

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

APRIL 2012

ISSUE 487

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& **HARRY HARRISON**

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## Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April **ROBERT BLACKHAM**

Robert 'Bob' Blackham is a long standing fan of J R R Tolkien's works and has become a recognised expert on the life of Tolkien and the influences it had on Tolkien's works of fiction. An active member of the Tolkien Society, Bob has extensively studied not only Tolkien's own works, but also the large body of academic work

dedicated to the study of Tolkien. This supports Bob's own published works highlighting the known and likely influences of the places Tolkien lived on works such as **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**.

**THE ROOTS OF TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE-EARTH** (2006) draws together the materials Bob has researched concerning the impact of Birmingham on Tolkien, with

**May 11th - to be announced.**

particular focus on Kings Heath and Hall Green (Sarehole Mill) where Tolkien spent much of his early life. Sarehole Mill is one of the few inspirational influences on TLOTR that we can be sure of, as Tolkien himself revealed that Sandyman's Mill in Hobbiton is directly based on Sarehole.

As well as the book, Bob has a well acclaimed presentation (of the same title) presenting many fascinating images of Birmingham, both modern and historical, in which he highlights the possible influences on Tolkien very clearly and allows the viewer to draw their own conclusions.

As most of you know, I am definitely NOT a fan of Tolkien's works but Bob's previous talk to the Group fascinated me so much I ended up buying a copy of his book. That doesn't happen often! I, for one, am really looking forward to Bob's brand new talk.

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.*

## **A MESSAGE FROM AMERICA**

Dear Birmingham Science Fiction Group,

I've just started an online reading group called Dark Margins which I believe might be interesting to your group, and I'd like to invite you to join. The group is located on Copia, an e-reading community (<http://thecopia.com>). They're supporting this effort to create a place online where SF & Fantasy fans can talk about the books they love.

The Dark Margins reading group focuses on Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Speculative Fiction. Copia's platform allows readers to post book reviews, connect with new friends and, most importantly, share comments and annotations in the margins of the ebooks that they download.

In addition to great SF and Fantasy, Copia also has a full selection of bestsellers, academic books, millions of other downloadable books that let readers share the experience of reading great a book with someone who is far away, or simply read for pleasure. It is the most comprehensive ereading platform on the market.

To start things off, I've added some preliminary books to our library shelves, such as PATTERN RECOGNITION, URTH OF THE NEW SUN and ANATHEM, but I hope you and your members will make suggestions as to what books I should add and what they'd like to discuss.

The Dark Margins reading group can be found online at <http://thecopia.com> as well as on Pinterest (<http://pinterest.com/thecopiadmj>) and Twitter at [@thecopia\\_dmj](https://twitter.com/thecopia_dmj), where we post news, writing contest info and Science Fiction and Fantasy-related finds. If you know of any interesting events coming up that you'd like to promote, feel free to share them with me and I can tweet or retweet them. If you have other questions about our reading group or Copia, please feel welcome to contact me at [jason.bunyan@gmail.com](mailto:jason.bunyan@gmail.com). Best, Jason W. Bunyan, New York

## **2012 ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD NOMINEES**

Six novels have been listed as finalists for the 2012 Arthur C. Clarke Award. They were selected by a panel of judges from works submitted by twenty-five different publishing houses and imprints. The nominees are:

HULL ZERO THREE by Greg Bear (Gollancz)

THE END SPECIALIST by Drew Magary (Harper Voyager)

EMBASSYTOWN by China Miéville (Macmillan)

THE TESTAMENT OF JESSIE LAMB by Jane Rogers (Sandstone Press)

RULE 34 by Charles Stross (Orbit)

THE WATERS RISING by Sheri S. Tepper (Gollancz)

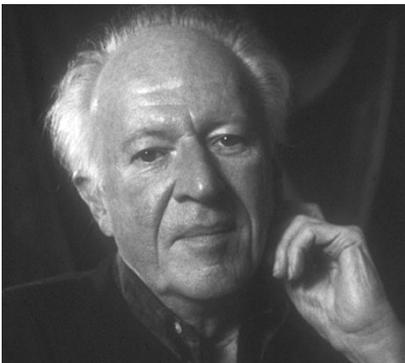
## **THE 2012 SOLSTICE AWARDS**

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America are pleased to announce Octavia Butler and John Clute as the recipients of the Solstice Awards for 2012. The Solstice Awards are granted to up to three persons, living or dead, who have consistently had a positive, transformative influence on the genre of science fiction and fantasy.

**Octavia Butler** (1947-2006) was a giant in the field of science fiction and fantasy; her work was awarded Nebula and Hugo awards, and she was the first science fiction writer to be granted the MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant. Butler's fiction delved into sociological, political and religious issues, explored gender, sexuality and cultural identity. She looked for the problems in the world, and tried to find answers and solutions. Butler's works include the Nebula Award winning novel *PARABLE OF THE TALENTS* plus *FLEDGLING*, *KINDRED*, the *Patternist* series, the *Lilith's Brood* series (aka the *Xenogenesis* trilogy) and numerous short stories.

Butler passed away in 2006. SFWA is proud to posthumously award her the Solstice Award for her influence in science fiction and fantasy.

**John Clute** (born 1940) is a Canadian-born author and critic. Clute's most notable contribution to the field consists of his work on a trio of reference works – the *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION*. The *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FANTASY* and the *ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION*, all of which won Hugo Awards in the category of Best Related Work. Clute is also the author of several collections of criticism and critical essays on the genre, as well as the 2001 space opera, *APPLESEED*, which was listed by the New York Times as a Notable Book for the year.



## **NEWS IN BRIEF . . .**

.... Artist **Ralph McQuarrie** (b.1929) died on March 3. McQuarrie is best known for providing the original concept art for the *Star Wars* films and also worked on the original *Battlestar Galactica*, *E.T.* *THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL* and *COCOON*, for which he won an Oscar. He got his start illustrating air and space craft designs for Boeing in the 1950s and was commissioned by **George Lucas** to create paintings which could be used to help sell the studio on the idea for *STAR WARS* in 1975 .... **Jean Giraud**,

one of France's leading comics artists, has died in Paris at the age of 73 after a long illness. He drew for more than 50 years, under various names, but was most widely known as **Moebius**. He was popular in the US and Japan, working with legend **Stan Lee** and manga artists, as well as in his homeland. He also worked on design concepts and storyboards for a number of top science fiction films, including ALIEN, TRON, THE ABYSS and THE FIFTH ELEMENT .... Linguist, author, and game-designer **Professor Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman (M.A.R.) Barker** (b.1926 as Philip Barker) died on March 16. Barker created the role playing game EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE, which was published by TSR in 1975. His first two novels, MAN OF GOLD (1984) and FLAMESONG (1985) were published by DAW Books in the US and introduced his world of Tekumel. Additional games and novels based on his world of Tekumel followed, including the games SWORDS AND GLORY and TÉKUMEL: EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE. As with Tolkien, Barker was a linguist who used his knowledge of languages to sculpt a complex world. He has been called the 'forgotten Tolkien' .... The British Fantasy Society has announced that the **2012 British Fantasy Awards** will be selected by a panel of five judges in a break with tradition. The panel will be presented with a shortlist of four nominees determined by BFS members and may add an additional work to the ballot. The judges include **James Barclay, Hal Duncan, Maura McHugh, Esther Sherman** and **Damien G. Walter** .... **ENDER'S GAME** complaint - A teacher at Schofield Middle School in Aiken County, South Carolina has been placed on administrative leave after a 14-year old student and his parents complained that the teacher read pornographic material to them. According to the student's complaint, the teacher read from three works which the student found inappropriate, including **Orson Scott Card's** ENDER'S GAME. After learning that the school was going to handle the matter internally, the family filed a complaint with the police department, when the school failed to notify under a South Carolina law requiring police notification whenever there is a possibility of criminal activity .... The winner of the **James Tiptree, Jr. Award**, given annually for gender-bending speculative fiction, has been announced. The winner is REDWOOD AND WILDFIRE by **Andrea Hairston** .... **Christopher Priest** has attacked the nominees for this year's Arthur C Clarke Award on his website. The rant is far too long to reproduce here but you can read it at <http://www.christopher-priest.co.uk/journal/1077/hull-0-scunthorpe-3/> .... Also too long is the story of **Norman Spinrad's** 'lost' *Star Trek* script. See at [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/arts/television/cbs-blocks-use-of-unused-star-trek-script-by-spinrad.html?\\_r=2&src=tp](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/arts/television/cbs-blocks-use-of-unused-star-trek-script-by-spinrad.html?_r=2&src=tp) ....

RGP



## BOOK REVIEWS



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

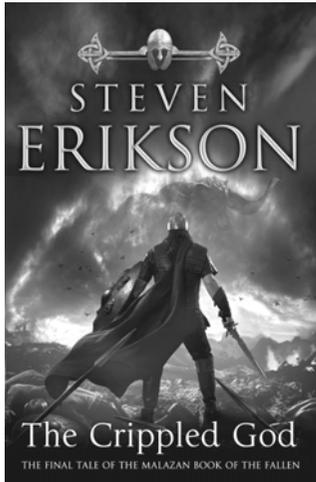
***THE CRIPPLED GOD* by Steven Erikson**

**Bantam / 1200pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-0553813180**

**Reviewed by Jim Pearce**

This is the tenth and final *Tale of The Malazan Book of The Fallen* following on from THE DUST OF DREAMS. It tells the story of a battle-weary, exhausted and decimated

army of Mazanian soldiers commanded by the Adjunct Tavore Paran whose apparent aim is to ‘rescue’ and defend the ‘Crippled God’. Ranged against the Malzanians and their allies are the Forkul Assail, who desire to cleanse the world of all humans and Gods, and their subject armies. The Malzanians and their supporters are definitely the underdogs in this dark and gritty epic saga.



By any stroke of the imagination this is an extremely long and complex novel consisting of a myriad of entangled strands following a huge company of characters, human, and inhuman, dead and alive as well as a smattering of gods. To help, or not depending on your point of view, Steven Erikson provides an eight page ‘Dramatis Personae’ list of characters appearing in both *THE CRIPPLED GOD* and *THE DUST OF DREAMS*. Personally I’m not sure if it was a help or not as I kept finding myself going to this list and spending considerable time trying, not always with success, to identify which group a character belongs to. I must admit that I found the first 30 or so pages of *THE CRIPPLED GOD* extremely confusing and dispiriting and I felt like giving up. However I’m glad that I persevered.

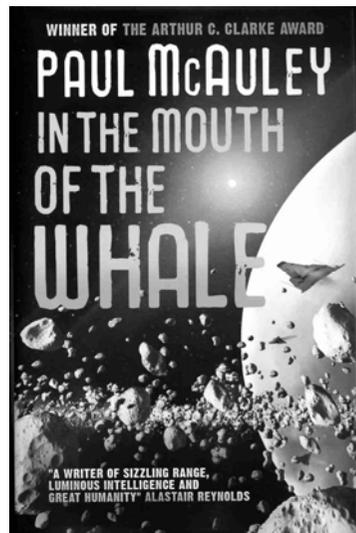
This is not an easy book to read, but Steven Erikson’s prose is wickedly fascinating with an uncanny beauty, like quicksand it sucks you in and also like a scab on a wound it keeps you picking at it like an itch that you must satisfy. This vast and complex tale is not one to be read in one sitting, you need breaks to get your breath back, but it keeps drawing you back. One further comment, although *THE CRIPPLED GOD* is a great read by itself I feel that it may have been easier to comprehend if I had at least read *THE DUST OF DREAMS* or the other nine tales in order before attempting this book. *JTP*

### ***IN THE MOUTH OF THE WHALE* by Paul McAuley**

**Gollancz / 376pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0575100732 / £14.99 trade paperback / ISBN: 978-0575100749**  
**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**

Cutting edge science fiction is such that it leaves the reader in awe of the imagination of the author. Paul McAuley is someone who has always been able to do this.

His last two novels, *THE QUIET WAR* and *GARDENS OF THE SUN*, took humanity out into the far reaches of the solar system. Now they have taken the leap across interstellar space and centuries of time. Seed ships arriving at Formalhaut were sent out by various factions, leapfrogging each other and continuing the rivalries. The Quicks arrived first. They tweaked their own genomes and



adapted, colonising worldlets around the star and creating habitats. When the Trues arrived they prided themselves on being unadapted 'True' humans. They requisitioned the Quick's worlds and enslaved the race. Ori is a Quick who works on a space station orbiting the gas giant known as Cthuga. She remotely controls a bot moving around on the outside of the structure, tending the cable that reaches down into the dense atmosphere. Isak is a True and a disgraced member of the clan that maintains the Library. Mostly this is an electronic storage facility, added to when fragments are found. Often these fragments (or hells) contain demons (equivalent to corrupting viruses) and his job is to destroy the demons. To complicate matters, the True are at war with the Ghosts, another faction that set out from the solar system who want possession of Cthuga where they believe is a world mind which will help them change history in their favour.

Creeping towards Formalhaut is a small, damaged ship. Within it is a passenger, the Child - a clone of Sri Hong-Owen one of the gene-wizards whose work produced the means to colonise the environs of the star. She is being brought up in a viron which is attempting to recreate her early life, snippets of which will ring bells with readers of the earlier two books. It is her ship's imminent arrival which triggers the events in which Ori and Isak find themselves caught.

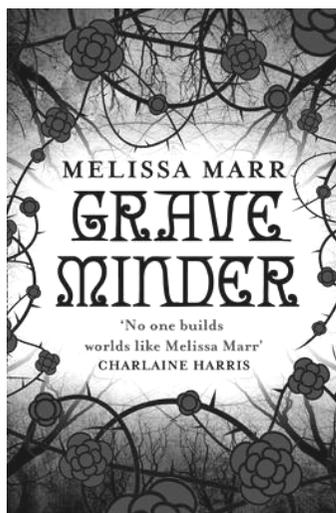
The technical descriptions may faze some readers but this is a book worth persevering with if only to see the skill and economy with which McAuley weaves his plot strands.

PM

### ***GRAVE MINDER* by Melissa Marr**

**HarperCollins / 324pgs / £6.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-0007349234**

**Reviewed by Theresa Derwin**



This is Melissa Marr's first adult novel following a string of teen genre stuff. With a seal of approval from Charlaine Harris of *True Blood* fame, you know what you're getting here.

When Rebekkah Barrow receives a call telling her that her Gran Maylene has been murdered, she returns to the small town of Claysville; a town that has always drawn her for inexplicable reasons. Unfortunately for her, she is also drawn to Byron, the local Undertaker with whom she has had on/off dalliances in the past. Things are complicated with Byron as he was originally the beau of Ella, her sister, who committed suicide some years ago. So going home following Maylene's death brings with it a whole host of problems, particularly as it turns out that for centuries the Barrow women have been 'Grave Minders' and Rebekkah has now inherited the job.

A pact was made in the 16th century between the town council at Claysville and a certain figure known as Death. Without the help of the Grave Minder working with the local Undertaker, the dead have a habit of rising in the town, and from now only, only Rebekkah can stop them. The job comes with its perks of course. Apart from never having to pay bills, Rebekkah can take trips to the land of the

dead for a little sight seeing, and the world which Marr has created is definitely worth exploring. The local bar in the land of the dead is particularly entertaining.

here are no real surprises here if I am honest, and while the novel itself is enjoyable, it is rather a breezy affair with the culprit of the piece being very obvious. However, the characters are believable, there is a fair amount of humour and all together it is a nice adult debut. I think Marr has more to offer and I would like her to examine her land of the dead in more detail. All in all, this novel is a decent enough diversion. *TD*

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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] 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.

**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***

**May 11th – tba**

**Jun 8th – bestselling Dark Fantasy author GRAHAM JOYCE**

**Jul 13th – SF editor and now publisher JO FLETCHER**

**Aug 10th – SUMMER SOCIAL – meal at the Black Eagle**

**Sep – tba**

**Oct – tba**

**Nov – SF author ERIC BROWN**

**Dec - CHRISTMAS SOCIAL – Skittles and buffet**

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #487** (April 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.peyton@btinternet.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