

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

FEBRUARY 2014

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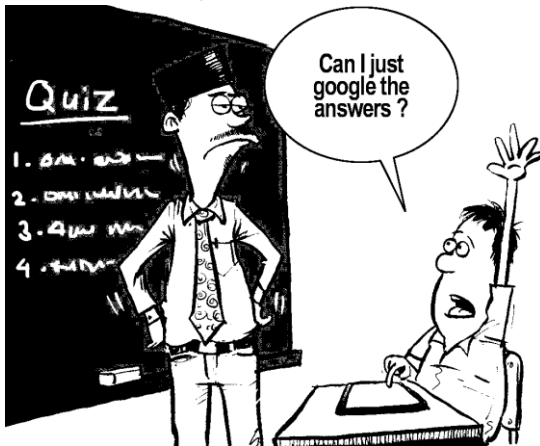
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THE QUIZ

Friday 14th February 2014



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

March 14th - SF and Fantasy authors, Stan and Anne Nicholls

hopefully swell the numbers.

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

This year the questions have been set by a new team of Michael Jones and William McCabe who kindly volunteered to take over from the previous team. I understand that questions could cover many aspects of SF and Fantasy from 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. Teams will be organised on the night (by lots) to encourage mixing and to give everyone a better chance!

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

BSFA AWARD NOMINATIONS

The nominees for the BSFA Award have been announced. The winners will be announced at Satellite4 (Eastercon) in Glasgow on April 20th. Full details of all categories are available at www.bsfa.co.uk.

NOVEL

GOD'S WAR by Kameron Hurley (Del Rey)

ANCILLARY JUSTICE by Ann Leckie (Orbit)

EVENING'S EMPIRES by Paul McAuley (Gollancz)

ACK-ACK MACAQUE by Gareth L Powell (Solaris)

THE ADJACENT by Christopher Priest (Gollancz)

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

The glamorous actress **Alexandra Bastedo**, has died of cancer aged 67. She became famous in the 1960's series, *The Champions* as one of a crime-fighting trio given mystical powers by Tibetan monks. Other genre appearances included roles in **CASINO ROYALE** (1967), **BATMAN BEGINS**, *Randall & Hopkirk (Deceased)* and *The Aphrodite Inheritance*. She also appeared in many English and Spanish horror films The writer, **Stepan Chapman**. He published SF and Fantasy short stories and some poems. His first story "Testing ... One, Two, Three, Four" appeared in *Analog* in 1969. His only novel, **THE TROIKA** won the Philip K Dick Award in 1997 **Nominations for the 2014 Hugo Awards** and the John W Campbell Award for New Writer are now open, as well as the 1939 Retro-Hugo Awards. Members of Loncon3 can vote either online or by post (details of postal voting were included in the Progress Report 2.) Online voting details are at www.loncon3.org/nominations.php. Closing time for receipt of nominations is 7.59 am April 1st UK time **Loncon 3**, this year's Worldcon, has announced a **photography contest**, open to amateur and professional photographers. Photographers can enter their works in three different categories: Alien Earth, Future Cities Today, or a Junior category open to anyone under 16. The junior category has a £2 entry fee and the other categories have a £10 entry fee. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winners, with winners who are not members of Loncon 3 receiving a day pass to the convention as well. The submission deadline is April 30th There has been an **online argument around the Hugos**, with Adam Roberts opining that too often voters vote for their favourite author (or indeed the one with a large online presence who can make the most noise/hype) rather than the particular merits of a book. John Scalzi took umbrage and said that it was not a case of "Hugo slots (and wins) going only to inveterate self-promoters with piles of slavering minions". No doubt the debate will continue! A

bid for **Worldcon 2016** has been received from **Beijing**. Kansas City is the other contender at the moment In an attempt to deal with the negative fallout from last year's all-male shortlist, the **Arthur C Clarke Award** Committee has chosen to release the list of nominees in two parts, first releasing the list of the 34 female authors submitted for the prize on the 16th January, followed by the full submissions list on the 30th January. The total of submissions was a record-breaking number of 121. The official shortlist will be available in March Quercus Books (which includes the **Jo Fletcher imprint**) has been formally offered for sale after a "significant trading loss" in 2013 Scientist and SF author **Geoffrey A Landis** will receive the 2014 **Robert A Heinlein Award** for outstanding work that inspires the human exploration of space. As well as many short stories and novels, Mr Landis also works with NASA including work on the Mars Rover project **Locus** has produced its **recommended reading lists for 2013** SF and fantasy. Recommended SF novels by UK writers include FINCHES OF MARS (Brian Aldiss), JUPITER WAR (Neal Asher), PROXIMA (Stephen Baxter), THE ADJACENT (Christopher Priest), ON THE STEEL BREEZE (Alastair Reynolds) and NEPTUNE'S BROOD (Charles Stross). Full list at www.locusmag.com/Magazine/2014/02/2013-locus-recommended-reading-list/ **Alchemy Press** has opened submissions for short stories for its forthcoming **URBAN MYTHIC 2**. Stories must be contemporary tales with an element of the fantastic and between 3000 to 8000 words. Closing date is April 30th. Electronic submissions only. The book will be launched at FantasyCon in September. See <http://alchemypress.wordpress.com> China's lunar rover, **Jade Rabbit** has been unable to successfully hibernate during the lunar night, which may mean it is unable to continue to function The European Space Agency (ESA) has detected signs of water vapour being ejected from the large **asteroid, Ceres**. The source of the water will be investigated in 2015 when the NASA Dawn probe will orbit and survey the asteroid The ESA also successfully received its **comet-chasing spacecraft, Rosetta** after 31 months hibernation in space. The craft is now preparing for its attempt to survey comet Churyumov-Gerasimenko from August

including actually landing a probe on the comet surface in November. CG

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE - Release date February 21st. Two vampires rekindle their centuries-old relationship. Stars Tilda Swinton and Tom Hiddleston.

A WINTER'S TALE - Release date February 21st. A burglar tries to use his gift of re-incarnation to save the heiress who died in his arms. Stars Colin Farrell and Russell Crowe.

WELCOME TO YESTERDAY - Release date February 28th. A group of teenagers build a time machine, after discovering secret plans.

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

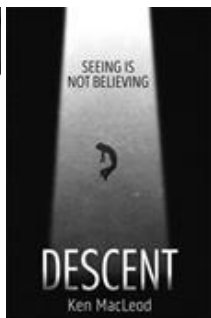
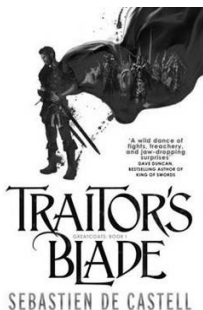


RED RISING by Pierce Brown / Hodder & Stoughton / £16.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1444758979 / January 28th. SF. On Mars, the Helldiver miners live hard lives underground working to terraform the planet. But it is all a lie

METRO 2034 by Dmitry Glukhovsky / Gollancz / 320 pgs / £16.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1473204287 / February 20th. SF sequel to METRO 2033. The last few survivors of an apocalypse seek refuge in the Moscow Metro tunnels.

HONOUR'S KNIGHT (Paradox 2) by Rachel Bach / Orbit / 384 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356502366 / February 25th. SF. Missing memories after being attacked, mercenary Devi Morris is seeing ghostly creatures and something wants her dead.

ANNIHILATION by Jeff Vandermeer / Fourth Estate Ltd / 208 pgs / £10 hardback / ISBN 978-0007550715 / February 27th. SF. The story of the twelfth expedition attempting to investigate the mysterious disaster zone, Area X.



TRAITOR'S BLADE (Greatcoats 1) by Sebastien de Castell / Jo Fletcher Books / 384 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1848663794 / March 6th. The Greatcoats upheld the King's Law until they allowed the King be killed. Reviled as traitors, they must fulfil a last promise to the King to redeem themselves.

DESCENT by Ken MacLeod / Orbit / 416 pgs / £19.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1841499413 / March 6th. SF. In a digital age, why can Ryan find no evidence of the mystery object which fell to Earth near his farm?

FINCHES OF MARS by Brian Aldiss / The Friday Project Ltd / 400 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007549252 / March 13th. SF. First time in paperback. The Mars colony founders as all children are still-born.

LORD DARCY (Fantasy Masterworks) by Randall Garrett / Gollancz / 672 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473201040 / March 15th. Omnibus edition of the Lord Darcy detective novels and short stories.



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).

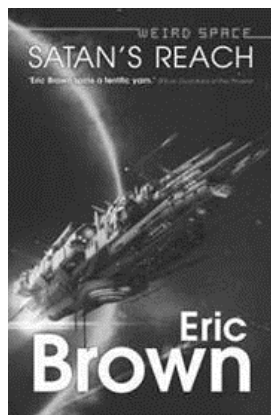
SATAN'S REACH by Eric Brown

Abaddon / 281 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781081303

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

This is the second novel in the *Weird Space* series. It is intended to be a shared world project where different authors will contribute their own novels to the series (similar to *Star Trek* or *Dr Who* books for example). Both this book and the preceding book, **THE DEVIL'S NEBULA** have been written by Eric Brown.

In the *Weird Space* universe, humanity is spread across thousands of worlds, overseen by an autocratic government, The Expansion. There is at present an uneasy truce with the neighbouring aliens, the Vetch. The eponymous Devil's Nebula and Satan's Reach are areas in space not directly controlled by either the Vetch or the Expansion. In the first book we were introduced to the "Weird", an alien race from another dimension who are invading the outer reaches of the human realm. The Weird exist in a number of different forms and in the first book we learned that this included small mind-parasites which could infect and control humans. Seven ships containing these mind-parasites had been sent to Expansion worlds in the past, with some also being sent to the Vetch planets. The only reliable way of detecting an infected human is scanning by a telepath.



The second book starts with a new set of characters than in the first book. We are introduced to Dan Harper, on the run from the Expansion authorities. Sold to them as a child slave, they used his telepathic abilities for espionage and scanning political dissidents. Sickened, he escaped with a valuable ship (which contains secrets he

is unaware of) but is pursued by a bounty hunter. His rescue of a young girl from a horrific death by another alien species, the Ajantans generates another set of enemies. In the course of their flight from their various pursuers, they encounter another infected human/Weird colony and only by working with some of their erstwhile enemies can they hope to escape.

This is good old-fashioned space opera, which you don't need a degree in physics to understand. It is fast-paced and fun with plenty of action and a quick read. I enjoyed this second volume better than the first, where I felt too much time was spent on establishing the various factions (Vetch, humans, Weird etc) at the expense of the characters. Although I enjoyed this book, it is not my favourite Eric Brown novel as it lacks some of the subtleties of his other work, and is a fairly straightforward plot. As a first introduction to Eric Brown, readers would be better directed towards the excellent *NECROPATH*, *HELIX* or *ENGINEMAN* (to name but a few). It will be interesting to see how the series progresses with other writers at the helm as I understand Eric Brown was only contracted to write these first two novels.

CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Abaddon Press)

WEIRD TRAILS 1 - URBAN FANTASY WALKS, DIGBETH, BIRMINGHAM edited by Adrian Middleton.

Fringeworks / 146 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1909573086

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

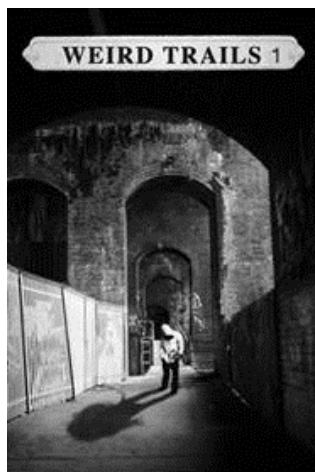
Starting probably with Neil Gaiman's *NEVERWHERE*, there is now almost a sub-genre of urban fantasy based around London's history, geography and urban legends (by writers such as Ben Aaronovitch, Paul Cornell, Alex Verus etc). This book sets out to say why should London have all the fun? There are other cities and places in the UK with just as rich a history and folklore (modern and old) worthy of attention. In this first book in what is intended to be an ongoing series, the editor has examined the area of Digbeth in Birmingham.

For those who are unaware, Fringeworks is a small press based in the Midlands. For a limited budget small press book this works very well. The book is a mixture of factual information and new fiction stories based around the area and legends of Digbeth. It

is organised to be used as a walking tour with a map and route at the start of the book. Indeed when launched at *Andromeda One*, attendees had the option to take the tour with the editor. I certainly found much interesting information about the history and buildings of the Digbeth area of which I had been previously unaware. The many photographs also help to associate building names to the actual places. The use of little picture symbols to associate various “legends” to specific areas of the map is a good idea. One small suggestion is in future volumes, repeating sub-sections of the map throughout the book might be helpful as I did find myself constantly having to flick back to the front of the book to locate the section being discussed. Splitting the map across two pages also made it harder to follow. That said I am not always the best person with maps!

The stories are all fantasy-themed, using facts or legends of the area. The various authors of the short stories which are interspersed between the drier factual sections include some Brum Group members such as Lynn Cochrane, Pauline Morgan (writing as Pauline Dungate), Theresa Derwin and Anne Nicholls. As with any collection of short stories there are always some stories which work better than others, but I found the majority of the stories quite fun although some seemed rather short. My own favourite is “The Curzon Street Horror” by James Brogden, a satisfying little horror story involving a mummified cat and the establishment of the railways. Personally I would have preferred a larger proportion of the book devoted to stories.

The recent success of the *Peaky Blinders* TV programme does seem to have increased interest in Birmingham’s history. This is therefore perhaps a good time to release this book. Whilst I personally found the balance too skewed towards facts (which can make it a little dry at times), this obviously increases the appeal to a



non-genre audience. In its stated aim as a sort of source book for new fantasy based around Birmingham I think it works very well. The concept would clearly work well for other areas and it is nice to read something different and not biased towards London. CG
(Review copy kindly donated by Theresa Derwin)

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

MORBID CURIOSITIES, 20th February, Birmingham. Victorian Ghost and Horror Stories. In the Shakespeare Room, Library of Birmingham at 7pm. Tickets £10. Booking etc. at www.libraryofbirmingham.com/Events

CONVENTIONS

PICOCON, 27th February, London. One day convention at the Imperial College Union. Guests include Sarah Pinborough, Charles Stross and space scientist, Professor David Southwood. Price £10. See www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/

E-M CON (EAST MIDLANDS CON), 16th March, Nottingham. First year of one day mixed media convention. Guests to date include Virginia Hey (Farscape), Craig Charles (Red Dwarf) and Sam Stone (horror/fantasy writer). Tickets £8.50/£12 (early bird). Details at www.em-con.co.uk/

SCI-FI WEEKENDER (formerly SFX Weekender), 27th - 30th March, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales Commercial multi-media convention. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See www.scifiweekender.com

SATELLITE 4 (EASTERCON), 18th - 21th April 2014, Glasgow
Guests of Honour include John Meaney, Juliet McKenna, Alice & Steve Lawson, Jim Burns, Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Sir Terry Pratchett (limited appearance subject to health). £65/50 concessions. Membership form at www.satellite4.org.uk

LONCON 3 (WORLDCON 72), 14th - 18th August 2014, London. Held at ExCel exhibition centre. Guests of Honour include Chris Foss, and Robin Hobb. £115 Adult membership. See www.loncon3.org

SHAMROKCON (EUROCON), 22nd - 24th August, Dublin. Guests include Hugo Award nominated Seanan McGuire, Andrzej Sapkowski (THE WITCHER also now a TV series and game) etc. Price is £35) at www.shamrokon.ie

ANDROMEDA TWO, 20th September, Digbeth, Birmingham. Guests of Honour are Sam Stone and Dave Hardy. Other guests include Stan and Anne Nicholls, Tom Fletcher, Jaine Fenn, etc. Early Friday registration will include movie double bill at the venue. Price from January 1st is £25 (£20 Brum Group). See <http://terror-tree.co.uk/andromeda-tw/>

FANTASYCON, 5th - 7th September, York. Guests of Honour are Kate Elliott, Toby Whithouse and Larry Rostant. Master of Ceremonies is Graham Joyce. Tickets £50 (£35 for British Fantasy Society members). Tickets and details at www.fantasycon2014.org

NOVACON 44, 14th - 16th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour: Kari Sperring and Science Guest: John Gribbin. Cost £45 (subject to review after Easter). Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

February 14th - Annual **SF Quiz**.

March 14th - **Stan and Anne Nicholls**.

April 11th - Writer **Gavin Thorpe**.

May 9th - Senior lecturer in robotics, **Dr Nick Hawes**.

June 13th- SF and fantasy author **Stephen Hunt**

July 11th - Urban fantasy author **Sam Stone** and publisher **David Howe**.

August 8th - **Summer Social** meal.

September 12th - **Chris Morgan**

October 10th - Dr Who fan and lookalike **Richard Ashton**

November 7th - SF and fantasy author **Storm Constantine**

December 5th - **Christmas Skittles Social**

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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