

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

APRIL 2013

ISSUE 499

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Friday 12th
April
**BRIAN
ALDISS**

This month we warmly welcome back our honorary president, Brian Aldiss OBE who is well known to many of you. Brian Aldiss is a hugely respected and influential writer. Although primarily known for his science fiction (novels,

May 10th - Award-winning fantasy author and GOH at
Eastercon 2013, FREDA WARRINGTON

short stories and numerous anthologies) he has also written poetry, plays, autobiographies and non-fiction. His first science fiction novel NON STOP was published in 1958 (and is still available as a SF Masterwork). He was part of the “New Wave” which included writers such as J G Ballard, Michael Moorcock and Harry Harrison. Several of his books have been adapted as films including FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND, BROTHERS OF THE HEAD and the short story “Supertoys last all Summer long” (loosely adapted as the film A.I: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE).

As well as actively writing science fiction he also was influential as an editor of many anthologies including SF Horizons (jointly with Harry Harrison). He has also been important in the study of science fiction with his histories of the genre, BILLION YEAR SPREE which was subsequently updated as TRILLION YEAR SPREE.

He has won many awards including the Hugo (HOTHOUSE and TRILLION YEAR SPREE), Nebula (THE SALIVA TREE), BSFA (THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE, BILLION YEAR SPREE, HELLICONIA SPRING and HELLICONIA WINTER) and the JOHN W CAMPBELL (HELLICONIA SPRING). In 2000 he was elected a Grand Master by the SFWA and inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2004. Outside the SF field he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters from Liverpool University in 2008 and was awarded an OBE in 2005 for his services to literature.

In 2012 Harper Collins imprint The Friday Project acquired the rights to publish more than 50 titles of his work, including both older and new work, which they have been progressively republishing. This month they will reissue FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND, DRACULA UNBOUND and MOREAU’S OTHER ISLAND. His latest novel FINCHES OF MARS will be available on 6th June. Further details can be found at his website www.brianaldiss.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 goodwinced@yahoo.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

.... Horror writer **James Herbert** died on March 20th at the age of 69. His first novel **THE RATS** was published in 1974 when he was 28. He published 23 books with sales in excess of 54 million, with his latest **ASH** released this March. Several of his works were adapted for film and television including **THE FOG**, **THE SURVIVORS** and recently **THE SECRET OF CRICKLEY HALL**. In 2010 he was made a Grand Master of Horror and also awarded an OBE The death of SF author and professional guitarist **Dan Morgan** at the age of 85 in 2011 is only just becoming known. His earliest novel was **CEE-TEE MAN** but he was probably best known for his *Sixth Perception* series. He appeared as a guest speaker at the BSFG in 1973, talking about “Science in SF” and he was a Guest of Honour at Novacon in 1975 **Micky Moore (aka Michael Sheffield)**, author and director has passed away. He was a child actor in silent films who graduated to a second unit director. His films included the *Indiana Jones* films, **WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE**, **WAR OF THE WORLDS** (1953), **GHOSTBUSTERS II** and **WILLOW** Author **Rick Hautala** has died. More well-known in the US, he wrote over 30 novels, mainly in the horror field. In 2012 he received the Bram Stoker Lifetime Achievement Award and the World Horror Grandmaster Award **R MacLeod’s** alternative history novel, **SNODGRASS**, in which John Lennon left the Beatles before they became famous is to be dramatised for Sky Arts Playhouse. It will be broadcast on April 25th Rates for attending **Loncon3** will increase on May 1st from £95 to £105 for a full adult attending membership The **British Fantasy Society (BFS)** Short Story Competition will be open from 1st March to 30th June. Further details at www.britishfantasysociety.co.uk/the-bfs-short-story-competition-2013/ **Carl Sagan** and **Ginjer Buchanan** (editor-in-chief of Ace and Roc books in the USA) are to receive the 2013 Solstice Award for individuals who have had “a significant impact on the science fiction or fantasy landscape” **Radio 4 Extra** (available via a digital radio, PC or iPlayer) is worth checking out. They run a reasonable range of science fiction/fantasy programmes. Recent broadcasts included **NEVERWHERE** (Neil Gaiman), **GUARDS, GUARDS** (Terry Pratchett) and SF short stories selected by Brian Aldiss A map showing the “**oldest light**” in the sky produced using the ESA Planck satellite shows the universe is 50 million years older than previous estimates and supports the Big Bang theory two **Apollo** engines have been recovered from 4km deep in the Atlantic Ocean. They will be restored and put on public display. Unfortunately

because the serial numbers are partly missing it is unclear at the moment which Apollo mission they are from. CG

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THE KITSCHIES 2012 AWARD WINNERS

The Kitschies, presented by The Kraken Rum, reward “the year's most progressive, intelligent and entertaining works that contain elements of the speculative or fantastic”. The prizes were announced on Tuesday, 26th February at the Free Word Centre, London.

Red Tentacle (Novel): ANGELMAKER by Nick Harkaway (William Heinemann)

Golden Tentacle (Debut Novel): REDEMPTION IN INDIGO by Karen Lord (Jo Fletcher Books)

Inky Tentacle (Cover Art): A BOY AND A BEAR IN A BOAT by Dave Shelton illustrated by the author (David Fickling Books)

The Black Tentacle: THE WORLD SF BLOG (this is a discretionary prize for an outstanding contribution to the conversation surrounding genre literature)

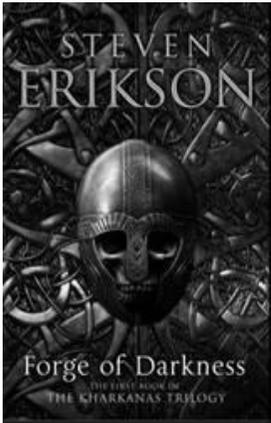


BOOK REVIEWS



(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).

FORGE OF DARKNESS: The First Book in the Kharkanas Trilogy by
Steven Erikson
Bantam / 662 pgs./ £20 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0-593-06217-3
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



We all know that some reviewers can be very snobbish when it comes to genre fiction often complaining that there is no literary merit in such as Science Fiction, Fantasy or Romance. Even crime fiction comes in for a battering. When it comes to explaining exactly what literary fiction is, the definitions can become as complex and varied as trying to come up with a definition of Science Fiction. For readers of popular fiction, literary fiction is often interpreted as the unreadable. More likely they mean that to get the most out of it they are required to think. A reader does not always want to be made to dwell on each sentence to grasp what the writer is intending. It would equally be a mistake to believe that no writers of fantasy can produce work of a literary quality.

For me, good literature is produced by writers who take the time to consider the structure of their sentences and their plot, who can paint pictures with their prose. You can find it any section of bookshop or library. Steven Erikson is a literate writer, his books are of literary quality. He also has a following amongst fantasy readers, especially those tired of the usual formula. That doesn't mean that everything is perfect - nothing ever is.

FORGE OF DARKNESS is the first of a new fantasy trilogy (his last series ran to ten volumes). The world he has created is one on the verge of civil war. A problem with societies that are steeped in violence is that peace is not something they, especially the warriors, can easily settle to and accept. The ruler of the Tiste, the principal race, is known as Mother Dark. She is almost a goddess. Her consort is Draconus but some feel that she should take a husband and champion Urusander for the job. The

Legion that he led against the Tiste's enemies has been stood down, disbanded although they are all ready to take up arms again at Urusander's request. That is not what he wants but events are being manipulated by others, including Hunn Raal, Urusander's second in command, and the mysterious race known as the Azathanai. This is novel filled with bloodshed and betrayal and makes David Gemmell's novels look tame.

Erikson is able to keep control of a vast landscape of characters and events but too many of these are introduced, too quickly. With the unfamiliar names that do not always trip easily off the tongue it becomes confusing. It is hard to remember who is allied to whom and whether the characters are on a side you would want to root for. This is not helped by the fact that all of the main characters, whatever their status or schooling, are prone to philosophising. While this can increase the depth of characterisation, not all of these people would have the knowledge or breadth of education to do this. It makes it hard to differentiate them. Neither does it help matters that characters that you are beginning to enjoy the company of are sometimes suddenly and nastily killed.

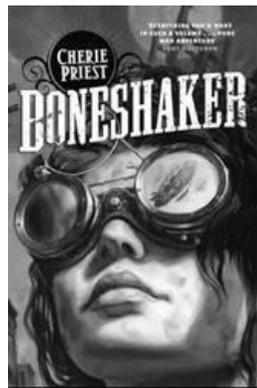
Those who are already fans of Erikson's writing will appreciate this new series. Newcomers need to be prepared to be initially confused by the plethora of characters, the concentrated, literary writing style and being made to think about the twists the plot throws up. Personally, I prefer the more relaxed style of George R.R. Martin who paints on an equally wide canvas with a larger personnel and twisted politics. PM

***BONESHAKER* by Cherie Priest**

Tor / 414 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978 1 4472 2508 9

Reviewed by Michael Jones

In nineteenth-century Seattle, in an alternative U.S.A., an eccentric inventor named Leviticus Blue accepted a contract to build a tunnelling machine to be used to bore through the ice of the Klondike in search of gold. On completing it however, he tested it on a destructive journey under the financial district of the city, causing widespread death and destruction, and then disappeared. Unfortunately, his depredations also opened a geological rift which released a subterranean source of poison gas, contact with which killed many people and turned those of the remainder who were unable to escape into zombies. Within a year the city had been surrounded by a massive wall two hundred feet high to contain



the gas. A fragment of the original populace continued to inhabit the decaying city, living a hand-to-mouth underground existence and forced to wear gas-masks and fight off the zombies whenever they venture out into the open.

Fifteen years later, Blue's son Ezekiel makes his way inside the city with the intention of learning the truth about him. His mother, Blue's widow, realising he has little idea of what he may be getting into, follows in the hope of rescuing him from the consequences of his folly.

The book recounting all this tries to be science fiction, steampunk, a zombie story and an adventure yarn all at the same time and because it tries to do all things at once it ends up not doing any of them very well. The tunnelling machine with which it begins is unoriginal and the release of poison gas from underground is implausible, as are its effects; the zombies, here called "rotters" because they are living people gone rotten rather than re-animated corpses, are no more believable than such usually are and although there is a certain amount of gadgetry involved it seems to be designed, if that is the right word to use, to fit the needs of the story rather than to be technologically realistic. On the plus side it is quite well-written and the characters of Zeke and his mother are rounded and complete although some of the subsidiary characters are less so.

The *Clockwork Century* novels, of which this is the first, have become well-established in the U.S. during the last three or four years. On this evidence some might find it difficult to see what all the fuss is about. *MJ*

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

OBLIVION - Release date April 12th SF with Tom Cruise as a veteran assigned to extract Earth's remaining resources who starts to question his mission.

EVIL DEAD - Release date April 19th Remake of the cult zombie classic where 5 friends in a remote cabin manage to raise the dead.

IRON MAN 3 - Release date April 26th Based on the *Marvel Comics'* character, Tony Stark/Iron Man must defeat new villain, The Mandarin

STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS – Release date May 9th Second film in the rebooted *Star Trek* series. Captain Kirk and the *Enterprise* crew hunt the mysterious attacker of Star Fleet.

FORTHCOMING BOOKS



VURT by Jeff Noon / Tor / 368 pgs / £16.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0230768802 / April 14th 20th Anniversary edition of *Arthur C Clarke* award winner. Cyberpunk SF where Scribble must rescue his sister marooned in an alternate reality (a “vurt”)

THE SHINING GIRLS by Lauren Beukes / Harper Collins / 432 pgs / £12.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0007464562 / April 25th A serial killer travels through time to cut out the “spark” of his “shining girls”

MAYHEM by Sarah Pinborough / Jo Fletcher / 400 pgs / £14.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1780871257 / April 25th In Victorian London a police surgeon hunts a Ripper-like killer but is he more monster than man?

THE CITY by Stella Gemmell / Bantam Press / 560 pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0593070987 / April 25th Fantasy by David Gemmell’s widow. A betrayed general must defeat the unnaturally youthful emperor to save the city.



A TASTE OF BLOOD WINE by Freda Warrington / Titan Books / 512 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781167052 / May 3rd Re-issue of acclaimed fantasy. Horrified by the carnage of World War 1, a vampire struggles to escape his cruel master.

MAGICIAN'S END by Raymond Feist / Harper Voyager / 664 pgs / £20 hardcover / ISBN 978-0007264797 / May 6th Fantasy. Billed as the final volume in the long-running *Riftwar Cycle*, the magicians of Midkemia may need to make the ultimate sacrifice to save the whole world.

THE SERENE INVASION by Eric Brown / Solaris / 416 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781080917 / May 9th SF. A war-torn, resource poor Earth welcomes the peacebringing “Serene” aliens apart from a few who wish a return to the “bad old days”.

TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG (SF Masterworks) by Connie Willis / Gollancz / 528 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575113121 / May 9th Hugo Award winning novel. The side effects of time-travelling leave a historian stranded in Victorian England unable to remember his vital mission.

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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

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

Ian Whates and Chris Beckett signing, 6th April, London Double signing of short story collections by Ian Whates (GROWING PAINS (PS Publishing)) and Chris Beckett (THE PEACOCK CLOAK (Newcon Press)). At Forbidden Planet, London Megastore (179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR). Details at <http://forbiddenplanet.com/events/>

Jeff Noon signing, 11th April, London Jeff Noon will be signing copies of the 20th Anniversary edition of VURT at Forbidden Planet, London Megastore (179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR). Details at <http://forbiddenplanet.com/events/>

Lauren Beukes signing, 29th April, London Arthur C Clarke award winner will be signing copies of her new SF novel THE SHINING GIRLS at Forbidden Planet, London Megastore (179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR). See <http://forbiddenplanet.com/events/>

Bradford After Dark III, 11th - 21st April, Bradford. Horror film strand of Bradford International Film Festival. Various package prices available. www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/BradfordInternationalFilmFestival

John Boyne talk and signing, 8th May, Nottingham Author of THE BOY IN STRIPED PYJAMAS has crossed into the horror genre with his new novel THIS HOUSE IS HAUNTED. At Waterstones Nottingham Bridle, 7:00pm Tickets £5/£3 for loyalty cardholders Tel: 0843 290 8525

Raymond Feist signings, 6th to 9th May, Various venues Signing copies of his latest novel MAGICIAN'S END at Forbidden Planet , London (6th May) and Waterstones Nottingham Bridle (9th May Tel: 0843 2908525 for details).

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. Guests of honour Ian R MacLeod, Ken MacLeod and Adam Roberts. 11am-late. Tickets £25, including access to all events, from Light House Box Office on 01902 716055 More information at www.light-house.co.uk or email alexdavisevents@hotmail.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

NOVACON 43
8th – 10th NOVEMBER 2013
GUEST OF HONOUR
JO WALTON
Membership is £45 until Eastercon.
See www.novacon.org.uk for details

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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