

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MARCH 2012

ISSUE 486

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

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WEBSITE:

[www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/](http://www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/)

EMAIL:

[bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk)

**Friday 9<sup>th</sup> March**

**CHRISTOPHER**

**PRIEST**



Chris Priest was the first author I ever met – way back in 1964 when we both were attending our first Eastercon in Peterborough. We'd been corresponding for a few months prior to the convention. He wasn't an author at the time but an aspiring wannabe who was already making a name for himself for his quality writing in fanzines. It was only one year later that he sold his first short story.

Quality – that's what Chris is all about. Those of you who have read his work will know what I'm talking about – if you haven't read anything by him (why not?) there's a

**April 13th** - local historian and Tolkien expert **Bob Blackham** returns to the Group with a brand new talk about Birmingham and it's relationship to works of fantasy.

bibliography of his work at the end of this intro. Just look at those Awards and Nominations. And I haven't included the Awards for short fiction!

Chris has probably spoken to the Group more times than any other author in our 40 year plus history so long-time members will need no persuading to be at this meeting as Chris always delivers a first-rate talk.

This time around, Chris will be talking about, among other things, his latest novel, *THE ISLANDERS* (Gollancz 2011), set in his world of the Dream Archipelago.

And for the record, here's a list of his published fiction:-

#### Novels

**INDOCTRINAIRE** (1970)

**FUGUE FOR A DARKENING ISLAND** (1972) – Winner of John W Campbell Memorial Award.

**INVERTED WORLD** (1974) – Winner of BSFA Award and Hugo Award nominee.

**THE SPACE MACHINE** (1976) – Winner of Ditmar Award.

**A DREAM OF WESSEX** (1977)

**THE AFFIRMATION** (1981) – Winner of Ditmar Award.

**THE GLAMOUR** (1984) – Winner of Kurd Lasswitz Award.

**THE QUIET WOMAN** (1990)

**THE PRESTIGE** (1995) – Winner of World Fantasy Award and James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction. Nominee for Arthur C Clarke Award and the BSFA Award.

**THE EXTREMES** (1998) - Winner of the BSFA Award and nominee for Arthur C Clarke Award.

**THE SEPARATION** (2002) – Winner of the Arthur C Clarke Award and the BSFA Award. Nominee for the Sidewise Award for Alternate History.

**THE ISLANDERS** (2011)

#### Short story collections

**REAL-TIME WORLD** (1974)

**AN INFINITE SUMMER** (1979)

**THE DREAM ARCHIPELAGO** (1999)

**ERSATZ WINES** (2008)

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 our January AGM is free and the August and December socials are ticket only events. All other meetings the entrance fee is £3.00 for members and £4 for non-members.*

## **2012 NEBULA AWARD NOMINATIONS FOR NOVELS**

Novels nominated for this year's Nebula Award are:-

AMONG OTHERS by Jo Walton (Tor US)

EMBASSYTOWN by China Miéville (Macmillan UK; Del Rey US; Subterranean Press US)

FIREBIRD by Jack McDevitt (Ace US)

GOD'S WAR by Kameron Hurley (Night Shade US)

MECHANIQUE: A TALE OF THE CIRCUS TRESAULTI by Genevieve Valentine (Prime US)

THE KINGDOM OF GODS by N.K. Jemisin (Orbit US; Orbit UK)

## 2012 BSFA AWARD NOMINATIONS FOR NOVELS

And for the BSFA Award...

CYBER CIRCUS by Kim Lakin-Smith (Newcon Press)

EMBASSYTOWN by China Mieville (Macmillan)

THE ISLANDERS by Christopher Priest (Gollancz)

BY LIGHT ALONE by Adam Roberts (Gollancz)

OSAMA by Lavie Tidhar (PS Publishing)

### NEWS IN BRIEF . . .



.... **Christopher Samuel Youd**, 89, better known by his pseudonym **John Christopher**, died February 3, 2012. As Christopher he wrote the classic SF catastrophe novel *THE DEATH OF GRASS* (1956; in the US as *NO BLADE OF GRASS*, 1957), and the YA trilogy *Tripods*, which began in 1967. His first novel *THE WINTER SWAN* (1949), as **Christopher Youd**, was fantasy, and he produced a number of non-SF works in the following years under various names. *THE TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY* (1954) collected some of his SF stories, and his first true SF novel was *THE YEAR OF THE COMET* (1955; in the US as *PLANET IN PERIL*, 1959), all as **John Christopher**. Other adult SF work includes *THE LONG WINTER* (1962; *AS THE WORLD IN WINTER*), *SWEENEY'S ISLAND* (1964; as *CLOUD AND SILVER* in the

UK), *THE POSSESSORS* (1965), *A WRINKLE IN THE SKIN* (1965; as *THE RAGGED EDGE* in the US, 1966), *THE LITTLE PEOPLE* (1966), *PENDULUM* (1968) and *BAD DREAM* (2003). He turned to children's SF and fantasy with *THE WHITE MOUNTAINS* (1967), beginning the *Tripods* series, which also includes *THE CITY OF GOLD AND LEAD* (1967), *THE POOL OF FIRE* (1968), and prequel *WHEN THE TRIPODS CAME* (1988). He also wrote *The Prince in Waiting* series, the *Fireball* series, and numerous standalones for children .... SF writer **Ardath Mayhar**, 81, has reportedly died in Nacogdoches TX.

Mayhar wrote poetry in the 1940s and published pseudonymous westerns and mainstream books before turning to SF and fantasy with *THE CAT WITH THE SAPPHIRE EYES* (1973). Her first SF novel, *HOW THE GODS WOVE IN KYRANNON* (1979) was one of more than 60 books and scores of short stories she produced in her long career. Other books of note were *KHI TO FREEDOM* and *GOLDEN DREAM: FUZZY ODYSSEY* a sequel to **H Beam Piper's** *Little Fuzzy* series. In 2008 she received a SFWA Author Emeritus Award ....



Horror author **Clive Barker** found himself in the hospital and a coma in late January after visiting the dentist. The dental visit released bacteria into Barker's system leading to toxic shock and several days in intensive care .... This year's recipients of the Skylark award was announced - **Sharon Lee** and **Steve Miller**. The Skylark Award is presented for significant contributions through work in the field of science fiction and by exemplifying the personal qualities which made the late "**Doc**" **Smith** well-loved by those who knew him .... Little, Brown and Company are delighted to announce that they will publish **J.K. Rowling's** first novel for adults worldwide in the English language, in print, audio and eBooks. No title or date yet .... RGP

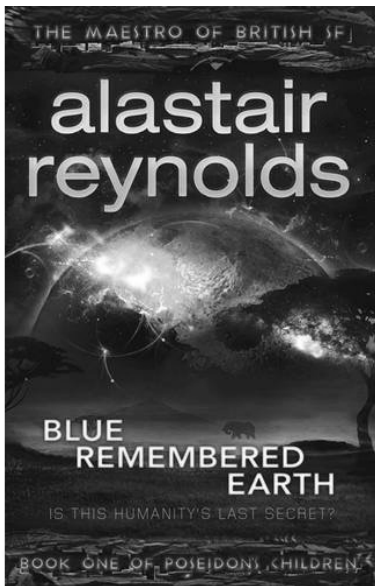
## 📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

(**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.**

### ***BLUE REMEMEMBERED EARTH by Alastair Reynolds***

**Gollancz / 505pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-057508827**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**



Alastair Reynolds has chosen to set his latest book – part one of *Poseidon's Children* - on Earth in 2150. There has been climate change, but rather than a dystopian future in the aftermath of disaster, he shows us a world in which the consequences of calamity have been overcome and a new world order established. In this world China and India are leading the exploration of the Solar System, while Africa is also a dominant technological and economic power. (It is not entirely clear whether a union of the many disparate African states has been achieved.)

From eastern Africa the Akinya family operates a vast business empire with interests all over the System and the death of its matriarchal leader, Eunice, who was almost single-handedly responsible for establishing its success, sets in motion a train of events which is to have incalculable consequences. She has left in place a series of clues which amount to nothing less than a Treasure Hunt, leading members of her extended family of descendants from one planet to another until they find in the Kuiper Belt the fruits of her advanced research. She had deliberately withheld this while she remained alive, but perhaps now it is time for it to be made public.

In terms of advanced science and technology this is everything we have come to expect from Reynolds. It is also beautifully paced: it seems slow at first but the tension

gradually increases as the various threads of the complex narrative come together in a dramatic conclusion. The characters are wholly believable, as are the descriptions of life in this advanced world. Most importantly, perhaps, the sheer quality of his writing shines through from every page, with not a word out of place or a sentence badly constructed.

The contract between Reynolds and publishers Gollancz for his next ten books has been widely publicised. On the evidence of this one he is worth every penny of what they are paying him and the future volumes in this series will be eagerly anticipated. This one works perfectly well on a stand-alone basis, but the series title provides a tantalising hint of what may be to come. *Mj*

### ***SHADOW'S SON* by Jon Sprunk**

**Gollancz / 279pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-0575096028**

**Reviewed by Dave Corby**



SHADOW'S SON is Jon Sprunk's first novel, following half a dozen published short stories. It is a low-fantasy tale (no elves with healing magic here) in an urban setting that feels slightly pre-renaissance, with sophisticated city life, an all-powerful church rule, but no gunpowder or more modern technology. The story itself concerns Caim, the main protagonist, an assassin by trade, and Josie, the young daughter of a nobleman, around whom the plot develops.

It is quite a short book (in a modern context); 279 pages (and a reasonable font size) make for more of a pleasant diversion than a weighty volume, and I think this is well judged. Sprunk does not over-complicate the story with a cast of thousands and keeps it mostly to the six or seven main characters. Nor does Sprunk bludgeon the reader with infinite detail derived from the thoroughly fleshed out fantasy world he has created. In a time when most fantasy authors seem to think everything must come in, at

least, three volumes and each volume should not be less than five hundred pages, this brevity seems quite refreshing. However, this reviewer notes that he has yet to dive into Sprunk's sequel, SHADOW'S LURE (Gollancz, published last July), so there is plenty of time for things to change – review pending.

Given Caim's occupation, the book occasionally waxes violent or bloodthirsty, but is by no means the most gore-filled fantasy I have read. The action, which is reasonably frequent, is written with a pleasing pace and the fights are clearly described, giving an almost cinematic feel. The characters are colourful and clearly characterised, descriptions reasonably vivid, and overall I found the book easy to read. Sprunk unfortunately falls into the modern habit of ending chapters on a compelling cliff-hanger; as a reader I like to break at chapter ends, so when this happens it irritates me! I'm sure this is a device to compel the reader to read on, and maybe most folk don't mind this.

However, this book doesn't do much that the average fantasy reader won't have encountered before. The lack of high-fantastic elements makes the book feel slightly pedestrian; substituting Sprunk's setting for any renaissance European country would give a straightforward historical novel. The text does hint at supernatural elements, quite

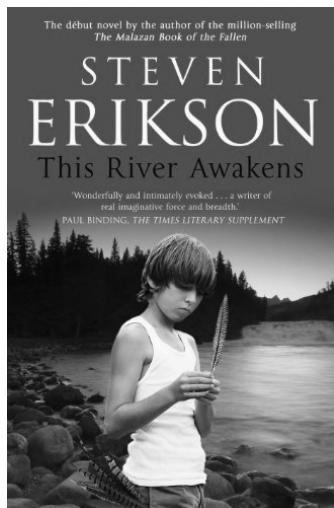
literally in the shadows, which come more to the fore at the climax, but for the most part this story is very down to earth. From the book's resolution, this reviewer suspects that the supernatural will be a much stronger theme in the sequel. I suspect this will be beneficial to the story.

I feel like I should be criticising this book more than I want to but I did find it fun to read. This reviewer is just not convinced that Sprunk does anything new or innovative with the genre. Nonetheless, it does feel like quite a promising opening chapter, so I shall be optimistic and hope that increased fantastic elements combined with Sprunk's writing style bodes well for the future of this series... *DC*

### ***THIS RIVER AWAKENS* by Steven Erikson**

**Bantam / 426pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0593067772**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**



This is Steven Erikson's first novel, originally published in 1998 under the name of Steve Lundin. It is not science fiction or fantasy and the only horror is in the hand fate deals to the characters. What it is, is a suburb literary novel. The setting is Canada where twelve-year-old Owen Brand and his family have just moved into the poor white community on the banks of a river. Theirs is a tale of a downward spiral into poverty. On arrival he falls in with three boys of his own age. Though he doesn't quite fit in with them – Owen reads voraciously and far above his age – they are camouflage. The event that holds them together, but at the same time separating them, is the discovery of a body washed down from the city with the spring thaw. It colours the way they regard each other.

The community holds a number of other lost or damaged members. Hodgson Fisk breeds mink. He has never fully got over his experiences during the war or come to terms with the loss of his beloved wife.

He rants at the boys as they cross his land to reach the river. Jennifer Louper is a disturbed thirteen-year-old. She smokes, takes drugs and generally runs wild. Her father is a violent drunk. She changes when she forms a friendship with Owen and is made welcome in their home by his mother. Against them is their teacher. Joanne Rhide comes with new ideas intending to use modern methods to educate her charges. She doesn't understand the circumstances her pupils live in and thinks Jennifer and Owen are deliberately trying to thwart her.

Walter Gribbs is the old caretaker at the Yacht Club and sees in Owen the intelligence and loyalty others miss.

Over the course of a year, allegiances and friendships change and develop. Mostly this is a story about children old before their time but the behaviour of the adults greatly affects the outcome. This is an insightful if harrowing book. Take a break from genre fiction and give it a go. *PM*

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### ***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] binternet [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.

**OLYMPUS 2012 - The 2012 Eastercon**, 6th - 9th April at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, UK. Guests of Honour: Paul Cornell, George R.R. Martin & Tricia Sullivan. Fan Guests of Honour: Margaret Austin, Martin Easterbrook. Registration is £65. Website is [www.olympus2012.org](http://www.olympus2012.org)

**ALT.FICTION WEEKEND FESTIVAL 2012** marks its sixth year with a fantastic weekend for readers and writers of science fiction, fantasy and horror. 14th & 15th April 2012 at the Phoenix Digital Arts Centre, Midland Street, Leicester, LE1 1TG. Guest of Honour will be Ken MacLeod. Website is <http://altfiction.co.uk/event-registration?ee=1>

**DISCOVER: A WEEKEND OF SF, FANTASY & HORROR** –18-20 May at Snibston Discovery Museum, Coalville, Leicestershire. Workshops, panels, talks, etc from many authors. Peter F Hamilton and Graham Masterton are the Guests of Honour. Attendance is £45 plus £2 booking fee. Website is <http://www.discoverfestival.co.uk/>

**TOLKIEN WEEKEND** at Sarehole Mill - May 19-20. Details at <http://middleearthweekend.org.uk/>

**THE EIGHNNNNNNNN DISCWORLD CONVENTION** - 24-27 August at the Metropole Hotel, Birmingham. Guest of Honour: Sir Terry Pratchett. Website: <http://www.dwcon.org/>

**NOVACON 42 - 9-11th November 2012. Guest of Honour is JAINE FENN. Full details on how to join is at [http://www.novacon.org.uk/join\\_novacon.php](http://www.novacon.org.uk/join_novacon.php).**

### ***FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG***

**Feb 10th – the Annual Quiz**

**Mar 9th – Christopher Priest**

**Apr 13th – Bob Blackham**

**May 11th – tba**

**Jun 8th – Graham Joyce**

**Jul 13th – tba**

**Aug 10th – Summer Social – meal at the Black Eagle**

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #486** (March 2012) copyright 2012 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](mailto: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.

**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