** (b. 1950) died on June 12. Ziskin was a producer of the three Spider-Man films as well as the forthcoming THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. She also worked as a producer on THE EYES OF LAURA MARS and STEALTH. Following a 2004 breast cancer diagnosis, Ziskin co-founded Stand Up to Cancer, a charity that has raised more than \$200 million for cancer research Actor **Roy Skelton** (b.1932) died on June 8. Skelton is perhaps best known for providing the voice for the *Doctor Who* villains the Daleks, from 1967 to 1988. He also provided voice work for the

Cybermen and the Krotons. Skelton also appeared as the mock turtle in a version of ALICE IN WONDERLAND and was a puppeteer and voice artist on the show *Rainbow* Congratulations to our young member **David A. Hardy** who has won Best Artist award at the 33rd Eurocon in Sweden. Young David has also been nominated for two Chesley Awards - for his April 2010 *Analogue* cover and in the Unpublished Colour category for his painting “Portals to Infinity”. This boy is improving all the time and could go far! **Sir Terry Pratchett** has announced the winners of the first ‘Anywhere But Here, Anywhen But Now’ writing contest. Two works, **David Logan’s** HALF SICK OF SHADOW and **Michael Logan’s** APOCALYPSE COW will receive a publishing contract from Transworld Publishers and will split the £20,000 prize. The two winners are not related NIAD Management is suing **Orson Scott Card** for commissions due from the film and web adaptations of ENDER’S GAME. When Card signed with NIAD in 2006, the contract specifically noted that they would not receive commissions on the ENDER’S GAME film optioned by Warner Bros. When the Warner option expired in 2008, the project was shopped to other studios and NIAD claims that the exclusion clause only applies to the project made by Warner, not subsequent projects **Charlaine Harris** has become the fourth author whose e books have sold more than a million copies for the Kindle reader. The other three are **Stieg Larsson, James Patterson** and **Nora Roberts** **Stephen Jones** will edit an original anthology A BOOK OF HORRORS for Jo Fletcher Books so if you have a short story written, it could be a good place to sell it The first part of **Robert Heinlein’s** biography by **William H Patterson Jr** is out from Tor. It covers his life up to the end of the 1940s and the mid-life crisis that changed him forever **SHIRLEY JACKSON: NOVELS AND STORIES** is out from the Library of America – 827pgs containing the collection THE LOTTERY, the novels THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE and WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE together with a selection of short stories previously uncollected RGP





BOOK REVIEWS





(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

WONDER by Robert J. Sawyer

(WWW Trilogy part 3)

Gollancz / 340pgs / £12.99 trade paperback ISBN 978-0575095083

Reviewed by Michael Jones

Previous parts of this three-volume story have described the spontaneous emergence of a self-aware Artificial Intelligence arising from the complexity of the World Wide Web and this final part picks up shortly after a failed attempt by a US Government agency to neutralize it. Fortunately, Caitlin Decter, the blind teenage maths genius who discovered and bonded with ‘Webmind’ is on hand to help protect and guide her new friend. With her help, supported by her family and a few friends, he (or should that be ‘it?’) is able to avoid further attacks and eventually to ‘go public’, addressing the General Assembly of the UN and pointing out that his survival is dependent on the future survival and well-being of humanity so that there is no way he could possibly constitute a threat –

in fact, quite the reverse. The climactic point is the award of the Nobel peace Prize jointly to Webmind and to Tim Berners-Lee, the original creator of the Web.



Sawyer writes in an engagingly readable style and tells a good story, keeping the reader interested and keen to discover what happens next. The narrative progresses in a tidy and logical fashion and the various characters play their parts well. There is just sufficient explanation, without it becoming tedious, of what has already taken place in the two previous volumes, although some prior knowledge of their contents was a help, and it becomes clear that the various subsidiary characters all have their parts to play in bringing about the final conclusion. However, it must be said that the story is comprised of a chain of events which for the most part are individually quite mundane and unexciting. Also, characterisation is in general stereotypical and shallow and Webmind him/it/self is represented as nothing more than an entity of merely average intelligence albeit with a superhumanly broad

attention span and a superhuman memory. But of course, perhaps that is how the first true Artificial Intelligence will be – who knows?

There have been artificial intelligences before, of course – Colossus, Hal, Mike, AM, Harlie, Valentina, to name but a few. Some have been supremely bad for mankind, others reasonably good; Sawyer's new contribution may be to show human and artificial intelligences coming together in a state of mutual interdependence to the benefit of both. As such, this volume stands to be a worth-while addition to the body of work on this kind of theme, but whether there has been sufficient new to say to justify a three-volume work is debatable. With, perhaps, a few minor additions to clarify references to the backstory covered in the first two parts, *WONDER* could have been sufficient on its own to make the point.

On that basis, it is just about worth reading, while not necessarily standing alongside the greatest works of SF.

Mj

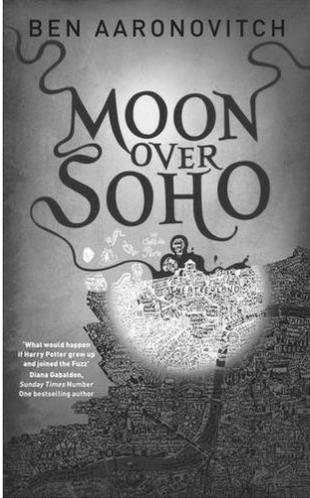
***MOON OVER SOHO* by Ben Aaronovitch**

Gollancz / 375pgs / £12.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0575097605

Reviewed by William McCabe

This is the second book of the series that began with *RIVERS OF LONDON* published in January of this year. Although it's not absolutely necessary to read the first book in the series before you start, it does help a great deal. Many of the characters that have carried over from that book are in situations as a result of that story that aren't explained here. That said, many of the new characters aren't very well developed here either. Taken as a classic police/detective novel with a fantasy twist, this works fairly well but there isn't any more to it.

Phillip Grant is a Detective Constable and apprentice wizard in the Metropolitan Police. He investigates cases that have supernatural causes and deals with incidents among the more magical citizens of London. His father was a famous jazz musician to those aficionados of the Soho scene of the 40s and 50s. He made a few records that are highly prized and hard to find nowadays: so when Philip investigates a series of deaths of jazz musicians that just stepped off stage, he can recognize the tune from the 40s that lingers in the air. The search through the jazz clubs of Soho also reveals a bizarre trade in hybrid people/animals that make Dr. Moreau look wholesome.



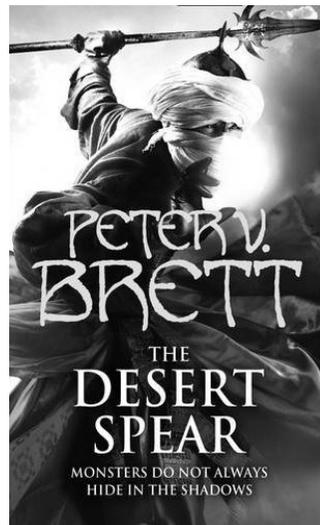
There's a lot that doesn't work properly here. The characters that were built in the first book seem to have disappeared into a fog of background or just been left out altogether. Some of this is explained by injuries sustained but they are still trotted out to explain bits of plot or take Grant to somewhere he needs to go to keep the story running. The only attempt at a new character is Simone who seems to be there only to give Grant a

sex life and 'spice up' the story in that way. There are many others, including Grant's parents, who seem to wander in and out of the story without really leaving a mark. It could be that these characters will persist and be expanded upon later. There's an evil wizard who, at the moment, is just someone in a mask but looks likely to become a series villain. The odd thing is that there were so many functional characters in the first book that it makes this look like someone else wrote it. I hope the series picks up after this but, judging by this entry, I'm not going to count on it.

WAM

***THE DESERT SPEAR* by Peter V. Brett**
Voyager / 761 pgs / £7.99 paperback ISBN:
978-0007276172
Reviewed by Jim Pearce

In the world known as Ala by the desert dwelling Krasians, and as Thesa by the Chin who live in the verdant north, an ages old war is being waged. Not between men, but between men and the 'core' dwelling demons that materialise on the surface as the sun sets and vanishes at sunrise. This war consists of active fighting in the south and passive resistance in the north where mankind cower behind 'warded' barriers. *THE DESERT SPEAR* is the story of two men, Ahmann Jardir living in Fort Krasia, a supreme warrior who declares himself the promised deliverer and Arlen Bales of Tibbets Brook (also known as the 'Painted Man'), a wanderer declared to be the deliverer despite his wishes by others. These two were formally friends. The story is enhanced by five major



secondary characters as well as a host of others. These major support actors being: Inevera a Dama'ting, - a Krasian holy woman and Ahmann Jardir's first wife, who is not an invisible power behind the throne. Abban a Kaffit - a man who works at a craft instead of becoming a warrior or a holy man who was a boyhood friend of Ahmann Jardir and in later life an adviser despite being despised by the rank and file Krasian warriors. Leesha the 'herb gatherer' (healer) and de facto leader of the township of Deliver's Hollow formally known as Cutter's Hollow. She is a friend of Arlen Bales and is a powerful 'ward witch'. Rojer - a jongleur and friend of both Leesha and Arlen Bales. His music has a unique magical effect on the demons. And finally, Reena, a childhood friend of Arlen Bales.

The first part of this story concentrates on the life of Ahmann Jardir following his rise from childhood obscurity to the absolute leader of the Krasians. Later on it covers his invasion of the north in pursuit of his holy war against the demons; a campaign during which he meets Leesha and Rojer. Meanwhile Arlen tries to make the leaders of the north aware of their danger from Ahmann Jardir and spreads his knowledge of aggressive warding; and while doing this he meets Reena again.

THE DESERT SPEAR is an excellent read, full of action and enjoyable engaging characters. While it is the second book of a series it is so strongly written that it can be read as a stand-alone novel without any detriment to the quality of the story. That said, the first, THE PAINTED MAN, is well worth reading. As is often the case, a taster of the next book, THE DAYLIGHT WAR, is provided. It too promises to be excellent and I look forward to reading it.

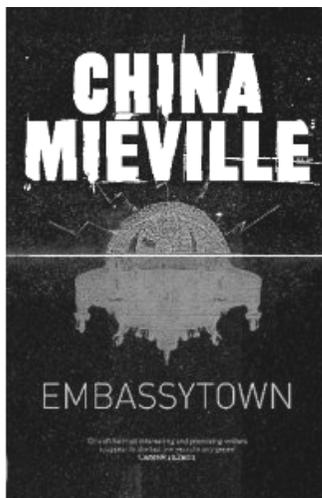
JTP

EMBASSYTOWN by China Miéville

Macmillan / 405pgs / £17.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0230750760 /

\$12.99 Trade paperback ISBN: 978-0230754317

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



China Miéville is a versatile writer who can demonstrate the true subtleties of science fiction. The Embassytown of the title is a far flung outpost of humanity and is an enclave within the city of the Ariekei, an alien species who speak Language simultaneously through two mouths. They do not recognise sounds as speech unless produced this way so Ambassadors are doppelers who have learnt to synchronise their speech. Other humans can understand the Ariekei but are not heard by them.

Avice was born in Embassytown but left to become an immerser – one of the people who can navigate the currents between worlds. She returns to Embassytown after a long absence with her fourth spouse, Scile, a linguist who wants to study Language. The problems start when Bremen, the administration centre of the colony, sends an Ambassador who is not home grown. These pair are very different people. The first time they speak to the Ariekei their combined voice has a strange effect. The Ariekei become addicted and the addiction spreads in such a way that

the civilisation of the Host species begins to break down, endangering the existence of Embassytown.

This is a compelling tale for the intelligent reader. Much of the set-up is not explained and has to be gleaned by inference – terms and devices that Avice is familiar with are not explained, she assumes the reader knows, in the way that a contemporary writer does not explain television. The themes beneath the plot concern the nature of language and the different ways of thinking rather than the interpretation of words and the ways misunderstandings can easily occur. It is the kind of book that can stimulate debate.

My only quibble is that Avice is not totally convincing as a female character. *PM*

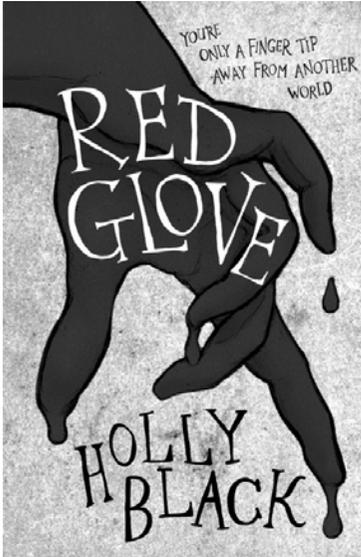
***RED GLOVE* by Holly Black**

(The Curse Workers Book 2)

Gollancz / 262pgs / £18.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0575096752 /

£12.99 trade paperback ISBN: 978-0575096769

Reviewed by Theresa Derwin



Cassel Sharpe is no ordinary senior. Where most students spend their summer vacation on the beach, Cassel finds himself spending his summer with his ex-convict Mom running cons in Atlantic City. Cassel's entire life he has been fighting his destiny as a Curse Worker. With just a slight touch of his hand, Cassel can transform anyone – into anything.

After his brother Philip is murdered by a mysterious lady wearing a red glove, Cassel is blackmailed into looking for the murderer by the FBI. They also offer him a job working in their Worker Unit. The only problem being he is also offered a rather lucrative job as an assassin working for Mobster Zacharov, his girlfriends' dad.

Cassel's world is an interesting world and an enjoyable place to visit. Curse Workers, regardless of persuasion or occupation, are treated as criminals, outcasts and thieves. Everyone has to

wear gloves to avoid their bare hands accidentally cursing someone and Cassel's friend Daneca runs the local Worker support group HEX. As part of the story we see many instances of Worker discrimination and bullying, which adds extra dimension to the novel. However, running somewhat short at 262 pages for your money, there is a missed opportunity here for Black to have covered more of the discriminatory elements.

Apart from the short length, this is a surprisingly satisfying novel, and it is immensely refreshing to find the lead character is a criminal who takes part in morally questionable actions, whilst still being very likeable. Philip's funeral and wake during which we encounter the Worker criminal underworld is particularly entertaining. Definitely worth a look as a quick pleasant read. *TD*

RECOMMENDED SF BOOKS – Rog Peyton

...And here's the next ten – the fifth, to bring us half way. Please note that these 10 books are NOT my favourite ten, or whatever – I've just picked books from the 100 at random. Another 10 next month. Please remember that I may be able to supply most of these titles – just email me and I can bring orders to the Group meetings.

Brian Aldiss - THE DARK LIGHT YEARS (1964). Brian Aldiss's satirical depiction of the first encounter and subsequent violent conflict between mankind and a gentle, intelligent race which it cannot understand. This still rates as my favourite Aldiss novel. (Faber 978-0571247233 - £12.00)

Isaac Asimov – THE END OF ETERNITY (1955) Andrew Harlan is a Technician and Eternal. His job is to range through past and present centuries monitoring and even altering Time's myriad cause-and-effect relationships. Then Harlan meets Noys and falls victim to a phenomenon older than Time itself - love. (Voyager 978-0586024409 - £6.99)

Arthur C Clarke - CHILDHOOD'S END (1953; revised 1991) When the aliens known as the Overlords arrive on Earth in their gigantic ships, it is not the invasion that is expected. Hidden from humans they eradicate crime and poverty and gradually lead humanity to a new level. (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-0575082359 - £8.99 hardcover)

Joe Haldeman - THE FOREVER WAR (1974; expanded 19??) Private William Mandella is a reluctant hero in an interstellar war against an unknowable and unconquerable alien enemy. But his greatest test will be when he returns home. Relativity means that for every few months' tour of duty centuries have passed on Earth, isolating the combatants ever more from the world for whose future they are fighting. Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards. (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-0575094147 - £7.99)

Robert Silverberg - A TIME OF CHANGES (1971) On the planet Borthan, colonised centuries before by puritans, it is blasphemous to use the words 'I' or 'me' or to indicate that anyone is an individual. But obviously things must change... (Orb import 978-0765322319 - \$14.00)

Jack Vance – EMPHYRIO (1969) Far in the future, the craftsmen of the distant planet Halma create goods which are the wonder of the galaxy. But in their society even the most basic use of automation is punishable by death. When Amiante, a wood-carver, is executed for processing old documents with a camera, his son Ghyl rebels, and decides to bring down the system. (Gollancz SF Masterworks 978-1857988857 - £7.99)

And the out of print books...

Octavia Butler – XENOGENESIS. A trilogy – DAWN (1987), ADULTHOOD RITES (1988) and IMAGO (1989). SF at its very highest standard. Possibly the greatest story of interbreeding between humans and aliens in the whole genre. Why isn't this in the SF Masterworks series? Or even in print?

Thomas M Disch - CAMP CONCENTRATION (1968) Three months into his 5-year sentence for being a conscientious objector, Louis Sacchetti is mysteriously taken from prison and brought to Camp Archimedes. This is the so-called 'camp concentration' where inmates are given a drug that will raise their intelligence to astounding levels, though it will also kill them in a matter of months.

Christopher Evans - THE INSIDER (1981). I've praised this book many times at several Novacons touting it as the most important SF book by a British writer that deserves to be reprinted. It is just simply a superb novel of a man who overnight changes his personality completely. But what or who has caused this drastic change?

Leigh Kennedy - THE JOURNAL OF NICHOLAS THE AMERICAN (1986)

Nicholas Dal, the writer of the journal of the title is not actually telepathic, but rather a telempath. This power gives him the unwanted ability to feel what those around him are feeling and makes his life incredibly difficult as he struggles to form and maintain relationships. His power makes him too sensitive to the inner feelings of those around him.

RGP

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the contact addresses.

Any information about forthcoming SF / Fantasy / Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com

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 to be announced

The British Library - "Out of this World: Science Fiction But Not As You Know It" will include works by Mary Shelley, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Francis Godwin, Cory Doctorow and China Miéville, among others as it traces the evolution of the genre. The exhibition runs from until 25 Sept and appearances by Iain M Banks, Brian Aldiss and Michael Moorcock are promised. There's a nice display of images on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-12860638> but full details can be found at <http://www.viewlondon.co.uk/whatson/out-of-this-world-science-fiction-but-not-as-you-article-612190-16498.html>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

Aug 12th - SUMMER SOCIAL at the Black Eagle, Handsworth.
BOOK NOW!

Sep 9th – Brum Group members **STAN NICHOLLS** (author of the *Orc* fantasy series) and **PETER WESTON** (author of *WITH STARS IN MY EYES*) will discuss the history of SF fandom in London and Birmingham.

Oct 14th – SF author **DAVID WINGROVE** author of the *Chung Kuo* sequence.

Nov 4th – tba

Dec 2nd – **The Christmas Social**

Jan 13th 2012 – **Annual General Meeting and Auction**



NOVACON 41 will be held over the weekend of November 11th to the 13th at The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham. NG5 2BT. The Guest of Honour will be SF author JOHN MEANEY. Further details can be found on the website <http://novacon.org.uk/>

BRUM GROUP NEWS #478 (July 2011) copyright 2011 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com). 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.

Thank you to Pat Brown for all photographs of both 40th Anniversary events

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 Membership Secretary, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG