

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MARCH 2013

ISSUE 498

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Friday 8th March **JAMES BROGDEN**

Local author James Brogden was born in Manchester and now lives in Worcestershire where he teaches English. He also spent part of his childhood in rural Tasmania, Australia. His first novel **THE NARROWS** is an urban fantasy with horror

April 12th - honorary president and SF author **BRIAN ALDISS**

elements set in Birmingham (published by Snow Books). Before being accepted by Snow Books the novel won through three rounds of WEbook.com's "Page to Fame" competition to the "Agents' Showcase" section and also won a Bestseller award from [www.Page 99test.com](http://www.Page99test.com) both of which helped him to be accepted by Snow Books. He has also published a number of short stories including "If Street" (*The Alchemy Press Book of Ancient Wonders*), "The Gestalt Princess" (*Gears and Levers Vol. 1*), "The Evoked" and "The Last Dance of Humphrey Bear" (both in *Dark Horizons* 2011) and "The Pigeon Bride". "The Pigeon Bride" won a short story competition run by the Midlands issue of "*The Big Issue*" in 2002 for a "modern midlands fable". He is currently working on his second novel TOURMALINE that will be published in July. His website is <http://jamesbrogden.blogspot.co.uk/>. CG

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.

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 goodwincd@yahoo.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Screenwriter **Richard Collins** has died at the age of 98. He wrote the scripts for the 1950's **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** and episodes of the *Planet of the Apes* television series. He was more famous in the US however for naming people to the McCarthy-era House Un-American Activities Committee The former editor of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine, **Anne Devereaux Wilson Jordan Crouse** has died. She also published poetry in several SF magazines and founded the US Children's Literature Association (which named its Outstanding contribution award after her) Actor **Robin Sachs** died at the young age of 61. His first role was in the film **VAMPIRE CIRCUS** and he later

appeared in many genre films and television shows including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Ethan Rayne), *Babylon 5* (Na'Tok and Na'Kal) and *GALAXY QUEST* (Sarris) **Richard Briers** has died. Although most well-known for *The Good Life*, he had many genre appearances including appearances in *Torchwood*, *Doctor Who*, **PETER PAN**, **MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN** and his final film **COCKNEYS vs ZOMBIES** Veteran BBC aerospace correspondent **Reg Turnill** has died aged 97. He was sent to Moscow to cover the first manned space launch and regularly reported on the Apollo moon landings. He was the first person to break the news of Apollo 13's difficulties. He officially retired in 1975, but continued covering the space programme for *John Craven's Newsround* Fragments of the **Chebarkul meteorite**, which spectacularly hit Russia in February, have been found near Chebarkul Lake in the Ural Mountains. The meteorite left a 20 foot wide crater. Tests have shown it to be a chondrite (stone with approximately 10% iron). Scientists do not believe there is any connection with the asteroid 2012 DA14 which grazed past the Earth at a distance of only 27,000km on the same day Astronomers have held an online poll to name two **moons of Pluto** (currently designated P4 and P5). **William Shatner** has appealed via Twitter for votes for Vulcan and Romulus (the latter has been excluded as it is already the name of a moon). Voting closed on February 25th and hopefully results will be known by the time this newsletter is received **Tor UK** has opened to unagented submissions. See <http://torbooks.co.uk/2013/01/29> for guidelines). No closing date at present but may "close it down temporarily" if too many submissions are received so quick submission is advised **ABOUT TIME** - A short documentary film exploring **Brian Aldiss'** views on writing and the passage of time is now available on the website Vimeo (<http://vimeo.com/59980686>). The film was originally made for the Sundance London short film competition The **Nebula Awards nominees** have been announced. Details are available at www.sfwa.org Annoyed by persistent abuse **John Scalzi** has pledged to donate \$5 to charity every time a "troll" posts an offensive comment on the author's website. His initial limit of \$1000 has been augmented by celebrity friends to a potential total of over \$50,000 Harper Collins UK will publish three of **Ray Bradbury's** best known works as e-books (previously only available in the US). The titles are **FAHRENHEIT 451**, **THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES** and **THE ILLUSTRATED MAN** **Solaris Books** has launched its own new YouTube channel that will feature trailers, book launches and author interviews and readings. CG

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BOOK REVIEWS

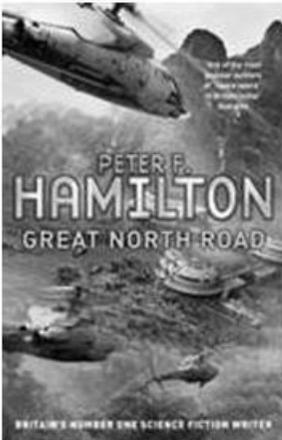


(REVIEWERS please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwinced@yahoo.com Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting).

GREAT NORTH ROAD by Peter F. Hamilton

Macmillan / 1087 pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0230750050

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



For many readers, being faced with a book this size is daunting. Fans of Peter Hamilton's work will expect it and often two more of similar dimensions to come. **GREAT NORTH ROAD** though is a singleton.

Hamilton is a writer whose breadth of imagination can scarcely be contained within the tomes he produces. That flair is evident all through the book. It is, however, three intertwined novels (of reasonable length) that only completely make sense within this structure and the background of all three is complex.

By the time of the action (2143), there has been an exodus to other planets via Gateways, a device Hamilton has used in other novels. One of the Gateways is sited in Newcastle and leads to a planet orbiting Sirius known as St Libra. The planet has been developed to produce biooil, a commodity which is used to fuel transport and homes but also processed into "raw", the substance that manufactory units use to produce almost every other

kind of commodity. The biooil coming from St Libra is controlled by the Norths. Descended from Kane North's three sons, the North family are all clones. There are a lot of them around.

Sid Hurst is a member of the Newcastle crime squad and he is called in when a naked body is found floating in the Tyne. The corpse is a North. He is landed with the job of identifying the clone and tracking down the murderer. With the political and financial stranglehold the Norths have on the country, this becomes top priority and all the resources regardless of cost are thrown at the situation. One problem is that all Norths are accounted for and those who dumped the body have gone to elaborate lengths to hide their trail. Complicating matters further is the mode of death. Five thin sharp blades inserted into the chest to shred the heart is exactly the same as the method used to kill Bartram, one of the original brothers and his household twenty years previously.

Angela Tramelon has so far spent twenty years in prison, convicted of Bartram North's murder. She has always maintained that there was an alien in the house that night and that was responsible for the deaths. Now it looks as if she might have been right. Just one problem - no sentient life has ever been discovered on any of the planets humans have colonised and no animal life has been found on St Libra, the site of the original killings. As a result, an expeditionary force is mounted to go deep into the interior in search of this alien. Angela goes with them.

These two plot concepts unfold in tandem. The third revolves around Angela and is told largely through her memories. It tells of the events that lead up to the point at which she now finds herself. This is the strand that allows the reader insight into the societies, technologies and problems that this future world has had to face.

With a book this size, the question that is often asked is, 'is it necessary?' Could cuts have been made? While the answer here is that yes, doing so too drastically would have reduced the richness of the writing. Could the three narratives be untangled to make a trilogy? No. While the detective 'novel' centred around Newcastle would have made a perfectly adequate book on its own, Angela's story is very much tied in with the way the plot is resolved. For some readers, the expedition to search for the alien, being under the aegis of the military, would be exciting. It is not a straight forward hunt but told on its own it would become tedious. It needs the other strands to strengthen the complexities. Personally, this is where I would have preferred some compaction, though this may be because there are so many characters that it is difficult to get to know those other than the principles who we are introduced to before they set off.

Those who like Hamilton's work will have an enjoyable journey through this book. Science Fiction fans will gain pleasure in wallowing in the creation of a master of the genre. PM

REDSHIRTS by John Scalzi

Gollancz / 306 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN: 978-0575134294

(also £7.99 eBook)

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

John Scalzi is the author of a number of SF novels including his OLD MAN'S WAR sequence which are well crafted mainline space odyssey masterpieces. In addition he has published a number of books with a more off beat but still highly entertaining SF bent, e.g. THE ANDROID'S DREAM. REDSHIRTS is in the latter sub-genre.

This story starts as its hero Ensign Andrew Dahl joins the Universal Union (called the DubU in most of the book) Capital Ship and fleet flagship *Intrepid*. He and the other members of his intake group soon find out that there is something very strange going on aboard the *Intrepid*. For instance why:

Do the staff take such drastic steps to avoid the ship's senior officers?

Is the ship involved in so many 'Away Missions'?

Does every Away Mission involve lethal confrontation with alien forces?

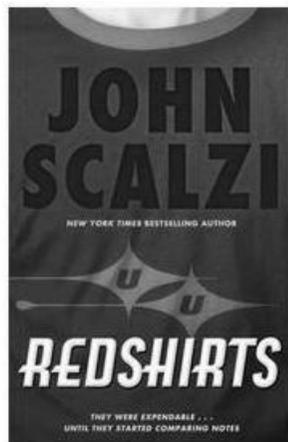
Do Away Mission personnel make out of character and illogical decision?

Is at least one low ranked mission member (a redshirt) always killed while the ship's captain, the science officer and the handsome Lieutenant Kerensky always survive?

Can the ship's scientific breakthroughs never be replicated back at Fleet Headquarters?

I am sure that any resemblance to 'Star Trek' is not coincidental.

After suffering through a number of away missions Ensign Dahl and his intake cohort investigate these phenomena resulting in them taking an extraordinary and risky away mission of their own which appears to bring the story to a definite end. However there is still about a third of the book to go! John Scalzi cleverly fills this with three codas focussing on the



aftermath of the away mission on three seemingly minor characters. The outcome of these codas and especially the final one makes one think that perhaps they were the real objective of the narrative.

The strong storytelling and characters in REDSHIRTS and his previous books makes them a pleasure to read confirming my strong opinion that John Scalzi is a writer of great imagination and skill. I eagerly look forward to reading any book he produces in the future. *JTP*

SHADOW'S MASTER by Jon Sprunk

Orion Books / 309 pgs / £12.99 trade paperback / ISBN 978- 0575096103

Reviewed by Dave Corby



SHADOW'S MASTER by Jon Sprunk is the third and presumably final novel in a trilogy, the first being SHADOW'S SON, which I reviewed in a previous Newsletter and the second being SHADOW'S LURE, reviewed in issue 489. This series is set in a low-fantasy world that started off feeling slightly pre-renaissance. The original setting, the realm of Nimea, sported sophisticated city life, an all-powerful church rule, but no gunpowder or more modern technology. In the later volumes the rest of the world seems more of a standard medieval sword and sorcery setting.

In the first book we met Caim, the main protagonist, a mercenary assassin with a mysterious control over shadows. We also met Josie, a young noblewoman at threat from the church state due to her heritage. Also detailed is Kit, a young ethereal fae woman in love with Caim, but whom no-one but Caim can perceive. The story concerned Caim's protection of Josie and eventually her crowning as Empress of Nimea at the end of the first book

In the second volume Caim searched to the north to determine the origin of his powers and what happened to his family. Separately we also read the story of Josie dealing with her new existence as Empress Josephine, dealing with duplicitous courtly intrigue and assassination attempts on her life. At the end of the second volume Caim discovers his heritage from the dark shadow folk who fled from a dark dimension to enslave the peoples of the north.

The first volume hinted at the supernatural, and spared overuse of the admittedly well written violence. In the second book I noted that Sprunk felt able to indulge, ramping the supernatural and violence up to high levels, and I concluded with regret that less was probably more.

Happily **SHADOW'S MASTER** settles down a bit and scales back the violence while using the mystical shadows plotline far more deftly. Throughout all three volumes I have found Sprunk's text to be easily read and pleasingly paced. The better balance of the third book ensures the series goes out on a high; I had worried that the overuse of blood and guts would build to a shattering crescendo, but the final book seems well judged and better considered.

The story nicely answers all of Caim's questions about his parentage and family. It finishes off his tale in a nice final fashion. It also makes the antagonists more than one-dimensional horrors, having a pleasing roundness that seemed to give them understandable motives. The story also resolves the relationships between Caim and Josie, and Caim and Kit. Josie's story deals with her fully growing into her role as empress, but interestingly leaves certain political matters unresolved. The reader cannot help but wonder if there is more to tell of the Nimean empress and her travails.

Of course, any review of a final book in a series cannot help but view the series as a whole and I find myself happy to recommend them. This series is not without faults; although not Sprunk's first published works, they were his first novels. Occasionally clumsy, yet fairly engaging, I nonetheless found them very enjoyable. The books are good because Sprunk makes the setting and story, which could be very familiar and even boring, feel fresh and unfamiliar. The characters, which could be stereotypical, seem vibrant and curious. This is an entertaining sword and sorcery series, if not one you will necessarily take much from in years to come. Ideal reading between other epics, if you will. Furthermore, these books make me anticipate what else Sprunk might produce. I wonder what he might be like writing SF? *DC*

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

JACK THE GIANT SLAYER - Release date March 22nd Farm boy Jack restarts an ancient war between humans and giants.

THE CROODS - Release date March 22nd *Dreamworks* animation in which a prehistoric family search for a new home after an earthquake.

G.I. JOE - THE RETALIATION (3D) - Release date March 27th Sequel based loosely on the action figures. The GI Joes fight the evil COBRA group.

THE HOST - Release date 29th March A parasitic alien forms a bond with her human host and they try to aid the “free” humans fight back. Based on the novel by Stephanie Meyer (*Twilight*)

WAR OF THE WORLDS ALIVE ON STAGE! - Release date April 11th Film recording of the Jeff Wayne stage show (recorded live at the O2 Arena on 15th December 2012)

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

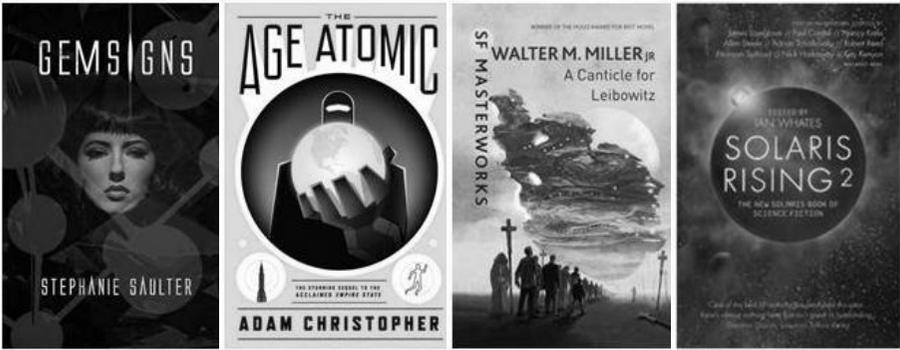


ZERO POINT by Neal Asher / Tor / 400 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0330524520 / March 14th Alan Saul (now a mind in the computer network) has overthrown the despotic Committee but many threats remain

WOLF HOUND CENTURY by Peter Higgins / Gollancz / 320 pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN 978-0575130531 (also released on same date as £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575130548) / March 21st Fantasy. Factions including terrorists, fallen angels and other supernatural forces struggle in an alternate Soviet -style world

AMONG OTHERS by Jo Walton / Corsair / 416 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1472106537 / March 21st Award winning SF/Fantasy novel now available in paperback

THE WARRING STATES (The Wave Trilogy 2) by Aidan Harte / Jo Fletcher Books / 592 pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN 978-0857389008 (also released on same date as £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857389015) / March 28th Fantasy set in an alternate medieval Italy.



GEMSIGNS by **Stephanie Sautler** / Jo Fletcher Books / 320 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1780878652 / March 28th SF. Genetically engineered humans (GEM's) seek freedom from the companies that enslave them

THE AGE ATOMIC by **Christopher Adam** / Angry Robot / 416 pgs / £8.99 medium paperback / ISBN 978-0857663139 / April 4th Superhero fantasy thriller (sequel to *EMPIRE STATE*) set in an alternate New York

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ (*SF Masterworks*) by **Walter M Miller Jr.** / Gollancz / 336 pgs / £9.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575073579 / April 11th Classic SF set in a post-apocalyptic world where a monk uncovers sacred relics and the political consequences

SOLARIS RISING 2: THE NEW SOLARIS BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION by **Allan Steele, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, James Lovegrove, Ian Whates** / Solaris/ 448 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781080870 / April 11th /Anthology of modern science fiction stories

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 goodwinced@yahoo.com

BritSciFi3, 9th - 10th March, Leicester The National Space Centre is hosting the third year of this media based event. Guests from *Dr Who*, *Red Dwarf*, *Blake's 7* etc. Also included is a whole area dedicated to Gerry Anderson. 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)

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA Musical, 13th March – 4th May, Birmingham

Andrew Lloyd Weber musical version of the Gothic horror classic. Birmingham Hippodrome. Tickets £22 to £60. Details: www.birminghamhippodrome.com

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS musical, 27th – 30th March, Birmingham

Comedy horror at International Convention Centre Hall 1. Tickets £15 - £25. Telephone: 0121 780 3333 or www.thsh.co.uk/event/little-shop-of-horrors-13

Cory Doctorow signing, 28th March, London

Cory Doctorow will be signing copies of his new novel THE RAPTURE OF THE NERDS (Titan Books) at Forbidden Planet's London megastore (179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR) from 1 – 2 am. Website: <http://forbiddenplanet.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/

CONVENTIONS

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

EDGE-LIT 2, 13th July, Derby.

Literary event considering Science fiction, fantasy and horror writing. Guests of Honour Mike Carey, Tricia Sullivan and Stan Nicholls. Venue is QUAD (Market Place, DE1 3AS). Tickets £25 Website www.derbyquad.co.uk/special-event/edge-lit-2 Phone: 01332 290 606

NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 9th – 11th August, Heathrow.

New fan run “multi-themed mega convention”. Guests include Jaine Fenn, Ben Aaronovitch, Charles Stross, Stan Nicholls and Anne Gay. Kickstarter funded (closes on March 1st) so details of ticket pricing etc to follow at <http://nineworlds.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, and Robin Hobb. £95 Adult membership. See www.loncon3.org

NOVA CON 43

8th – 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 - fantasy author **FREDA WARRINGTON**
June 14th - authors' agent **IAN DRURY**
July 12th - **RICHARD DENNING** on self-publishing
August 9th - **SUMMER SOCIAL** (new venue the Bull near Aston University)
September 13th - Loncon 3 (Worldcon 2014) chair **ALICE LAWSON**
October 11th - TBA
November 1st - TBA
December 6th - **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL** - Skittles and buffet

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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