

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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Dave Cox

(By Helena Bowles)

I knew Dave Cox for nearly thirty years. He was one of those members of fandom who always seemed to be around, even during the time when I was almost gaffiated due to the demands of small children. Those children are now almost adults and Dave was a small but regular presence in their whole lives.

He was a big man when we first met with a great love of good food and drink so it was very difficult for him when he was diagnosed with diabetes in his early fifties. He took

There are still some tickets available for the Social. If you want to come please email Vicky (bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk) as soon as possible with ticket numbers and meal requirements (standard or vegetarian). Then pay when you arrive. But do come - meals are booked in advance and have to be paid for so if you change your mind the Group has to pay.

Next Meeting -January 11th AGM and Auction.

responsibility for his condition, lost a great deal of weight and controlled his diabetes with a rare discipline. It is one of life's ironies that despite his massive lifestyle change, his health continued to gradually deteriorate over the next twenty years.

Dave had two great loves in his life – SF and trains. He enjoyed cult TV and was a regular attender at the Portmeirion conventions organised by Six of One. He possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of minutiae which he would share with enthusiastic pedantry before being regularly shouted down. He was also one of the kindest, most generous men I knew who never bore a grudge if the shouting was sometimes a little harsh. The BSFG benefited from his membership for many years as did the informal social group the MiSFITs where he rarely missed a meeting.

Before his health took a final deterioration, Dave made one final big trip to indulge his other great love. Accompanied by a friend he bought an open rail ticket and travelled across North America by train. He returned delighted with a plethora of blurry photographs taken from train windows. He had a wonderful time and I am very glad he had that as his various physical infirmities began to seriously trouble him not long after his return.

Over his last several months travelling to socialise became very difficult for him and he missed some MiSFITs meetings. I talked about taking the group to him and would have liked to do that. Sadly the demands of work and a lack of free weekends meant I never managed it and now I never will and that makes me very sad. I hope he knows that we all valued his company even though we certainly let him know when he rambled on too much. Two days before the October meeting he emailed to say he had had another blackout and could not attend. He died after a further collapse the next day.

He wanted to leave his body to science and I am happy that it was accepted. He would have been greatly satisfied by that *HB*

(Reproduced from Novacon 42 booklet with Helena's kind permission, photograph courtesy of Pat Brown)

DAVE COX, FAN AND FRIEND ***by Vernon Brown***

Writing an article such as this one is actually quite difficult because I have known Dave for so long that he seems to have always been a part of the Brum fannish scene. It's going to be strange not seeing him in his usual seat at meetings.

Looking at a couple of old programme booklets I see that Dave attended his first Novacon somewhere between 1972 and 1981, presumably around the time that he joined the BSFG, which makes him one of our earliest members. He was always a friendly individual, ready to help out in getting meetings set up although in later years as he became unwell he would sit and chat while he waited for the meeting to start. And when chatting he took no prisoners; some people consider me to be pedantic but Dave would easily outclass me and anyone else - his knowledge was very extensive.

As his illnesses took their toll he found travelling to be more and more difficult so it took him quite an effort to get to Group meetings but he usually managed it although because he travelled from Tamworth by bus he had to be very careful with his timing as he found it difficult to walk far. In fact he phoned me the day before he died to apologise for missing the previous meeting because he had been so unwell.

But he enjoyed travelling. Recently he managed to go to the USA and spend a couple of weeks travelling around by train, on his return he loved speaking of what he had done there.

Group meetings will be much quieter without Dave. He'd always be one of the first to arrive and claim his chair at the end of the front row ready to hold his own in any conversation. We'll miss him.

Postscript

A celebration of Dave's life was held in Coventry on November 24th because he had donated his body to medical science. About seventy family and friends were there, including BSFG members Chris and Pauline Morgan, Dave Hardy, Tony Berry, Simon Dearn, Pat and me, although Rog Peyton could not attend because he had slipped in the torrential rain a few days before and hurt himself. As well as Group members a number of fans from the Midlands and elsewhere were also present.

VB

MEMBERS' NEWS

A reminder that **Stan Nicholls** will be giving a talk at Northfield Library on 10th December at 11am. (See Events section for further details.)

THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

The December meeting will be the Social held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak, where we have once again hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00pm until 11.00pm on Friday 7th December. To get there take a 45 or 47 bus from outside Boots, opposite New Street Station on Smallbrook Queensway. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - it is about 15 minutes ride.

NOVA AWARDS

The Nova Award winners were announced on November 9th at Novacon 42 in Nottingham. The Nova Awards are presented to recognize excellence in British fanzine publishing and writing.

Fanzine: *Banana Wings* edited by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer

Fanwriter: Mark Plummer

Fanartist: (tied) D West and Sue Mason

WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The World Fantasy Awards winners were announced at the World Fantasy Convention held in Toronto from November 1st to 4th. The Awards for Lifetime Achievement are announced in advance of the event.

Novel: OSAMA by Lavie Tidhar (P S Publishing)

Novella: A SMALL PRICE TO PAY FOR BIRDSONG by K J Parker (Subterranean Winter 2011)

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

Anthology: THE WEIRD edited by Jeff and Ann Vandermeer (Corvus Books)

Author Collection: THE BIBLE REPAIRMAN AND OTHER STORIES by Tim Powers (Tachyon)

Artist: John Coulthart

Special Award Professional: Eric Lane, for publishing in translation (Dedalus Books)

Special Award Non-Professional: Raymond Russell and Rosalie Parker (Tartarus Press)

Lifetime Achievement Winners: Alan Garner and George R R Martin

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Russian SF author **Boris Strugatsky** has died at the age of 79 on November 19th. Strugatsky and his older brother Arkady were famous for their many collaborations. Probably the best known Russian SF writers, the satirical nature of some of their work and Boris’ continued criticism of the Russian government was not always appreciated by them. Despite this, both President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev praised his contribution to Russian literature. The Strugatsky brothers’ collaborative work included *ROADSIDE PICNIC* (later filmed as *STALKER* by Tarkovsky) and *HARD TO BE A GOD*. After his brother’s death in 1991, Boris published two more novels, although they did not achieve the success he had when writing with Arkady Artist **David Grove** died on October 25th from emphysema. Grove began working on covers for a wide variety of publishers in the 1970s. In addition to covers, Grove also painted movie posters, including one of the Ray Bradbury-based *SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES* and artwork for advertising. He was inducted into the Illustration Hall of Fame in 2007 and had a retrospective show at the Society of Illustrators in New York earlier in 2012 Author **Kevin O’Donnell, Jr.** has died. O’Donnell published more than 70 short stories in magazines as diverse as *Analog* to *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine*. His first two novels were published in 1979. O’Donnell was active in SFWA, chairing the Nebula Award Committee from 1990 until 1998. He served as Chairman of SFWA’s Grievance Committee for six years and in 2005 received the Service to SFWA Award **C.S. Lewis**, who wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Perelandra* trilogy, *The Screwtape Letters*, and several

works on religion, will be honored with the placement of a memorial stone in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey on November 22nd 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Lewis will be the first addition to Poet's Corner since Ted Hughes was added in December 2011 **Stephen Hunt** is offering his fans the chance to appear as a character in his next novella (part of his *Sliding Void* series). A reader selected at random will give his or her name to the king or queen of the space pirates **Brian Aldiss'** new (and final) novel **THE FINCHES OF MARS** will be available from 29th November but only as an ebook. The hardback copy will not be available until the 6th June 2013 The **Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, or TAFF** (<http://www.taff.org.uk/>), is looking for candidates for the 2013 Westbound TAFF trip. Candidates must; be nominated by three European SF fans, be nominated by two North American SF fans, submit a written platform not exceeding 101 words and post a bond of £15 .The candidates must also pledge to take the 2013 TAFF trip and attend LoneStarCon 3, to be held in San Antonio, Texas, USA from 29th August to 2nd September. TAFF delegates are expected to write and produce a trip report and will administer the fund for two years. The fan fund will pay for the trip, related expenses and the publication of the completed trip report. Candidates will be voted on by interested fans from all over the world - voters and nominators must be active SF fans that are known to the administrators. Nominators should be sent to their local administrator. The European administrator is John Coxon - his email address is john.coxon@gmail.com and his postal address is 14 Chapel Lane, Peterborough, PE4 6RS. The deadline for nominations is 23:59 GMT on 31st December 2012. Voting will commence shortly after the close of nominations and ballots must be submitted by 23:59 GMT on 5th April 2013 *The Telegraph* has revealed that **Sir Terry Pratchett** 'almost died' in New York in the back of a New York taxi this month after suffering from a heart condition brought on by blood pressure drugs and his busy touring schedule, his assistant has revealed. The assistant had to use CPR. The writer made a rapid recovery and downplayed the episode, joking that he had heard that book-signing tours could kill you "quicker than drugs, booze and fast women". In a recent interview with the *New Statesman*, Sir Terry Pratchett discussed his plans to hand the *Discworld* series over to his daughter, video game writer **Rhianna Pratchett**, once he's no longer able to write. The New York health scare had made Pratchett consider the future of his work. Rhianna Pratchett will be a co-writer on the upcoming BBC *Discworld* series *The Watch*, and will write the *Discworld* books when Pratchett eventually retires **Random House** and **Penguin** are set to merge in a £2.5 billion deal to become the biggest publisher in history. It is believed that the companies hope the merged resources will leave them better able to compete with digital rivals such as Amazon and Apple A *Battlestar Galactica* prequel series *Blood and Chrome* is now available on YouTube **Fringeworks Publishing** aims to produce a series of genre themed ebooks in 2013 and is calling for short story submissions for a "continuing anthology" series entitled "Grimm and Grimmer". Details are available at www.fringeworks.co.uk/blog/. The closing date is 6th January 2013 **Newcon Press** is producing a series of collections featuring the uncollected and original work of a single selected author. Each

volume will be produced as a numbered, limited hardback edition and an ebook. Books will be available singly or by subscription (which gives reduced price, free ebook and free UK shipping and guaranteed availability). Further details at www.newconpress.co.uk **NASA'S Mars rover Curiosity** has apparently made a discovery "for the history books" according to Curiosity chief scientist John Grotzinger. However the Rover team will not announce immediately what the SAM (onboard sample analyser - which is capable of identifying organic compounds) has found until the results are double checked. Grotzinger stated that the news will come out at the American Geophysical Union meeting, which takes place from December 3rd to 7th. CG



BOOK REVIEWS



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

CITY OF DRAGONS by Robin Hobb

HarperVoyager / 425 pgs / £20.00 hardcover / ISBN: 9780007273805

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

There are times when a book that you know is probably the second of a trilogy ends with a feeling of satisfaction, of ideas achieved. Similarly, there are third volumes of a trilogy that leave so many threads hanging that there has to be another. Robin Hobb usually writes trilogies though many of them are set in the same fantasy world and may contain overlapping characters.

The *Rain Wild Chronicles* began with **THE DRAGON KEEPER**. The dragon Tintaglia had steered the sea serpents to the cocooning grounds but instead of fully fledged dragons emerging from them, the resulting hatchlings were deformed and unable to fend for themselves. As a result young people were chosen to look after them and accompany them up the Rain Wild River a suitable place to settle. In the sequel, **DRAGON HAVEN**, the dragons and their keepers arrived at the ruined but mythical city of Kelsingra where once upon a time dragons and Elderlings had dwelt side by side. Their goal was achieved, characters had discovered their strengths; some had found love. Life was going to be hard, but together they could make it work. A good end for a book.

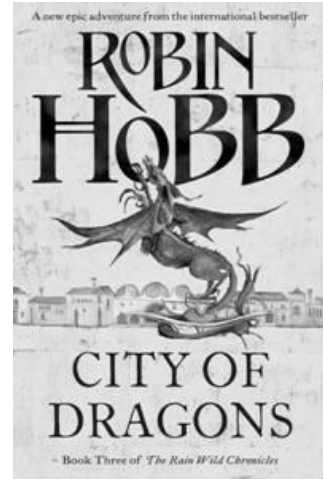
CITY OF DRAGONS is the third in the series. Kelsingra is on the other side of a raging river and it never seems to stop raining. The dragons are permanently hungry, and grumpy. They have developed on their journey up river but only one can fly. Rapskal's dragon, Heeby, is willing to carry Alise across so that she can explore and record the dead city. She is a woman fascinated by anything to do with dragons and used them as an excuse to flee her abusive sodomite of a husband but she is also aware that as soon as the wider world find out that Kelsingra has been discovered, vultures will descend and strip its treasures. Any Elderling artefact, because of its rarity, fetches a high price. This, she is sure,

will happen all too soon, especially as Leftrin, captain of the liveship Tarman and Alise's lover has to go back down stream to collect the pay of the dragon keepers and buy supplies to make their new life a little more comfortable. The city, however, has surprises for everyone.

Hobb's novels are never straightforward. The main narrative thrust (what happens to the dragons and their keepers) is entangled with the lives of others. The dying Duke of Chalced believes dragon parts will cure him and the tentacles of his empire are far reaching. In fear of his life, Alise's husband is forced to travel upriver in search of the dragons. Tintaglia's three Elderlings are in danger; Seldon is being exhibited as a freak in a carnival show and because he exhibits dragon scaling on his skin the unscrupulous want to pass off parts of him as true dragon parts to earn the Duke's reward. The other two, Malta and Reyn, and their expected child face the same kind of dangers.

All the threads of this novel are heading in one direction - towards Kelsingra. The frustrating part is that there has to be a further novel to complete the cycle. Hobb is a fine writer who builds detailed worlds and characters and weaves compelling plots, the kind who makes you wish for more. For a newcomer to her work, it would be better to start with the first volume of this set so that all the nuances of the plot become clear.

PM



DESTINY QUEST 1: THE LEGION OF SHADOW by Michael J. Ward
Gollancz / 656 pgs / £16.99 tradeback or £8.99 Ebook / ISBN: 978-0575118720
Reviewed by Dave Corby

The LEGION OF SHADOW is the first book in a new series titled *Destiny Quest* by Michael J. Ward. In order to review this book I must first explain what it actually is. Do not be fooled by any Amazon descriptions; this is NOT a novel. It is a game. Back in 1982 Steven Jackson and Ian Livingstone started a fad for fantasy themed game backs known as the *Fighting Fantasy* series. The first was THE WARLOCK OF FIRETOP MOUNTAIN, which was very successful, selling over 16 million copies, and which Michael counts as primary inspiration for *Destiny Quest*. The LEGION OF SHADOW is Michael's homage to, and attempt to revive the interest in, *Fighting Fantasy*-style games.

The hero of THE LEGION OF SHADOW awakes, following a battle, with no memory of his or her past. After accepting to undertake a quest from the last wounded knight left alive (and who soon passes away) the hero soon realises he/she has strange powers that stem from strange shadowy marks on their arm. While embarking on an adventure to understand who he/she is, the hero ends up

being pivotal to an invasion of the world by an evil sorcerer and has shadow world allies.

In a book like this the reader plays the part of the hero “With only a sword and a backpack to your name, you must discover your destiny in an unfamiliar world full of monsters and magic”, to quote the blurb. The text is written mostly from the second person perspective “Reaching the main square, you consider your options. Ahead of you is the local tavern...” The book is split into numbered passages and at the end of each passage you are told to which paragraph you must turn next, often with a choice. In the above example, if you want to visit the tavern, you turn to paragraph X, with other choices made by turning to paragraph Y or Z.

On top of this is a simple ‘*Dungeons-and-Dragons-lite*’ games system. The reader records several statistics, such as speed, brawn and health, etc. on a hero sheet that can be photocopied out of the book (or downloaded from the website). At various points in the story the book instructs you to fight various



opponents and monsters, which are given their own statistics. In order to resolve the fight the player follows the simple rules, which involves rolling dice for the hero and the monster, adding them to the relevant statistics, and determining who has scored higher. The loser loses one from their ‘health’, and so another turn ensues, with eventually either the player or the opponent running out of health and losing the fight. Winning generally awards the player with equipment which provides bonuses to the character’s statistics, and thus the player can go on to tackle monsters with better statistics. Eventually, with the correct choices made and enough battles won, the player is in a position to take on the final encounter and finish the game.

This is roughly the same format as taken by WARLOCK back in 1982. However, Michael seems to have had one or two new ideas he has added in to freshen the concept. For a start, LEGION OF SHADOW is much bigger than WARLOCK, having 939 passages (and more if you want to download the extras), to the latter’s 400.

One of the new innovations is the map at the centre of the book. The player chooses which passage to turn to (and hence what adventure to play through) by examining the map and picking a feature, each of which has an associated passage number. In this fashion the player can play as much or as little as he/she likes, although skipping to the later, harder parts of the book may prove difficult because the player’s statistics have not built up enough to beat the encounters.

The success of this kind of book relies on the feeling have having freedom of choice to explore it. However, in the first act (of three) too few passages have been allocated to each adventure, meaning that for a reasonable

story to be followed there cannot be too many choices, or the book will run out of passages before the story is told. This tends to mean that each passage ends with just one number to turn to. This renders the concept of different passages redundant; the text might as well just have been printed in one long passage, and the book is less exciting as a result. Happily, the allocation of passages in the second and third acts is far more generous, and the game improves significantly in these later sections.

Unfortunately, because of this, I found the first third of the book fairly boring. The writing is extremely pedestrian and often stodgy. Without the interest of making lots of choices I found the first third a real chore to get through, and I can imagine people being put off by this. While the structure and game aspect gets better later on, unfortunately the writing does not. The basic plot, imagery and fantasy feels very generic, much like hundreds of other sub-Tolkien (or sub-Eddings / Feist / McCaffrey for that matter) novels printed in the last twenty years.

I can remember enjoying WARLOCK and its sequels back in the 80s, but THE LEGION OF SHADOW doesn't really seem to be as enjoyable as my memory of those earlier books. Admittedly, to put this in context, I have spent the last 25 years playing fantasy games of one sort or another, from *Warhammer* to *Dungeons and Dragons*, and it may be that I have seen so many creative and interesting scenarios LEGION simply pales by comparison. Maybe for someone new to the concept this game might be an ideal introduction, providing a simple and approachable starting point to fantasy gaming.

This book was originally self-published, and Gollancz have taken it on due to its success. However, I do not think that THE LEGION OF SHADOW or the *Destiny Quest* series is going to start off a second fad for this style of game. It just does not add enough that is new to justify the cost of buying it over the current reprints of the old *Fighting Fantasy* games, which are half the price. Despite my feelings of nostalgia for this kind of game, I simply cannot recommend it based on the lack-lustre writing and generic setting.

Fans of Michael J Ward might like to note that the second *Destiny Quest* book, THE HEART OF FIRE, is now out.

DC

***EMPTY SPACE: A HAUNTING* by M John Harrison**

Gollancz / 302 pages / £12.99 trade paperback / £6.99 eBook / ISBN: 978-0575096314

This is the third book of a series that began with LIGHT and continued with NOVA SWING. Although I have not read the preceding volumes, I believe this book can stand on its own and may even provide explanations to things unexplained previously.

The book is divided into three separate strands. Two of them are contemporary with each other and the third seems to occur (mostly) a long time before them. I understand that several characters and situations continue from previous volumes. Anna Waterman who, as Anna Kearney, has appeared in previous volumes takes up a third or more of this one and some of that time also

includes a computer drive filled with data that belonged to her dead husband, Michael Kearney. The "Nova Swing" (from the second book) and its crew take up another third.

The first of the three streams seems to take place on a near-present Earth. There are no real signs of advanced or unusual technology. The country seems to be much the same as the one we know. I wouldn't be surprised to find the scenery between Carshalton and Central London looked exactly as it would have when I was there last. The latter two streams seem to be set in a distant future. Interstellar travel is common as evidenced by the "Nova Swing's" travels although there's nothing much said about the science behind it except for the toll it takes on a pilot. There is a great deal about the supposed effects of the Kefahuchi tract (a region in space) on the universe in general. Although no-one understands how it affects anything they do not seem terribly surprised by the results. The "Nova Swing" is engaged in ferrying some of the human results of its effects into a quarantine orbit. One of the more grisly results involves a governess and child that started to occupy the same space at the time when one of the child's parents came home and tried to separate them and became entangled in a single part-living organism. The tract is described as a place where physics breaks its own rules but its rule-breaking isn't confined to the place that it seems to be.



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In the first strand, Anna Waterman has discovered a computer drive full of her husband's files. She believes it to be important and that she should deliver it somewhere although she is uncertain where. As is often the case with such things, the files are inaccessible to any device she has access to. In addition she is seeing strange phenomena that aren't really there. Things burst into flames and, moments later, the flames disappear without any damage. Several things seem to be warnings about the summer house. Despite all this, she seems to spend her time wandering between Carshalton, London, and the south coast.

Meanwhile, the character of the assistant (most of the time she is only known as that) is investigating two strange deaths at a warehouse. Two people (Enka Mercury and Toni Reno) have been shot and the bodies are floating in mid air and slowly rising. There is also the image of a woman that has trouble communicating her name and who claims to come from the future. Do all these mysterious phenomena have anything to do with the cargo that surrounded the bodies and has just been taken on board by the "Nova Swing" headed for the Kefahuchi Tract? The crew of the "Nova Swing", too, will be faced with a ghost that is having trouble communicating. Also, on board the "Nova Swing", the cargo is starting to escape into the hold. Considering this is quarantined material that could be very dangerous. Elsewhere, there are other related situations including a

minor war in "The Beach" (the systems closest to the Tract) and something called "The Aleph" which seems more complex and inexplicable than the Tract.

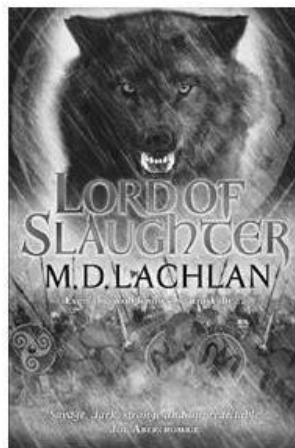
It is hard to describe the plot accurately as the great flaw with this novel is that so much seems to just wander aimlessly for most of the story. As a whole, there is a lot going on here and some would want to read it just to find the odd explanation to pieces from the earlier books or for a kind of ending to the whole thing. There are some explanations and characters do advance to some kind of conclusion. The problem is that all of the major plot seems to happen in the background while the foreground concentrates on people not communicating with others and, more importantly, themselves. That last statement may seem nonsensical but there is a good explanation that will become crystal clear by the end of the book. This book is more for the imagination than for anyone that wants a solid plot although Harrison's imagination is remarkable. Maybe there is still another book to be got out of this that can tie up the explanations for the explanations. WM

LORD OF SLAUGHTER by M D Lachlan

Gollancz / 496 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-0575089693

Reviewer: Theresa Derwin

M. D. Lachlan's century-spanning series of gods, wolves and humans reaches the 10th century and Constantinople, magic, Christianity and intrigue. The book starts from multiple viewpoints. On a battlefield strewn with corpses, a ragged figure, dressed in wolfskin and intent on death, slips past the guards into the tent of the Emperor and draws his sword. The terrified citizens of Constantinople are plagued by mysterious sorcery. The wolves outside the city are howling. A young boy has traded the lives of his family for power and a Christian scholar, fleeing with his pregnant wife from her enraged father, must track down the magic threatening his world.



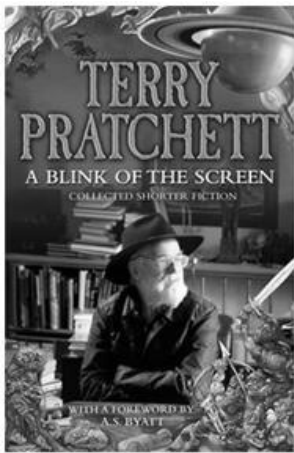
All paths lead to the squalid and filthy prison deep below the city, where a man who believes he is a wolf lies chained and the spirits of the dead are waking. The Norsemen camped outside the city have their own legends, of the wolf who will kill the gods, but no true Christian could believe such a thing. Yet it is clear to the Christian scholar, Loys that Ragnarok is coming. Will he be prepared to sacrifice his life, his position, his wife and his unborn child for a god he doesn't believe in?

This epic dark fantasy/horror from Lachlan is third in the *Craw* trilogy, yet the beauty of this book first of all, is that it can be read independently of its predecessors. Brimming with action, blood, guts and gore, this book is not for the faint-hearted. Although it is much more fantasy than horror, particularly given its

interwoven Norse mythology, it is gruesome enough that horror readers will enjoy it.

As with all major fantasy nowadays, there is the ‘task’ or ‘quest’ that the lead character must embark upon, and the plot rattles along at a fair speed. The language and atmosphere in this book is gripping, the atmosphere being dark, broody and rather depressing to be honest, yet despite the darkness underlying the adventure, it remains an entertaining read. Though by no means an expert on Norse mythology, I know my Asgard and my Ragnarok from other sources, and I have to admit, this feels historically accurate. It rather reminds me of the *Silverwolf* series by Anne Rice’s sister Alice Borchard. And this similarity is predominantly because both authors create a strong and believable medieval world.

This is an excellent example of historical dark fantasy that delivers on all fronts. TD



A BLINK OF THE SCREEN by Terry Pratchett
Doubleday / 318 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN: 978-0385618984

Reviewed by Michael Jones

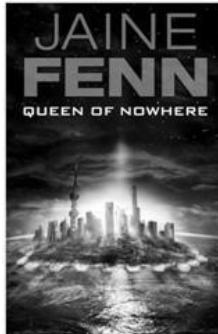
Terry Pratchett is of course best known for novels - fifty at last count, not including various collaborations and much else - but like many another successful writer his first published work was a short story, two decades before the first *Discworld* book. That story is reproduced here, together with a collection of other work spanning most of his writing career, all with explanatory introductions and supplemented by Josh Kirby illustrations the majority of which have not previously appeared on, or in, books. The book is subtitled “Collected Shorter Fiction” rather than “Collected Short Stories” which is as it should be: although every word in it (apart from the afore-mentioned introductions) is fiction, there are several pieces where anything constituting a narrative is conspicuous by its absence. But no matter - in fact, some of the pseudo-nonfiction items are arguably better than the stories.

Unsurprisingly, there are several *Discworld* stories, variously featuring such familiar characters as Cohen the Barbarian, Grammy Weatherwax, the Wizards of Unseen University, Corporal Carrot and Death. The two-thirds of the book which is non-*Discworld* contains some fantasy, including that first teenage story which is quite powerful, although the writing style could be described, forgiveably, as a trifle naïve. However, there are also several stories which provide irrefutable evidence that inside the well-known writer of comic fantasy is a first-rate SF writer trying to get out - and usually succeeding! It is also of interest to find here a story which provided the original idea for *THE LONG EARTH* recently developed with Stephen Baxter as a novel.

It would be overstating the case to say that this collection provides a comprehensive overview of Pratchett's writing career. Between 1965 and 1970, for example, he wrote 247 story episodes for the children's column in the local newspaper where he was then employed, although judging by the samples reproduced here the less said about these the better, and there are probably another one or two stories from this era which remain uncollected. Nevertheless it is a reasonably complete selection which displays a considerable range of styles and talents. Some pieces are merely humorous while some are out-and-out jokes; withal some are quite totally serious.

Taking it all-in-all this is superb, confirming Pratchett (as if confirmation were needed) as a born writer, brimming with ideas and abundantly possessed of the ability to turn them into words. It should be on the bookshelves of every reader who has ever enjoyed his work and of a good many more who do not yet know what they are missing. *MJ*

FORTHCOMING BOOKS



LONDON FALLING by Paul Cornell / Tor Books / 400 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0230763210 / December 6th Urban fantasy thriller with London Police officers using modern tactics to hunt a supernatural criminal

QUEEN OF NOWHERE by Jaine Fenn (*Hidden Empire 5*) / Gollancz / 352 pgs / £14.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0575096998 / December 27th SF in which Bez, an elite hacker, tries to bring down the hidden empire of the deadly Sidhe.

PLANESRUNNER: Book 1 of the Everness Series by Ian McDonald / Jo Fletcher Books / 320 pgs / £16.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1780876658 / January 3rd Everett Singh searches across multiple universes for his missing father



SCRIVENER'S TALE by **Fiona McIntosh** / Harper Voyager / 592 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007503933 / January 3rd Fantasy adventure. Ex-psychologist finds his patient's delusions of a medieval world, Morgravia affecting his life in modern Paris.

NEXUS by **Ramez Naam** / Angry Robot / 448 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857662927 / January 3rd An experimental nano-drug, Nexus can link human minds together. A young Nexus scientist encounters espionage and unforeseen dangers - for there is far more at stake than anyone realises.

THE DEMI-MONDE: SUMMER (Book 3 of the Demi-Monde) by **Rod Rees** / Jo Fletcher Books / 576 pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1849165051 / January 3rd Third in an SF series set in a dystopian virtual reality. Three girls battle to prevent super-warriors, the Grigori from escaping into the real world.

BURY MY HEART AT WH SMITHS by **Brian Aldiss** [No Image available] / The Friday Project / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482122 / January 5th Re-issue of the entertaining memoir from the science fiction Grand Master.

NEW FILM RELEASES

Listings should not be necessarily taken as recommendations. View at your own peril! Not a lot available this month unless you want Santa or young children's films.

THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY 3D - Release date December 14th Peter Jackson directs the first of three films adapting the novel by J R R Tolkien. IMAX at Millennium Point will also show the three *Lord of the Rings* films in the preceding week (6th - 11th). Standard price £8.50 each or £12 for all three if quote booking reference for *The Hobbit*. Details at 0121 202 3333 or www.giantscreencinema.co.uk/page.asp?section=1125§ionTitle=Lord+Of+The+Rings+Trilogy

SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED - Release date December 26th Comedy where three magazine employees head out to interview a man who placed a classified ad seeking a companion for time travel. (NB Limited distribution)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organizers before travelling. Any information about forthcoming SF/Fantasy/Horror events is always welcome – please send to Carol at goodwinced@yahoo.com

CHICKS UNRAVEL TIME Book launch 5th December, London The sister book to the 2011 Hugo Award-winning CHICKS DIG TIME LORDS features award-winning female writers, media professionals and scientists, examining *Doctor Who*. Join Kate Welsh, Juliet McKenna, Una McCormack, Iona Sharma, Elizabeth Bolton-Gabrielson and Laura Simpson to celebrate female writers and all things *Doctor Who*. Location: Forbidden Planet Megastore from 6 to 7pm. Address is 179 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8JR

Steampunk On The Thames 7th December, London Robert Rankin is the special guest at this intimate event (limited to 50 tickets), which takes a cruise along the Thames in a sailing barge. The barge departs from Tower Millennium Pier (Lower Thames Street, EC3N 4DT), and the cruise lasts from 6pm to 10pm. The ticket price includes a glass of mulled wine and some soup! Price: £36 (and £2.81 booking fee) www.timemachineadventures.com Twitter: @timemachinead

Paul Cornell signings 6th and 12th December, Various venues Doctor Who and Marvel/DC writer will be signing copies of his first novel LONDON FALLING at Forbidden Planet, London (6th December from 6 to 7pm) and Toppings Book Store, Bath (12th December from 7.45pm). The Toppings event is ticketed but you can redeem your tickets for money off the book. Tickets: £6/£5. Website: www.toppingbooks.co.uk or phone: 0122 5428 111

Lee O'Malley and Hope Larson signing 9th December, Nottingham Hope Larson, Eisner Award-winning creator of numerous YA graphic novels, will be signing at comics store Page 45 (9 Market Street, NG1 6HY), along with her husband Bryan Lee O'Malley, who wrote Scott Pilgrim. The signing takes place from 1 to 4pm. Bring one of their books to be signed and they'll do a small sketch for you. Website: www.page45.com Twitter: <https://twitter.com/pagefortyfive>

Stan Nicholls Talk 10th December, Northfield Stan will be at Northfield library. Every month the library hosts a guest author under the banner *Talk About*. He will be discussing fantasy and science fiction for one hour from 11am, and admission is free. Northfield library is at 77 Church Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2LB. Further details at www.birmingham.gov.uk/northfieldlibrary

Gareth L Powell signing 12th and 15th December, Various venues Steampunk/SF novel ACK-ACK MACAQUE launches at Forbidden Planet, London on December 12th then at Forbidden Planet, Bristol on December 15th (times to be confirmed – Check at <http://forbiddenplanet.com/events/>)

CONVENTIONS

REDEMPTION '18, 22nd – 24th February 2018, Coventry Multimedia SF Convention run “by fans for fans”. To be held at the Britannia Hotel, Coventry. Guests include Virginia Hey (*Farscape*) and Kim Newman (author). Adult weekend £70 until 11th February. Details at www.conventions.org.uk/redemption/

SCI-FI WEEKENDER (formerly SFX Weekender), 1st – 3rd March, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales Commercial multi-media convention. Guests include Craig Charles (*Red Dwarf*), Brian Blessed, Peter Davison (*Dr Who*) and Robert Rankin. Writers from Angry Robot, Harper Voyager, Orbit and Black Library. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See www.scifiweekender.com

EIGHT SQUARED CON (EASTERCON 64), 29th March-1st April 2013, 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 www.eightsquaredcon.org/

FUTURA, 15th June, Wolverhampton. One day SF convention at the Wolverhampton Light House. Guest of honour Ian R Macleod. More information at www.alexdavisevents.co.uk

LONCON 3 (WORLDCON 72), 14th – 18th August 2014, London. Held at ExCel exhibition centre. Guests of Honour include Iain M Banks, Chris Foss, Robin Hobb. £95 Adult membership. See www.loncon3.org

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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**

May 10th - tba

June 14th - authors' agent **IAN DRURY**

July 12th – **RICHARD DENNING** on self-publishing

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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