

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

OCTOBER 2012

ISSUE 493

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Friday 12th
October
**ADAM
NEVILL**

Adam L G Nevill was born in Birmingham, England, in 1969 and grew up in England and New Zealand. His writing concentrates on supernatural horror often likened to M R James. He is a graduate of the University of St Andrews Creative Writing Masters programme. He

NOVEMBER 2ND - welcome to prolific Science Fiction writer (HELIX, ENGINEMAN etc) and SF reviewer for *The Guardian*, ERIC BROWN.

completed his first novel, *BANQUET FOR THE DAMNED* in 2000 but this was not bought until 2003. He finally sold it to a small press publisher, PS Publishing, who read and accepted it within a week. He has subsequently produced another three successful novels (*APARTMENT 16*, *THE RITUAL* and his latest novel, published by Pan Macmillan in May 2012, *LAST DAYS*). He has also successfully published some short stories including this year “The Age of Entitlement” in *DARK CURRENTS* (edited by Ian Whates, Newcon Press) and “Pig Thing” in *EXOTIC GOTHIC 4* (edited by Danel Olson, PS Publishing). Further details can be found on his website at www.adamlgneville.com CG

NB The talk by Adam Nevill will start at the later time of 8:30pm. Adam Nevill will be appearing on the Birmingham Book Festival panel “*Take Three with Stuart Evers, Chris Morgan Jones & Adam Nevill*” at 7pm and will then walk across to the Brum Group meeting. The venue for the Book Festival talk is the Birmingham Library Theatre, Central Library, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, B3 3HQ. The talk starts at 7pm. Admission is free but tickets should be pre-booked. For details and booking see Website: <http://www.birminghambookfestival.org/take-three-with-stuart-evers-chris-morgan-jones-adam-nevill-3766/>

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 normally 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.

HUGO AWARD WINNERS

The 2012 Hugo Award winners were announced at Chicon 7, the 70th World Science Fiction Convention. The ceremony took place on September 2, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Chicago. The ceremony was hosted by Chicon 7 Toastmaster John Scalzi. The 2012 Hugo trophy base was designed by artist Deb Kosiba, who had also previously designed the bases for the 2005 and 2006 Worldcons.

Best Novel: *AMONG OTHERS* by Jo Walton (Tor)

Best Novella: “The Man Who Bridged the Mist” by Kij Johnson (*Asimov’s*, September/October 2011)

Best Novelette: “Six Months, Three Days” by Charlie Jane Anders (Tor.com)

Best Short Story: “The Paper Menagerie” by Ken Liu (The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, March/April 2011)

Best Related Work: THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION, THIRD EDITION edited by John Clute, David Langford, Peter Nicholls, and Graham Sleight (Gollancz)

Best Graphic Story: DIGGER by Ursula Vernon (Sofawolf Press)

Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: GAME OF THRONES (SEASON 1) (HBO)

Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: "The Doctor's Wife" (DOCTOR WHO) (BBC Wales)

Best Editor, Short Form: Sheila Williams

Best Editor, Long Form: Betsy Wollheim

Best Professional Artist: John Picacio

Best Semi-Prozine: LOCUS edited by Liza Groen Trombi, Kirsten Gong-Wong, et al.

Best Fanzine: SF SIGNAL edited by John DeNardo

Best Fan Writer: Jim C. Hines

Best Fan Artist: Maurine Starkey

Best FanCast: SF SQUEecast by Lynne M. Thomas, Seanan McGuire, Paul Cornell, Elizabeth Bear, and Catherynne M. Valente

John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer: E. Lily Yu

Award for the best new professional science fiction or fantasy writer of 2010 or 2011, sponsored by Dell Magazines (not a Hugo Award).

RETURN OF ALCHEMY PRESS

Small press publisher, *The Alchemy Press* returned to publishing in 2011 after an eight year gap. It was created in the 1990s by Peter Coleborn, (an ex-member of Brum SF group) with the aid of a National Lottery Grant.

This September they have produced two new collections of short stories (officially launched at FantasyCon 2012).

The first, THE ALCHEMY PRESS BOOK OF ANCIENT WONDER is a collection of fourteen stories

on the theme of things from long ago, even if the story takes place in the far future or in outer space. Contributors include Adrian Tchaikovsky, William Mickle, Aliete de Bodard, Peter Crowther, Adrian Cole, Pauline E Dungle (otherwise known as **Pauline Morgan**; Lynn M Cochrane and Anne Nicholls (wife of Stan Nicholls).

The second, THE ALCHEMY PRESS BOOK OF PULP HEROES features seventeen stories by Mike Resnick, Peter Crowther, Peter Atkins, Anne Nicholls, Adrian Cole and others, exploring the heroes and villains



from the heyday of pulp fiction. As a fan of SF/Fantasy short stories I personally am glad to see a publisher who also appreciates and encourages short story collections. Further details including distributors can be found at <http://alchemyvpress.blogspot.co.uk/> CG

NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Author **Stephen A. Rynas** (b.1921) died on August 26. Rynas published science fiction under the pseudonym Stephen Arr. His first story appeared in *Vortex* with later stories appearing in *Galaxy* and *Other Worlds*. His career spanned two years, from 1953 through 1955, although two of his stories were reprinted as chapbooks in 2010 Actor **Michael Clarke Duncan** (b.1957) died on September 3. Duncan rose to prominence with his role in the film THE GREEN MILE. He went on to appear in numerous films and television shows, including ARMAGEDDON, CHUCK, GREEN LANTERN, THE LAST MIMZY, and as Kingpin in DAREDEVIL. His distinctive voice was used in numerous animated series, including *Spider-Man*, *Teen Titans*, and *Kim Possible* **Harper Voyager** announces a digital publishing opportunity for debut authors as it is opening to unagented, genre submissions for a two-week period in October (1st to 14th October). Further details at Website:<http://harpervoyagerbooks.com> The **London Worldcon 2014** bid was confirmed by vote at Chicon 7. The convention will take place from August 14-18, 2014 at the ExCeL London. Alice Lawson and Steve Cooper will serve as the convention's co-chairs. The Guests of Honor will be Iain M. Banks, John Clute, Malcolm Edwards, Chris Foss, Jeanne Gomoll, Robin Hobb, and Bryan Talbot The live stream of the **Hugo Award Ceremony** from Chicon 7 was interrupted when a "bot" used by service provider Ustream flagged the inclusion of properly-provided clips from DOCTOR WHO for copyright infringement. Ustream was unable to reverse the automated decision in time for the remainder of the ceremony. Chicon 7 is working to make the full ceremony available online **Stanley Schmidt** has announced his retirement as editor of *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*, Schmidt has served as editor since 1978. His thirty-four year tenure meets or exceeds the tenure of *Astounding/Analog* editor John W. Campbell, Jr.'s tenure. During Schmidt's time as editor, he discovered and nurtured many authors. Schmidt will be succeeded by Trevor Quachri SF/F publisher **Angry Robot**'s e-book initiative to boost paperback sales is a huge success. The idea is that every Angry Robot paper/print book sold through the *Mostly Books*' bookshop in Oxfordshire had the option of getting a free additional e-book. This initiative has tripled the sales of Angry Robot print titles from the shop. Now 20 other independent bookshops have indicated a willingness to sign up to the deal Gollancz is to release the entire science fiction and fantasy back catalogue of **Michael Moorcock**, plus much of his literary fiction. The two-year publishing project will launch in February 2013, with publication of Moorcock's last three *Elric* novels. The programme will go on to bring back all of the author's genre works. The books will be published as Gollancz print editions and as e-books from Gollancz's online SF&F digital library, SF Gateway **Jo Fletcher Books**, Quercus' sci-fi and fantasy imprint, has bought the rights to a trilogy of

Viking-themed novels from Icelandic writer **Snorri Kristjansson**. The first (and debut) novel **SWORDS OF GOOD MEN** is set for publication in summer next year Best selling author **Sarah Luddington** has today announced that she has just launched her own publishing company, Glastonbury Publishing, specialising in Fantasy and Science Fiction. The company plans to invite new authors to submit their novels to her for consideration. Her website at <http://www.glastonburypublishing.com> outlines her requirements for new authors Barnes and Noble will launch its **Nook e-readers and tablets** in the UK in October. This rival to the Kindle will have access to over 2.5 million digital titles NASA has announced proposals for a “**Gateway**” **spacecraft** to be based at Lagrange Point 2, 38,000 miles beyond the moon. The craft could be built using leftover parts from the International Space Station. It would provide a stable platform for future Moon and Mars missions. NASA has also announced that the **Mars Curiosity Rover** has encountered the first “on the ground” proof that water once existed on Mars. The size and shape of the rocks indicate that the water flow was “deep, powerful and stretched for up to 25 miles”. CG

NEW FILM RELEASES

Listings should not be necessarily taken as recommendations. View at your own peril! NB Release dates are subject to change.

RUBY SPARKS - Release date October 12th Romantic fantasy in which a writer’s dream girl comes to life after he writes about her. But will the real life girl live up to the fantasy?

FRANKENWEENIE - Release date October 17th Tim Burton animation in which a young boy brings his dead dog back from the dead

BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD - Release date October 19th October Award winning film with fantasy elements about a six year old girl living in a flooded Louisiana bayou and her visions of prehistoric beasts.

STITCHES - Release date October 26th. UK comedy starring Ross Noble as a clown who comes back from the dead to haunt the people responsible for his death.

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW - Release date October 31st. One Day Only at Vue Cinemas.

MY FRIEND HARRY – Rog Peyton

Harry has gone. How do I get my head around that? He’s always been around since my early days in fandom.

Harry was Guest of Honour at Brumcon 2 - the 1965 British Eastercon - and I was a novice committee member at only my second convention. I was editing *Vector*, the BSFA’s journal, at the time and had already corresponded with him and I’d read **DEATHWORLD** and **THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT** in import

editions. So when we met he was relatively easy to talk to. We got on well and spent a lot of time in the bar at that con.

We met up again a few months later at the 1965 Worldcon in London and I remember talking to him about his short story "The Streets of Ashkelon" which had been published here in *New Worlds* after being rejected by virtually every American magazine, and inevitably we talked about religion and atheism. I discovered we were both confirmed atheists. "The Streets of Ashkelon" remains one of my all-time favourite short stories.

After that, Harry was back to globetrotting - living at various times in Denmark, Italy, America, the UK and Ireland and I don't remember our next meeting. However, after opening my bookshop, *Andromeda*, in 1971, Harry did several signings after which we'd go for a meal, usually Indian.

At the Brighton Worldcon in 1979, I'd travelled down on the Wednesday, one day early in order to prepare selling at our first Worldcon and in the evening discovered a great Indian restaurant which I told several people about the following day. In the evening I bumped into Harry and he invited me to the bar for a drink as he was meeting a friend there. The friend turned out to be Alfred Bester and after several drinks Harry suggested that the three of us went out for a meal. I told them about the meal I'd had the previous evening and Harry said something along the lines, "If Rog recommends it, it must be good." When we arrived at the restaurant, it was packed - mainly with fans from the convention. We were fortunate to get a table after only a short wait and we duly ordered our food. The waiter then returned to inform us that they'd run out of rice as they hadn't expected to be busy over a weekend that was usually very quiet. We had to change our order to naan breads and after every future signing he did at *Andromeda* when I suggested going for an Indian, Harry would say, with that wicked gleam in his eyes, "Do they do rice at this one, Rog?".

Harry was one of the most generous people I've ever met. Several times he invited Arline and I to stay with him over in Ireland which we had to decline because of being unable to leave our dogs. At one time he offered to loan me a large amount of money to help expand *Andromeda* but again I had to decline his offer as I've always believed that you don't borrow from friends. At his 80th birthday party, I'd travelled down to Brighton and Harry found me a good hotel to stay in after the party. I was very surprised to find that he'd actually paid my hotel bill in advance and he refused to accept anything from me.

A great author, a great friend and someone who I will miss very, very much. *RGP*

HARRY HARRISON FAREWELL

VERNON BROWN

(The numbers in brackets refer to the accompanying photographs)

Pat and I had arranged a mid-August break in Scotland and were beginning to prepare for it when I opened my emails early on the 15th and found a message from Rog to say that Harry Harrison was dying. This was not unexpected news, he

had been ailing for some time, nevertheless it was not the sort of thing that anyone wishes to hear. Then a couple of hours later there came another email to say that he had since passed on.

The next couple of days passed in a blur. An email of condolence to Moira, Harry's daughter, on behalf of the Group was followed by a dash to the shops for a couple of suitable cards while our preparations were punctuated with Committee emails. Then there was the problem of who would be able to represent the group at the funeral, which was to be held in Brighton, particularly if it were to be held while Pat and I were away. Things were still undecided when we left early on the 19th, having arranged with Rog a variety of possible ways that he might be able to use to contact us in the Northern Wilds. But our worries were allayed a couple of days later when he texted us to say that the funeral would be held on the 31st, giving us some leeway in which to arrange things.

When we returned the following week I found an email invitation from Moira to Harry's committal at the Woodvale Crematorium, to be followed by the HarryCon Party, a celebration of his life and times. Another flurry of Committee emails ensued during which it was decided that Rog, Pat and I would represent the Group, as we were the only ones who could attend. Then Pat, an expert in such matters, arranged train tickets and an hotel for the following night. Travelling to Brighton and back the same day was not really an option.

So we met at New Street Station early on Friday 31st to catch our trains to, through and from London to Brighton, arriving soon after 11.30. Our hotel, the Jury's Inn, was just behind the station so we were soon installed in our rooms and met again to book a taxi to the Crematorium just outside town, arriving about 12.30. **(Photo No.1)**

For a while we circulated; although some of those present we knew from our fan circle most were from the many other areas of Harry's life. Then just before one o'clock Harry's coffin arrived in a Dormobile-type vehicle rather than the more usual black hearse. We learned later that this was in memory of a similar vehicle in which he and his family travelled around Europe in his younger days. When he had been carried into the South Chapel **(2+3)** we all followed and took our places. The service was non-denominational, because Harry was not religious, consisting in the main of short readings and pieces of classical and other music and concluding with our saying farewell to him with a glass of his favourite scotch, or apple juice for the non drinkers **(4)**.

Moira arranged lifts for us to Stanmer House, Stanmer Park **(5)**, just outside Brighton, where the HarryCon Party was to be held in a marquee in the gardens behind **(6)**. As we entered drinks and nibbles **(7)** were available to help initiate conversations **(8)**. Chris Priest, Tom Shippey, Rog) while further in were several reminders of Harry's writings. A large symbol of a certain series **(9)**, based, I think, on artwork by Harry himself, gave an opportunity to post memories or messages and two pieces of artwork depicted an intelligent dinosauroid **(10)** and its skull **(11)** from the *Eden* novels.

When everyone had arrived and circulated for a while we all sat cinema style **(7)** to watch filmed snippets of Harry's life while a number of friends and

relatives spoke of their memories of him and his life. These included Moira (12), Peter Murphy (13), the officiating celebrant, and Tim Aldiss, Brian Aldiss' son (14). Brian was unable to be with us, being on holiday, but he had emailed a piece to be read for him by Tim.

Afterwards the buffet opened and conversations resumed for quite a while until people started to drift home. Eventually only a few (15) were left and it was decided to call it a day. Lifts were arranged and everyone departed although a certain amusement was yet to come. The chap who gave us a lift had brought the rat (9) in a box resting on the back seats of his Dormobile which meant, as it was too big to fit elsewhere, the three rear seat passengers had to travel miles with it partly balanced on their heads. I was lucky, because of an injured knee I occupied the front passenger seat.

Summing up the afternoon is difficult. Under other circumstances it would have been enjoyable, being a well organised and pleasant event. But English has no suitable tense, all I can say is that Harry would have enjoyed it had he been there.

After being dropped off at the hotel Rog, Pat and I decided to go for a meal. Brighton was somewhat crowded, being not only a Friday night but in addition the weekend was to be devoted to an international Gay Pride event so people were arriving from all over the place. But we finally found somewhere, enjoyed our meals and returned to the hotel. Pat and I weren't going to have breakfast but Rog wanted a sandwich so we checked the restaurant/bar menu carefully and found a heading "All Day Breakfast" under which was the subheading "Breakfast Sandwiches" giving a choice of fillings. Being fairly literate we knew that this meant that breakfast would be available all day on Saturday and that breakfast sandwiches would therefore be available all day. So we arranged to meet after Rog had broken his fast to look around Brighton.

But when Pat and I strolled downstairs next morning we found a somewhat annoyed Rog waiting for us in the foyer. Despite the words "All" and "Day" being among the basic words that a child should know and be able to read by the age of seven apparently local usage varies from the norm because when Rog had attempted to order an All Day Breakfast Sandwich he was told that they were not available during breakfast time, presumably cooked breakfast time. So we booked out of the hotel, leaving our bags in their left luggage room, and went to get Rog his repast at a nearby café. Then we spent a few hours wandering around the Lanes, a labyrinth of small roads and alleys full of shops of all types and sizes, getting lunch at a little pub, before returning to the hotel to collect our bags and catch our train homeward.

(Despite Rog's problem with breakfast Pat and I thought that the hotel was worth staying at, we would certainly stay there again if the occasion arose and would recommend it to anyone).

VB



Number 1



Number 2



Number 3



Number 4

Number 6



Number 8



Number 5



Number 7



Number 9



Number 10



Number 11



Number 12



Number 13



Number 14



Number 15





BOOK REVIEWS



(REVIEWERS please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwinced@yahoo.com Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.

THE RITUAL by Adam Nevill

Pan / 418pgs / £7.99 paperback, ISBN 978-0330514972

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

We have all experienced those “it seemed like a good idea at the time, but what the hell am I doing here,” moments. For the four friends on a hiking holiday inside Sweden’s Arctic Circle it comes two days into their journey. It didn’t help that two of them were unfit and woefully unprepared for such strenuous travel through an uncompromising, snow-covered wilderness.

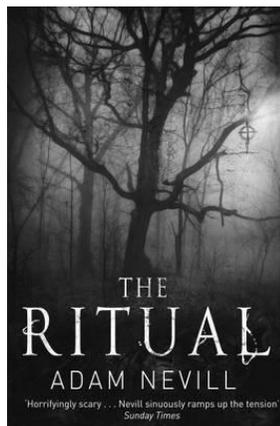
The four had been college friends. In fifteen years they had grown apart but after meeting up again at Hutch’s wedding they had planned this trip. It was only a three day hike through a National Park but one day in, Dom had twisted his knee and Phil hobbled on severe blisters. Luke had decided he had nothing in common with these men any more. It was Hutch, the only one who could read a map, who had made the decision to take a short cut through virgin forest. There were no trails so after hours of crashing through undisturbed undergrowth the sight of an eviscerated deer twelve feet up a tree was unnerving, reminding them that there could be wolves or bears in the forest. It was a relief, then, to come across the deserted, dilapidated house. Despite the disturbing relics discovered in the roof space they decided to stay the night. Their nightmares, probably induced by the day’s events made the rifts between the men deeper. The abandoned church they found the next day didn’t help either but when in the night something rips Hutch from his tent, the terror of the unknown settles very firmly over the remaining men.

The first half of this novel deals with the terrors of being lost in a strange place and the way that relationships can disintegrate in the face of hardship. Most novels of this kind would have the shared experiences drawing the men together and bonding being cemented in the face of adversity. Nevill doesn’t take the obvious route. Luke’s disgust at the failure of Phil and Dom to cope in a crisis increases his alienation from them, especially after Hutch’s death (they find his body strung up in a tree the same way the deer was). His instinct is to go on without them and try to find help. Why he didn’t has more to do with the fear of being alone rather than any sense of comradeship. The reactions of all four men are cleverly depicted to bring out the best and worst of their characters.

Nevill doesn’t stop there. The second part of *The Ritual* concerns what happens to Luke once he manages to get out of the forest, and the strange people who take him under their roof.

The horror in this book is far more constrained than in Nevill’s previous novel, *Apartment 16*. The situations the four men, and later Luke on his own, are ones that can easily be imagined given the way that people behave under stress. As a psychological thriller, *The Ritual* works extremely well.

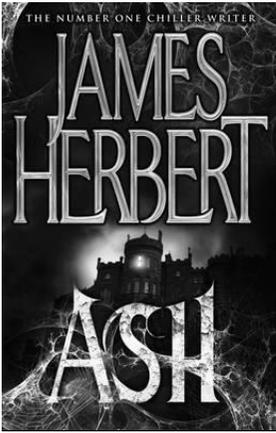
PM



ASH by James Herbert

Macmillan / 693 pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0230706958

Reviewed by Michael Jones



The eponymous David Ash, detective of the paranormal, is hired through his employers the Psychological Research Institute to investigate strange goings-on at a place called Comraich Castle. This, he learns, is a “Retreat” where the sufficiently wealthy (and they need to be very wealthy indeed) can withdraw from the world at large – as often as not to escape the consequences of their past misdeeds – and live out their lives in luxury, comfort and safety without anyone knowing where they are. It also transpires that the wealthy can be provided with a hiding place for relatives whom they wish, or need, to conceal: the mad, the bad and the just plain embarrassing. The castle is run by a secret cabal allegedly set up a couple of centuries ago with the connivance of the Royal Family of the time. Since then it has grown in power and influence and, being privy to the guilty secrets of the highest in the land, is effectively outside the law. It even arranges political assassinations on behalf of

the Government.

Unfortunately, it is becoming apparent that the Castle is haunted, although that is scarcely an adequate word to describe the situation. A brutal incident in its history resulted in a curse being placed upon it and the resulting evil influence has grown and festered through the years and is now being magnified and channelled through some of its less sane inhabitants. There have been one or two strange incidents, but it is the unpleasantly bloody death of one of the paying guests that has led to outside help being sought.

As Ash arrives, it all begins to escalate. During dinner one evening the food on everyone’s plate turns to maggots halfway through the meal, causing widespread panic as those who have already eaten them find flies hatching in their stomachs. Things then go from bad to worse, with people being dismembered, torn to pieces by wild animals, blown to smithereens, burned alive, etcetera, etcetera, all described in graphic detail. Ash’s encounters with rats and quite large spiders en route to his escape from the castle almost pale in comparison. The unpleasantness of these various set pieces is an essential constituent of this kind of modern horror novel.

It is almost a pleasure to see so many thoroughly nasty individuals receiving their just desserts, which provides a kind of rationale for the more horrific aspects of the story. At the same time, there is a conspiracy theory side to it which is highly intriguing, providing as it does contrived explanations for a number of the mysteries and unexplained disappearances of recent and, in some cases, not-so-recent history. It should be said however that the inclusion of at least some of these subsidiary plot elements, referring to real people, may be of questionable taste. Be that as it may, this aspect certainly makes the book into something more than a mere tale of horror or the supernatural.

It is, in all honesty, not the best-written book ever. It is over-elaborate, chunks of exposition are almost forced in here and there, the dialogue can be suspect and some situations and subsidiary characters are clearly shoehorned in just to provide further opportunities to disgust the susceptible reader. Thus it is longer than it needed to be. If, however, one can overlook these faults, it is possible to be quite enthralled by the story and

the way it all works out, which may broadly speaking be predictable, although the ending includes a couple of unexpected twists. A reader with a broader range of interest than merely the most rigorous SF will find much of interest. *MJ*

THE CHOSEN SEED (The Dog-Faced Gods Book Three) by Sarah Pinborough

Gollancz / 375 pgs / £14.99 trade paperback / ISBN 978-0575089549

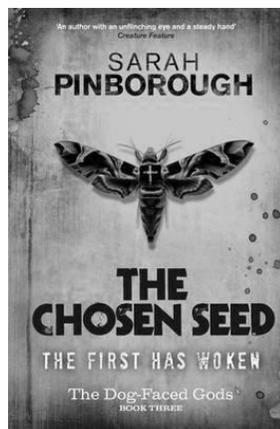
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a trilogy that started well. In *A MATTER OF BLOOD*, the first of the three, we are introduced to Cass Jones, a relatively honest cop in a world where a degree of corruption is accepted as the norm. The shape of the book is a near future thriller with Cass trying to find a serial killer at the same time as trying to cope with the deaths of his brother, Christian, and family. The accepted sequence of events is that Christian killed his wife and son, then himself. Cass is not so sure. Somewhere behind everything is The Bank, for whom Christian used to work, and the mysterious Mr Bright.

By the start of *THE CHOSEN SEED*, Cass has enough evidence to suggest that his nephew, Luke, was exchanged at birth and is still alive somewhere. Cass is also a wanted man, having been framed for two murders and shot during his escape from the officers pursuing him. Other than staying free, he has two objectives - to bring down Mr Bright and to find his nephew. The police, while still hunting him have other concerns. There is a man going around infecting people with a disease called Strain II which makes AIDS look as dangerous as a common cold. Victims deteriorate quickly, usually after having infected several others.

The story is told from multiple viewpoints. There is the main narrative of Cass's search, with the help of underworld friends, for Luke. The search for the new serial killer is followed from the view of several of Cass's old colleagues, some of whom have concerns about his guilt, others of whom have no such doubt. To fill in the gaps and prevent the reader from wandering around in the dark there are the viewpoints of Mr Bright and his associates. It is mainly through this strand that the real situation can be fully understood.

As a fast paced, action-packed thriller, this volume and the two preceding it are enjoyable. The problem is the premise behind the whole set-up headed by Mr Bright. It is difficult to discuss this without revealing the rationale behind these books but I found it a tired theme and was disappointed that Pinborough had descended to an idea that lacked imagination. As a writer, and in most of the scenes and plot twists, she has shown that she has plenty. The other issue to consider is that in *A MATTER OF BLOOD* there is considerable time given over to the details of this near future Britain. By the time *THE CHOSEN Seed* is reached this is only paid lip-service and many readers picking up this volume would be hard pressed to spot the differences between Pinborough's world and our own. It is a shame that a promising trilogy has ended on a down beat. *PM*



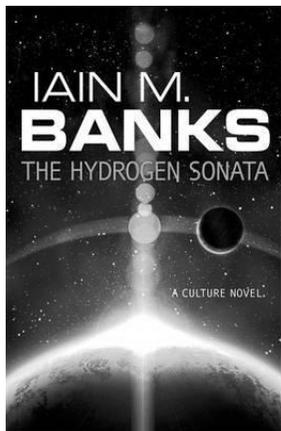
***THE HYDROGEN SONATA* by Iain M. Banks**

Orbit / 517 pgs /h/ £20 hardcover/ ISBN 978-0356501505

Reviewed by Michael Jones

For his latest *Culture* novel Banks has eschewed the somewhat portentous over-elaboration of the most recent ones in favour of the somewhat lighter and more accessible tone of the earlier ones. It is also between ten and fifteen percent shorter, which is perhaps not such a bad thing.

It mostly concerns a civilisation called the Gzilt who were around at the time the Culture first came into being some ten thousand years ago but chose not to join. Now they have decided to do what a lot of other races have done before them and Sublime, moving their individual downloaded personalities into a new and better form of existence in another dimension beyond the seven or eight that are generally known. Various shenanigans ensue as, during the last twenty-three days before this event (Enfolding) takes place, various factions seek to better their positions in the hope of future advantage. And one of the advantages being sought is continued concealment of a momentous secret which largely accounts for them having not joined the Culture all those years ago when they had the chance. A disparate group of Culture ships have got wind of all this and, naturally enough, decide to try and find out just what is going on, with a view to interfering if necessary. This involves locating and interrogating an individual who was there at the beginning, but unfortunately he has excised the relevant memory, placed it into secure storage and lost it. The story is mostly about their efforts to find it again while thwarting the efforts of those of the Gzilt who would prefer it to remain lost. Vyr Cossont, a young Gzilt musician, is called upon to play an important and risky part in this search.



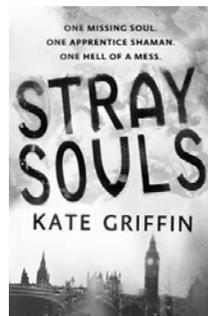
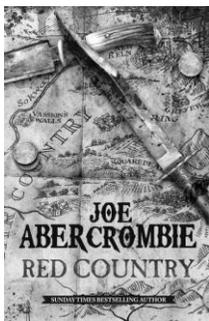
The Hydrogen Sonata of the title is an ancient and difficult piece of music and it is her life's ambition to play it from beginning to end without unwonted pauses or mistakes. Her efforts to do so symbolise her part in the larger story: at the beginning of the book she is continuing to try and fail. At the end, having done her bit, she successfully completes the sonata, then chooses not to take part in the Enfolding but to go off on her own instead.

This long and, it must be admitted, complex story provides ample opportunity for Banks to do what he does best, obviously enjoying himself as he explores his creation (The Culture) and giving free rein to his inventive imagination, with amazing advanced technology pervading almost every page while weird personalities both alien and human abound. At the same time, he explains more than has previously been given away about both the origin of the Culture and the ultimate aim of maturing civilisations, to Sublime. It is all written in the conversational, mostly light-hearted, style which he seems to use more in his *Culture* books than in some others he has written, never using one word where four or five or even more would do and constructing sentences of up to two hundred words (depending on how you count hyphenated ones). The argumentative chatter among the Ship Minds is particularly entertaining.

It marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Culture and is every bit as good as one has come to expect, although a reader not already familiar with the Culture might find it a trifle difficult and fail to pick up on some of the less obvious nuances. The sheer

inventiveness displayed and the writing style combine to make it a delight and one can but hope for more like it. MJ

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

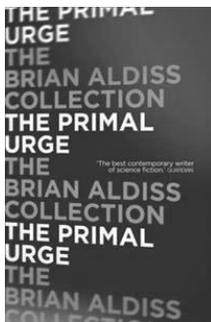
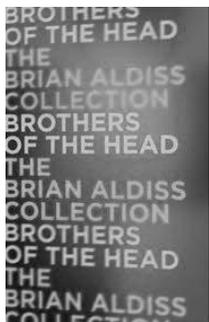


THE MIDDLE KINGDOM by David Wingrove / Corvus / 448pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1848877313 / October 18th Third volume in the *Chung Kuo* series that deals with a future Chinese Empire

RED COUNTRY by Joe Abercrombie / Gollancz / 464pgs / £16.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0575095823 / October 18th Set in a fantasy world where Shy South must return to her bad past to rescue her stolen brother and sister. Be warned –as Joe Abercrombie’s books contain graphic violence and strong language

THE ETERNAL FLAME by Greg Egan / Orion / 400pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575105720 / October 18th Second book in the *Orthogonal* series. An over-populated generation ship faces stark choices but the ‘Eternal Flame’ may offer an alternative solution.

STRAY SOULS by Kate Griffin / Gollancz / 448pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN 978-0575105713 / October 25th In a fantasy London setting, shaman Sharon Li searches for the lost soul of the city of London



BROTHERS OF THE HEAD by Brian Aldiss / The Friday Project (Harper Collins) / / £6.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482047 / October 25th Siamese twins form a rock band and must deal with violence and jealousy

THE PRIMAL URGE by Brian Aldiss / The Friday Project (Harper Collins) / / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482061 / October 25th Re-issue of 1961 novel. The hilarious

and frightening events surrounding the proposed compulsory implantation of forehead discs which glow when the person is sexually aroused.

THE TWELVE by Justin Cronin / Orion / 592pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN 978-0752897868 / October 25th Sequel to THE PASSAGE. Survivors in a world over-run by the undead search for the twelve escaped convicts who are the source of the infection.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organizers 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 is always welcome - please send to Carol at goodwincd@yahoo.com

Peter F Hamilton Great North Road signing tour 8th to 14th October, Various venues. Peter Hamilton will be appearing at various venues to sign copies of his new book, GREAT NORTH ROAD including Birmingham Book Festival on the 8th October at the Custard Factory (as listed in last month's newsletter). Details from Website: <http://torbooks.co.uk/2012/09/04/the-peter-f-hamilton-great-north-road-tour/>

Iain M Banks signing tour 10th to 12th October, Various venues. Iain Banks will be appearing at Edinburgh (10th October with Peter Hamilton), Manchester (11th October) and Formby (12th October). Further details at Website: www.iain-banks.net/extras/appearances

The 56th BFI London Film Festival 10th to 21st October, London. There will be a total of 225 features screening at this year's London Film Festival. It starts with the European Premiere of Tim Burton's FRANKENWEENIE. Other SF and fantasy highlights include horror-comedy JOHN DIES AT THE END, BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD, vampire film KISS OF THE DAMNED, ROBOT AND FRANK, documentary on Kubrick ROOM 237 and anime WOLF CHILDREN. Tickets: on sale to the general public on Monday 24 September. Website: www.bfi.org.uk/fff Phone: 0207 928 3232

Special BSFA Meeting, Han Song interviewed by Lavie Tidhar. 10th October, London. Han Song (Chinese Science Fiction author) will be interviewed by Lavie Tidhar (Israeli SF writer). Although little of his work has been translated into English, Han Song is one of the most prolific of Chinese SF writers, and has won the prestigious Galaxy prize six times. This meeting is presented in collaboration with the British Council. Free Entry (Non-members welcome). The interview will start at 7 pm. Room open from 6pm. Location: Cellar Bar, The Argyle Public House, 1 Greville Street (off Leather Lane), London EC1N 8PQ. Nearest Tube: Chancery Lane (Central Line).

The British Independent Horror Film Festival 12th to 13th October, London This film event takes place at the Empire, Leicester Square (WC2H 7NA) and showcases independent British horror cinema. This year's line-up includes the features DEMON, THREE'S A SHROUD, ART HOUSE MASSACRE and DARKWOOD MANOR, as well as numerous shorts. Website: www.thefilmfestivalguild.com Twitter: @UKFILMFESTIVALS

Lavie Tidhar book signing 13th October, Croydon. Lavie is one of the rising stars of world Science Fiction. His latest novel OSAMA was compared to Phillip K Dick's MAN IN THE

HIGH CASTLE by *The Guardian*. Lavie will be signing the paperback of OSAMA and back list titles in Waterstones store. Phone 0208 686 7032 if you are unable to attend but would like a signed copy. Waterstones Croydon at 12pm

Joe Abercrombie Red Country signing tour 18th to 26th October, Various venues. Joe Abercrombie will be appearing at various venues to sign copies of his new book, RED COUNTRY although there are no signings listed for the Midlands. Details available at Website: www.joeabercrombie.com/2012/09/10/red-country-uk-tour

Bristol-Con 2012 20th October, Bristol. The fourth one-day event from the Bristol Fantasy & SF Society, taking place at the Ramada Hotel (BS1 6NJ). Featuring John Meaney, Gareth L. Powell, Anne Sudworth and Colin Harvey Tickets: £20 Website: www.bristolcon.org/

Hollywood Costume 20th October to 27th January 2013, London. The Victoria & Albert Museum's major Autumn exhibition brings together over 100 iconic movie costumes, and covers everything from early Chaplin silent pictures to the motion-capture costume design for AVATAR and JOHN CARTER. Items on display will include Dorothy's gingham dress from THE WIZARD OF OZ, Darth Vader's body suit, and Indiana Jones's costume from RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK Tickets: £14 (concessions available). Advance booking is advised. Website: www.vam.ac.uk Phone: 020 7907 7073

The Festival Of Fantastic Films 26th to 28th October, Manchester. Now in its 23rd year, this festival once again brings "the best collection of movies and guests to Manchester". Taking place at the Manchester Conference Centre (M1 3BB), guests include director Michael Armstrong. Tickets: £70 weekend (day tickets available) Website: www.fantastic-films.com

Grimm Tales: Telling Stories: Philip Pullman in conversation with Neil Gaiman. 29th October, London. To celebrate the publication of GRIMM TALES FOR YOUNG AND OLD, this one-off event will bring together the award-winning authors, Philip Pullman and Neil Gaiman. Hear two of the most distinctive voices in modern fiction discuss their own work and the enduring appeal of fairy tales, along with a reading from the book by Philip Pullman. The event will take place in the Cambridge Theatre. There will be a limited signing after the event, for books purchased on the night. Purchase tickets at <http://www.seetickets.com/Event/PHILIP-PULLMAN-IN-CONVERSATION-WITH-NEIL-GAIMAN/Cambridge-Theatre/667581> Doors open at 7pm, Starts at 7:30pm in Cambridge Theatre, Earlam Street, London WC2H 9HU

100 Years Of The BBFC Season, 1st to 30th November, London. Tying in with the centenary of the British Board of Film Classification, this season of screenings at BFI Southbank will look at the censors' changing attitudes to confrontational material over the last 100 years. Films screening will include INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM, ISLAND OF LOST SOULS and THE EVIL DEAD Tickets: £10.00, concessions £6.75; BFI members pay £1.50 less. Website: www.bfi.org.uk Phone: 020 7928 3232

Horror in the East, 2nd to 3rd November, Lowestoft. Guests for this new horror-lit convention include writers Adam Baker, Joseph D'Lacey, David Moody and Conrad Williams. It takes place at the Aspire Centre, on the grounds of Denes High School (NR32

4AH). Tickets: Entry is free (though there will be a donation bucket for a local cause).
Website: www.horrorintheeast.com

CONVENTIONS

NOVACON 42, 9th-11th November, Nottingham. Now in its fifth decade, Novacon is held at the Park Inn Hotel in Nottingham. **Guest of Honour Jaime Fenn.** Website www.novacon.org.uk Twitter: @Novacon42

EIGHT SQUARED CON (EASTERCON 64), 29th March-1st April 2012, Bradford. To be held at the Cedar Court Hotel, Bradford, UK. Guests of Honour: Walter Jon Williams, Freda Warrington, Anne Sudworth and Edward James. Registration is £60 which will be held until Jan. 31st 2013. Website is <http://www.eightsquaredcon.org/>

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

Nov 2nd - SF author **ERIC BROWN**

Dec 7th - **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL** - Skittles and buffet

Jan 11th- **Annual General Meeting and Auction**

Feb 8th - **Quiz**

Mar 8th - local urban horror author **James Brogden**

Apr 12th - Honorary President and SF author **Brian Aldiss OBE**

STOP PRESS: A Couple of Reminders

The Christmas Social is on December 7th, the first Friday of the month. Tickets £10 including buffet now on sale. Full details in next months newsletter.

The Committee stands down at the AGM in January. If you are considering standing please speak to Vernon asap to discover what the post entails. This will not commit you in any way.

BRUM GROUP NEWS #493 (October 2012) copyright 2012 for Birmingham SF Group. This issue produced by Carol Goodwin (goodwind@yahoo.com) and designed by Rog Peyton. 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