

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

FEBRUARY 2013

ISSUE 497

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THE QUIZ

Friday 8th February 2013

It's time for the annual quiz again. This is held in February due to the potential bad weather and the risk of speakers (and members) being unable to get to Birmingham city centre. The members of Birmingham University SF Society have again been invited to hopefully swell the numbers.

For those who have not previously attended, the quiz is a pub quiz style event with several teams competing for honours and prizes.

I understand that questions will cover SF and Fantasy in books, magazines, artwork, films, TV, radio, gaming etc so everyone has a chance of winning. The questions should hopefully be a mixture of easy, medium and a few "stinkers" for the "anoraks" amongst us. It is recommended that each team consists of no more than four people and each team should

MARCH 8th - local urban horror author JAMES BROGDEN

have members of both the BSFG and the University guys.

So, if you haven't already, start revising – a great excuse for reading and watching more SF (and Fantasy!)

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.

LAST MONTH'S AGM AND AUCTION

For those unable to attend, the January meeting was the Annual General Meeting. Most of the Committee retained their jobs – see masthead on Page 1.

Dave Nichols has been unable to act as Secretary for a few months due to ill health and sent his announcement and apologies that he was not well enough to stand for re-election. Vicky Stock was elected as the new Secretary (a role which she has previously held) and will combine this with the role of Membership Secretary. There was a presentation of a bottle of wine and an engraved decanter label to Rog Peyton in recognition of his sterling work and long service as Newsletter Editor. I (Carol Goodwin) was elected as the new Newsletter Editor. We also welcomed Yvonne Rowse to the Committee in her role as Novacon 43 Chairperson.

Vernon Brown also announced that the committee had recently received a note from Dave Cox's sister in which she describes "the enormous pleasure, fun, friendship and interest that membership of the 'Brum Group' gave Dave over the years. Novacon was a 'must do' event in his diary." As Vernon said, 'we think that while Dave derived a great deal from the Group he contributed at least as much'. He'll be missed. *CG*

AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions or queries to me at goodwined@yahoo.com

The May issue of the Newsletter will be the 500th edition. To celebrate, this will be a "bumper" issue. We have some ideas for extra articles etc

already but if anyone has anything they would like us to consider including or indeed, wishes to submit something, then please talk to me at a meeting or email me.

CG

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Director **Michael Winner** died on January 21st. Winner was best known for his work on DEATH WISH, but he also directed the horror films SCREAM FOR HELP, THE SENTINEL, and THE NIGHTCOMERS. He was nominated for a Saturn Award for THE SENTINEL French editor **Jacques Sadoul** has died. As an editor for *Editions Opta* and *J'ai Lu* he brought English language science fiction to France as well as publishing French authors. He founded the Prix Apollo and also published HISTOIRE DE LA SCIENCE FICTION MODERNE in 1973 Italian actress, **Mariangela Melato** has passed away. Mainly appearing in Italian films she was known to British audiences for her role as General Kala in the 1980's film FLASH GORDON Interviews with science fiction writers including **Steven Barnes, Octavia Butler, Terry Dowling, David Gerrold, Tim Powers, Jim Blaylock and Robert Silverberg** online via <http://www.sfsignal.com/archives/2013/01/a-host-of-sff-classic-author-interviews-from-the-hour-25-radio-show-butler-powers-silverberg-and-more/#more-70353> **Amazing Stories** is now fully available online to the public. Membership and contents are free via <http://amazingstoriesmag.com/> Nominations for the **British Science Fiction Award** have been announced. Members of the BSFA and attendees of Eastercon (where the winners will be announced) are eligible to vote. Details of nominees and links to some of the nominated works are available at www.bsfa.co.uk/ Also announced this month was the shortlist for the British based **Kitschies Awards**. This relatively new award is for the “most progressive, intelligent and entertaining works that contain elements of the speculative or fantastic”. Previous winners have included Lauren Beukes and China Mieville The **TAFF (TransAtlantic Fan Fund)** ballot to enable a fan to travel to LoneStarCon 3 in the USA is open for voting and will run until April 19th. The two candidates are **Jim Mowatt** and BSFG member **Theresa Derwin**. Further information is available at <http://taff.org.uk> Fantasy author **Jim Hines** has become an internet hit for highlighting the ridiculous, unrealistic and sexist way women are often portrayed on SF/Fantasy book covers by posting photos of himself in contortions trying to imitate the poses. See <http://jimhines.livejournal.com/612200.html> and has raised \$15000+ dollars for charity Disney announced that the new **STAR WARS V11**

film is to be directed by J J Abrams who has previously produced SF/Fantasy TV series such as *Lost*, *Fringe* and films such as CLOVERFIELD and the re-booted STAR TREK *Locus Magazine* has produced the results of a poll for the best 20th century and 21st century SF and Fantasy writing. The 20th century novel winners were LORD OF THE RINGS (Fantasy) and DUNE (SF). The 21st century novel winners were AMERICAN GODS (Fantasy) and OLD MAN'S WAR. Full details are available on the *Locus* website. CG

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(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).

TANGLE OF NEED by Nalini Singh

Gollancz / 422 pgs / £12.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0575119475

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan



One of the issues that some readers have against the Mills & Boon romantic novels is that they are written to a formula and that the outcome is predictable. Certain things will happen, others won't. Yet to some degree there are a lot of fantasy novels that the same thing could be said about. Readers of both tend to come back for more of the same. Perhaps we ought to admit that there are a lot of people who do not like being turfed out of their comfort zone and this applies to what we read as well as real life. I was once told that science fiction was Mills & Boon for boys and in the 1950s this was a criticism that could be levelled at Space Opera. (How many volumes did *Perry Rodan* reach?) While I can hear the sound of teeth grating in the back ground it is worth remembering that not everyone is open to experimental or cutting edge writing.

Nalini Singh writes in a comfort zone niche of science fiction. Her novels are formulaic but there are enough readers out there (probably the majority are female) for TANGLE OF NEED to be the eleventh in the *Psy-Changeling* series. The setting is 2081. While there are many aspects of

this world that feel contemporary, the biggest difference is that we humans share our planet with two other sub-species. The Psy have, as their name suggests, mental powers. They are linked in the PsyNet which stabilises their personalities. For decades they have lived behind the wall of the Silence, a discipline that trains them to reject emotion in all its forms. Initially, this was a survival strategy. Among the Psy there are empaths, teleporters, healers, foreseeers and mind-readers. The other group are the changelings who can morph into the shape of an animal. They are highly emotional, the complete opposite of the Psy.

The main story arc to the whole series is a war between Henry Scott who is Pure Psy. He will countenance no deviation from the condition of Silence. Some of the Psy have broken Silence and got back in touch with their emotions. They have come under the protection of a wolf-changeling pack led by Hawke Snow. Thus Scott is at war with the Changelings. Hawke and his allies inflicted a crushing blow to Scott's troops at the end of *KISS OF SNOW*, the previous book in the series.

Each individual part in the saga, though, is the erotic dance between two of the characters. In *KISS OF SNOW* it was between Hawke and Sienna, a Cardinal-X Psy. She has the ability to release a cold, consuming fire and this was the turning point in the climax of the novel. In *TANGLE OF NEED* the couple in romantic conflict are Adria and Riaz. Both are dominant wolves. (There is no space to go into the intricacies of pack structure here.) She is emotionally bruised as she has recently broken up from her partner, partly because his neediness was sucking the life out of the relationship. Riaz has a different problem. Wolves mate for life. The woman who should be his mate was already happily married to another before he met her. As a result he knows that he will never know the complete bonding that mates share. Going with another is not something he wants to contemplate as he sees it as betrayal yet he is drawn to Adria. Wolves need to touch. Adria offers him that without strings. Or so it seems. This novel explores their developing understanding of each other's needs. Expect hiccups.

Like Mills & Boon books, this series satisfies a need in the market. For those who like their romance very spicy – the sex is explicit – and don't mind a good sprinkling of emotion, then they will enjoy this series. At the same time this is a blend of SF (the Psy element) and fantasy (the Changelings) with an added dimension of a political thriller threaded through it. Characters and plot lines are developed and not all threads are completely tied up by the end. This is not for every reader but Singh does grab those in favour by the scruff of the neck and drag them deep into the story she is telling.

PM

***BLUE FRIDAY* by Mike French.**

Elsewhen Press / 190 pgs / £9.99 enlarged paperback / ISBN: 978-1908168078

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Most of us have played those games with friends where a situation is taken and the conversation follows the line ‘what if’ and gets sillier and sillier as the night progresses. In the morning you cannot remember any of the details, only that at the time, it was hilarious. Mike French has been playing those games but he does remember what happened. The result is this book which can be best described as a surreal science fiction satire. While in *INTRUSION* Ken MacLeod took a serious and depressing view of the consequences of the Nanny State, Mike French has gone for the bizarre.



At the present time there is an emphasis on a work-life balance urging employers not to overload their staff so that they have very little time for their families and social life. The EEC Working Hours Directive only regulates time in the workplace but doesn't account for working from home. What if... the law insists family time is sacrosanct and there is vigorous enforcement. That is the scenario postulated in *BLUE FRIDAY*.

Overtime is not just banned, it is illegal. At five o'clock all nine-to-five married couples must begin to make their way home (shift workers must adhere to their shift patterns). Charlie Heart is part of the resistance. At 5.00 precisely on the Friday before Christmas he closes down his work station and induces the surveillance network to think he is leaving the building. Instead, he is signing on to an illegal overtime network. (It is never clear what they do when working illegally; perhaps it is the thought that they are breaking taboos that is the lure). Unfortunately, Charlie is caught by two enforcement agents, Mr Stone and Mr Brittle, whose job it is to eject lingering staff from the building. They enjoy their job a bit too much. The intention is to tranquilise Charlie and put him in a taxi home; however also in the building is a Family Protection Officer, Trent, who discovers tabs of AvodaOne in Charlie's possession. These pills cause a mental breakdown and produce an obsession for work in those that take them. When Charlie escapes from custody he is shot trying to get back into his office. Trent then

finds himself replacing Charlie as head of the underground overtime network. Why or how this happens is not clear. It doesn't really matter.

This is a skewed and cynical look at a future that has taken things to extremes. It is not one that I could conceive of actually coming about, whereas MacLeod's version is all too plausible. Mike French was having fun while writing *BLUE FRIDAY* and he loads bizarre on surreal on bizarre. It is witty with the wry humour that only satire can impart and all readers will find some resonance in it. To try pulling apart the structure and point out the ways that this scenario would not work would be very ungallant. This is a book that should be taken for what it is, a comment of the idiocy of law makers. The only thing that can be done with a book like this is to go along for the ride and enjoy the experience. *PM*

(Elsewhen Press is a small press publisher based in Dartford, Kent, UK and this book was kindly donated at Novacon. For other works see www.elsewhen.co.uk)

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NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

Listings should not be necessarily taken as recommendations. View at your own peril!

BEAUTIFUL CREATURES - Release date February 13th Adaptation of Young Adult Fantasy novel. Teenager Ethan must save Lena, (a magic "Caster") from being claimed by the "Dark" on her 16th birthday

CLOUD ATLAS - Release date February 22nd Visually stunning film with six interrelated stories from the 19th century to a distant, post-apocalyptic future

HANSEL AND GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS - Release date February 22nd Re-imagining of the fairy tale has Hansel and Gretel as bounty hunters who track and kill witches

OZ: THE GREAT AND POWERFUL - Release date March 8th Prequel shows one man's journey from Kansas to Oz and how he becomes the Wizard

ROBOT AND FRANK - Release date March 8th Comedy set in the near future. After his son gives an ageing jewel thief (Frank Langella) a caretaker robot, he and the robot become a new heist team

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

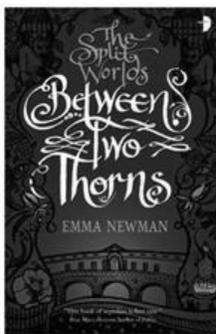


A CONSPIRACY OF ALCHEMISTS by Liesel Schwarz / Del Rey / 384 pgs / £14.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0091949860 / February 7th Steampunk. Airship pilot Elle Chance becomes involved in the war between the Alchemists and Warlocks

THE DAYLIGHT WAR (Demon Cycle 3) by Peter V Brett / HarperVoyager / 560 pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0007276196 / February 11th Fantasy. Two deadly rivals must unite to defeat an army of demons

THE INEXPLICABLES (Clockwork Century 4) by Cherie Priest / Tor / 368 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1447225591 / February 14th SF/Fantasy by Locus award winning author. An eighteen year old orphan seeking “(un)gainful employment” is attacked by an unknown “Inexplicable” monster

THE EMPEROR OF ALL THINGS by Paul Witcover / Bantam Press / 464 pgs / £16.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0593070703 / February 14th Alternative history/fantasy set in 1758. A pocket watch with strange properties is sought by various factions



SEOUL SURVIVORS by Naomi Foyle / Jo Fletcher Books / 320 pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN 978-1780875965 (also released on same date as £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1780875989) / February 28th SF set in the mountains near Seoul. As a meteor threatens the Earth, a bio-engineer develops a strange solution to save humanity

BETWEEN TWO THORNS by Emma Newman / Angry Robot / 416 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857663191 / March 7th Urban Fantasy set in Bath’s mirror city. Only a mad sorcerer and a dislocated soul can help find the missing Master of Ceremonies

INTRUSION by Ken Macleod / Orbit / 416 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1841499406 / March 7th SF. The Fix, a pill taken when pregnant eradicates many common genetic defects. Is refusing to take the pill a private matter of conscience or wilful neglect of the unborn child?

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

Space Fiction, 9th - 24th February, Leicester, The National Space Centre is hosting a series of literary events, readings etc over the half term holiday. Guests include Ian Whates, Alastair Reynolds, John Jarrold, Peter Hamilton and Brian Aldiss on various days. They are also hosting a competition for the "Best Science Fiction Book". Nominations are via online video (can also be recorded at the Space Centre during the above dates). Each book will be given its own profile page on the Virtual Bookshelf and nominators are eligible for prizes. Day Entry is £13/11 but free upgrade to an annual pass is available if tickets are booked in advance. Details at www.spacecentre.co.uk or 0116 261 0261 (Monday to Friday)

PicoCon, (Imperial College Science Fiction and Fantasy society), 16th - 17th February, London Guests of Honour include Peter F Hamilton, Kate Griffin, Richard Morgan and Steph Swainston. Tickets £20 for two days. Details at picocon@icsf.org.uk

Christopher Brookmyre signing, 18th February, Birmingham Author of SF novel BEDLAM will be signing at Waterstones, Birmingham New Street. from 7:30 pm. Tickets £3, available from the shop and redeemable against purchase of the book on the night. For further details call 0843 2908151

Peter Brett signing, 27th February, Birmingham Fantasy author will be discussing his new release THE DAYLIGHT WAR at Waterstones, Birmingham from 7:30 - 9:30 pm. Tickets £6/£4 concessions, available via The Box (0121 245 4455) or www.birmingham-box.co.uk/event/meet-fantasy-autor-peter-brett

Jasper Fforde talk, 19th February, Ross-on-Wye Jasper Fforde will be talking about the latest book in his *Thursday Next* series, THE WOMAN WHO DIED A LOT. Venue: The Phoenix Theatre from 7pm. Address is Palace Pound, St Marys Street, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 5HT. Ticket £5 (£3 redeemable against book), obtainable on 01989 564 464 or email ross@rossiterbooks.co.uk

"Ain't Afraid of No Ghost, 24th February, Leicester. Solo comedy show subtitled "One man versus the supernatural" written and starring stand-up comedian Paul Gannon, whose life changed forever in 1984 when he saw Ghostbusters. Venue is Kayal, Leicester (153 Granby Street, LE1 6FE). Tickets: £7 (Leicester). Twitter: @paulgannonshow

MICROCON (Exeter Sci-Fi Society), 25th – 26th February, Exeter Microcon
Microcon 2012 is on February 25th and 26th (Saturday and Sunday). Speakers include Anneke Wills (*Dr Who*), Jasper Fforde, Cryptozoologist Richard Freeman, Phillip Reeve, author of YA novels *Mortal Engines*, David A. Hardy and Steve Green. Details at <http://societies.ex.ac.uk/scifi/microcon.html>. Tickets cost £12.

CONVENTIONS

REDEMPTION '13, 22nd – 24th February 2013, 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, 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/

Middle Earth Weekend, 11th – 12th May, Hall Green Held at Sarehole Mill, Cole Bank Road, Hall Green. Free entry (Parking £2). Details: www.facebook.com/MiddleEarthWeekend or www.middleearthweekend.org.uk

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

WORLD FANTASY CON, 31st October – 3rd November, Brighton. Guests of Honour include Richard Matheson, Alan Lee, Brian Aldiss and Tessa Farmer with China Mieville as Master of Ceremonies. Numbers are limited to book early. Attending membership £125. at <http://wfc2013.org/howtojoin01.html>

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

NOVA CON 43

8 – 10TH NOVEMBER 2013

GUEST OF HONOUR

JO WALTON

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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