

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 2014

ISSUE 516

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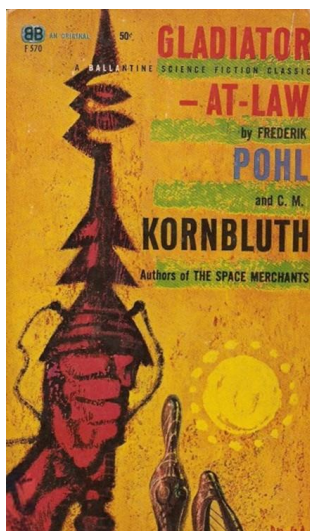
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CHRIS MORGAN **12TH SEPTEMBER**

CHRIS MORGAN has been a Brum Group member since the early 1970s and is one of the select group who have attended all Novacons. He is a writer and poet who has collected and auctioned SF art for many years.

His talk will be a PowerPoint presentation on "The Golden Age of SF Cover Art" and will look at artwork on American SF book & magazine covers, particularly covering the 1950s and 1960s and the work of Richard Powers. This talk is a companion piece to the one on British cover art done for the Brum

Group and at Novacon in 2010.

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

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

HUGO AWARDS 2014

The 2014 Hugo Award winners were announced on August 17th. The ceremony was held in London at LonCon 3 and hosted by Justina Robson and Geoff Ryman. There were 3587 valid ballots. This year's award featured the "Gherkin" building (St Mary Axe in London) as a backdrop to the usual Rocket.

Best Novel: ANCILLARY JUSTICE by Ann Leckie (Orbit)

Best Novella: EQUOID by Charles Stross (www.tor.com, Sept. 2013)

Best Novelette: "The Lady Astronaut of Mars" by Mary Robinette Kowal (www.tor.com, Sept. 2013)

Best Short Story: "The Water That Falls on You from Nowhere" by John Chu (www.tor.com, Feb. 2013)

Best Related Work: "We Have Always Fought the Women, Cattle and Slaves Narrative" by Kameron Hurley (*A Dribble of Ink*)

Best Graphic Story: TIME by Randall Munroe (XKCD website)

Best Dramatic Presentation (Long Form): GRAVITY written by Alfonso Cuarón & Jonas Cuarón (Warner Bros.)

Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form): "The Rains of Castamere" from *Game of Thrones*. Written by George R.R. Martin, Directed by David Nutter. Created by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss (HBO)

Best Editor - Short Form: Ellen Datlow

Best Editor - Long Form: Ginjer Buchanan



Best Professional Artist: Julie Dillon

Best Semiprozine: *Lightspeed Magazine* edited by John Joseph Adams, Rich Horton and Stefan Rudnicki

Best Fanzine: *A Dribble of Ink* edited by Aidan Moher

Best Fancast: *SF Signal Podcast* by Patrick Hester

Best Fan Writer: Kameron Hurley

Best Fan Artist: Sarah Webb

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (not a Hugo): Sofia Samatar

THE RETRO HUGO AWARDS 1939

The 1939 Retro Hugo Award winners were announced on August 15th.



These were awarded for the 75th Anniversary of the first Worldcon for the best work published in 1938 (as there were no Hugo awards at the first Worldcon). The ceremony was held in London at LonCon 3 and hosted by Mary Robinette Kowal and Rob Shearman. There were 1307 valid ballots. The award featured the Chrysler Building in New York (city where the 1st Worldcon took place)

Best Novel: THE SWORD IN THE STONE by T H White (Collins)

Best Novella: WHO GOES THERE? By John W Campbell (*Astounding Science-Fiction*, August 1938))

Best Novelette: "Rule 18" by Clifford D Simak (*Astounding Science-Fiction*, July 1938)

Best Short Story: "How We Went to Mars" by Arthur C Clarke (*Amateur Science Stories*, March 1938)

Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form): THE WAR OF THE WORLDS by H G Wells. Written by Howard Koch & Anne Froelick. Directed by Orson Welles (The Mercury Theater on the Air (CBS)

Best Editor - Short Form: John W Campbell

Best Professional Artist: Virgil Finlay

Best Fanzine: IMAGINATION! By Forrest J Ackerman, Morojo and T Bruce Yerke

Best Fan Writer: Ray Bradbury

LONCON 3 –THE 75TH WORLDCON by Carol Goodwin

In August quite a few of the Brum Group were to be found at the Excel centre in London at the 75th Science Fiction World Convention – Loncon 3. Unlike some members of the Birmingham Group this was the first time I had been able to attend a World Con full time. My brief taster as a one day visitor at AussieCon 3 (Melbourne) in 1999 does not feel as if it really counts – especially when you consider that had around 1600 attending compared to around 8000 for this Loncon. A lot of this is based off my personal experience. Other people will have different experiences which they might be willing to share with you.

I actually started my Worldcon a day early and attended one of several pre-events organised by various publishers. I went to the Gollancz Festival at Waterstones which was excellent. In the room which I attended there was a reading from Joanne Harris (*THE GOSPEL OF LOKI*) and then there were very funny and entertaining talks from Joe Hill (US horror writer), Patrick Rothfuss (US fantasy) and four new writers (Den Patrick, Ed Cox, John Hornor Jacobs (all Fantasy) and Jon Wallace (SF)). There was also another session on at the same time with different writers and at the end one had the opportunity to get autographs from all the writers. There was also a very generous goodie bag and copious amounts of wine so a very enjoyable evening.



The Excel centre itself is huge – it has two railway stations and the convention itself was spread over four floors. The lifts were reserved for those with mobility issues whereas the rest of us had to use stairs and escalators. Luckily there were plenty of the latter as by Day 5 I felt like an old-style Dalek: unable to climb stairs! Apart from the meeting rooms (which varied hugely in size and seating capacity) there were two main areas; the Fan Village and the Dealers room. The fan village theme was meant to be something like a Summer Fayre with marquees around a central “green” and of course a bar as well (with not enough seating!). The marquees were manned by various groups, mostly bidders for future conventions. Many of these held parties in the evening with free food and drink. For those who are interested, if you search on YouTube

(www.youtube.com) for Loncon 3 fan village there is a time lapse video of the construction of the village.

As most of you no doubt know, the Dealers Room is mainly a well-baited trap designed to part the lowly fan from their money! There were lots of British (Gollancz, Harper Voyager, Rebellion (Solaris/Abaddon, Titan etc) and foreign publishers there as well as second-hand dealers including Durdles Books owned by BSGF members, **Ian and Lou Morley**. Needless to say I bought far too many books although there were lots of freebies and competitions as well. Special thanks personally to Harper Voyager for allowing a few of us to spend half an hour drinking with Joe Abercrombie and giving us a free advance copy of his as yet unreleased next novel - a personal highlight. The Dealers Room also had the Art Show which was superb featuring many excellent artists including some of the Hugo Award nominees. Some of my personal favourites were Jim Burns, John Harris and Dominic Harman but there were lots of other superb exhibits.

The programme itself was also huge with often 5 or 6 items that I wanted to attend all at the same time. There were lots of different themes including large Science and Literature programmes including a talk by a Russian Cosmonaut. There was also less traditional areas such as board and video games, TV/Film SF, manga/anime etc. This meant the Worldcon appealed to a wide range of interests and it was encouraging to see a great variety of people including a lot of young people and even one person attending “virtually” (See Photo - telepresence Robot).

One of the things I was fairly new to was the concept of the Kaffeeklatsch, where a small group sits and chats with an author/editor/artist etc. Some of the big name artists were impossible to get to but I had a couple of excellent sessions with British based SF authors Stephanie Sautler (BINARY and GEMSIGNS) and Chris Beckett (DARK EDEN). There were also of course the big events such as the Hugos, the Masquerade Competition (with some incredible costumes which must have taken months of work) and another of my personal highlights, the Worldcon Philharmonic Orchestra.



I loved meeting lots of new people and the massive range of events and activities (even though I couldn't do everything) and I definitely found some new interests. I kept seeing the other Brum Group members in passing but we were all so busy dashing to different things we never managed to be free at the same time for longer than about half an hour. Loncon was absolutely manic and took a lot of energy but was great fun - my carefully marked out plan of what to do didn't survive the first day! I definitely had that "kid in a candy shop" feel of too many treats to choose from and I also missed some planned panels as the room was too full or I was too busy talking to people. However some of the unplanned events that I then tried became some of my favourites. I am now back home and trying to come back down to Earth and work out where I am going to put all the books I couldn't resist buying!

CG

NEWS IN BRIEF



Actor and director **Richard Attenborough** has died at the age of 90. As well as his illustrious mainstream work, his SF/Fantasy connections include his roles as John Hammond in **JURASSIC PARK** and **JURASSIC PARK: THE LOST WORLD**, Kris Kringle in **MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET** and Albert Blossom in the original **DOCTOR DOOLITTLE**. He also directed **SHADOWLANDS** about the life of C S Lewis (author of the Narnia series) Actor and comedian **ROBIN WILLIAMS** died at the age of 63. His breakthrough was playing the

alien Mork in the comedy, **MORK & MINDY**. Other fantasy/SF films included the genie in **ALADDIN**, the grownup Peter Pan in **HOOK**, **THE FISHER KING**, **JUMANJI**, the robot in **BICENTENNIAL MAN**, **FLUBBER**, Teddy Roosevelt in the *Night at the Museum* films and **WHAT DREAMS MAY COME** Kansas City defeated Beijing for the rights to host **Worldcon 2016** and will be called MidAmericonII Paris has won the bid to host the **2016 Eurocon** The **Eaton Collection of SF and Fantasy** (the world's largest publically owned collection) which was under threat from new management at the university has received a gift of \$3.5 Million from the estate of Jay Klein, who had been photographing writers and fans at conventions since the 1940's The late **Anne**

McCaffrey's *Pem* series has been optioned by Warner Bros who hope to turn it into a series of films The Alchemy Press book **URBAN MYTHIC 2** (to be published in September) features stories by Adrian Tchaikovsky, Tanith Lee, and local authors James Brogden and BSFG member Pauline Morgan (writing as Pauline Dungate) The British Film Institute will have a three month celebration of film and television **SF, Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder** at various venues around the country. Details are still to be confirmed but events, guests and screenings will be happening across the UK. As part of this, the BBC will show a new four part series, **TOMORROW'S WORLDS** which will look at SF in its many forms. Keep an eye on the BFI website for update (www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/)

CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

(NB Prices given are Recommended Retail Price and may be available at cheaper prices)



DRAGONS AT CRUMBLING CASTLE by Terry Pratchett / Doubleday Childrens / 352 pgs / £6 hardback / ISBN 978-0857534378 / September 12th. Short story collection featuring time travel, tortoises, dragons, monsters and mayhem!

THE HIVE CONSTRUCT by Alexander Maskill / Doubleday / 352 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0857522214 / September 25th. SF. In New Cairo artificial implants help the poor survive but when they fail anarchy and class struggle ensue.

BETE by Adam Roberts / Gollancz / 320 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575127685 / September 25th. SF. When domestic animals are injected with Artificial Intelligence then is it murder to kill them for food?

A SLIP OF THE KEYBOARD by Terry Pratchett / Doubleday / 336 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-085751224 / September 25th. A collection of non-fiction writings billed as from “serious to surreal”



COMPANY TOWN by Madeline Ashby / Angry Robot / ? pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857665355 / September 30th. SF. On the giant oil rig, Company Town, the only unenhanced human must investigate a series of interconnected murders.

ANCILLARY SWORD (Imperial Radch 2) by Ann Leckie/ Orbit / 383 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356502410 / October 7th. SF. Sequel to multi-award winner, Breq the soldier who was a spaceship tries to protect a family on far from tranquil Athoek Station.

THE ABYSS BEYOND DREAMS (Chronicle of the Fallers 1) by Peter F Hamilton / Macmillan / 750 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0230769465 / October 9th. SF. Nigel Sheldon, Commonwealth creator investigates prophetic visions which emanate from the mysterious Void.

FEARSOME MAGICS edited by Jonathan Strahan / Solaris / 416 pgs / £13.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781082126 / October 9th. Fantasy. An anthology of new fantasy stories from Christopher Priest, Garth Nix, Catherynne M Valente and others.

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

I ORIGINS - Release date September 26th. New eye scanning tests appear to detect reincarnated people.

DRACULA UNTOLD - Release date October 3rd. The origin story of the man who will become Dracula

LIFE AFTER BETH - Release date October 3rd. Zombie romantic comedy (!) - A young man gets a second chance when his dead girlfriend returns.

THE MAZE RUNNER - Release date October 10th. Young Adult SF. Teenage boys trapped in a monster filled maze attempt to escape.

FILMED IN SUPERMARIONATION - Release date October 10th. Documentary about the technique of Gerry & Sylvia Anderson (as used in *Thunderbirds* etc) featuring interviews and archive footage.



BOOK REVIEWS

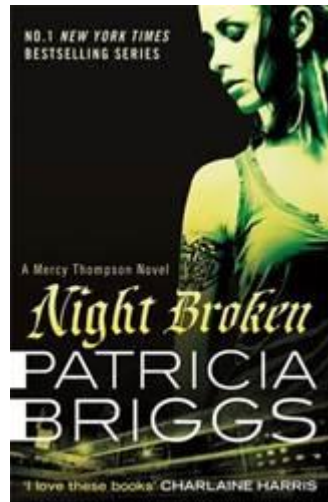


(REVIEWERS please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwinced@yahoo.com Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting).

NIGHT BROKEN by Patricia Briggs
Orbit / 341 pgs / £12.99 Trade paperback
/ ISBN 978-0356503295

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

Mercy Thompson, coyote shapeshifter, VW mechanic, wife and mate of Adam the local werewolf pack's alpha, is in trouble once again. Adam's ex-wife, Christy is in peril and has turned to him for rescue and protection from her abusive new boyfriend. As Adam has an oversized sense of responsibility he cannot turn away the mother of his daughter. This is a nightmare for Mercy as not only is Christy in her home but she



is also attempting to take over, trying both to recapture Adam and destroy Mercy's relationship with the pack.

In a world that contains werewolves, vampires, the fae and other paranormal creatures it's not surprising that Christy's boyfriend turns out to be other than human and a major threat to the local population. To add to the stresses and strains on Mercy a character from one of Patricia Briggs' *Alpha and Omega* novels, FAIR GAME comes calling in the middle of the night and places an onerous obligation on her. This leads Mercy to make contact with an unknown, to her, half-brother who proves vital to the unfolding situation. I hope that he sticks around to feature in subsequent novels.

NIGHT BROKEN is the 8th book in this series and is up to Patricia Briggs' usual high standards. As with the previous books it is rich in well-described and believable characters most of whom have shared Mercy's life and adventures throughout the series. Mercy herself is a terrific heroine, brave and compassionate and totally loyal to her family, friends and those who come to rely on her or need her help. It should not be confused with other 'urban fantasy' books which are written as 'romance' novels. Patricia Briggs' books are urban fantasy adventures, not too gory but with a satisfying and appropriate amount of violence and interpersonal relationships.

I have read all the previous books in this series and own all but one of them - an omission I hope to rectify soon. In my mind this series is so good that any new Mercy Thompson novel is a must have (even though I dislike that phrase) worthy of space on my somewhat crowded bookshelves. As a PS anyone planning to spend time in the Canary Islands should perhaps keep a wary eye open for one of this book's characters.

JTP

(Review copy kindly donated by Orbit)

EMPRESS OF THE SUN (Everness book III) by Ian McDonald

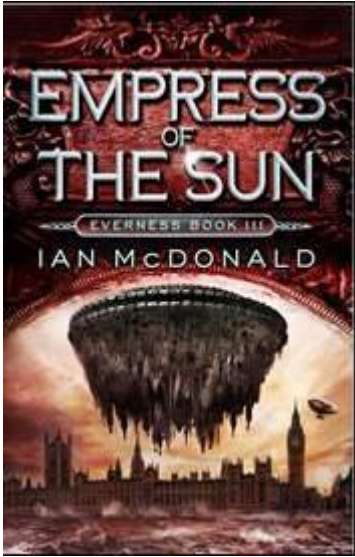
Jo Fletcher Books / 385 pgs / £20.00 hardcover / ISBN 978-100780876719

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

One of the big differences between adult and YA fiction is the abilities accorded to the young people involved. They may be beset by problems that would appear insurmountable to the ordinary youngster but they will win out in the end. In adult novels this might not be the case and the story has possibility of ending in total disaster - just as it might in real life. The hero of this series of books, Everett Singh, is a mathematical genius. He hasn't quite sussed out girls yet, but the one he is most in contact with is bit

of a tease. She's also a lot more confident with her abilities and she can pilot an airship.

It has long been proposed that each time a decision is made, an alternative future becomes a possibility. In the first volume of the series, PLANESRUNNER, Everett discovered that his father, a physicist, had



been involved in developing a Heisenberg Gate. This device enables users to cross from one possible world to another. So far, ten have developed the technology. Everett's Earth is the tenth. His father, Tejendra, developed a mathematical model that enabled any of the possible worlds to be accessed, and left it for Everett, just before he was kidnapped. Now there are factions, the most dangerous being led by Charlotte Villiers, who will go to any lengths to acquire the device. Everett, though, has help. It comes from the crew of the airship *Everness*.

At the end of the second volume, BE MY ENEMY, the ship jumped to a world where Everett hoped to find his

father. EMPRESS OF THE SUN begins with *Everness* being dropped, literally, onto a very strange version of Earth. The solid matter in the solar system has been remodelled to form a huge disc with the sun moving up and down in the centre, through a hole. The technology to do that is so obviously in advance of what Everett is used to so that first they speculate that aliens have created it before they meet the inhabitants. It seems that the dinosaurs were not wiped out in this plane but have had the extra two hundred million years to develop though they still retain some characteristics of their reptile ancestry and are considerably warlike.

Thus the crew of the *Everness* have an extra set of problems added to what they had before. The airship is in desperate need of repair and as they start on the work, they find themselves caught between two of the tribes vying for supremacy. They still have Charlotte Villiers on their tail, trying to get the Infundibulum - the map of the other planes and Everett is still searching for his father.

In BE MY ENEMY, Everett's alter (from another Earth) was placed in Everett's family as a spy. Known, for convenience, as Everett M, he has his own problems. Not only does he have to avoid the pitfalls of

impersonating himself, he also has to deal with the nano-spider that came back with him from Earth 1 and wishes to absorb carbon based life into one huge nano-entity. Despite his original brief, he finds he is beginning to care about what happens to his alter's friends and family.

While this is still a great action packed young adult book the series is beginning to delve deeper into what it is to be a caring human. The philosophy is not overwhelming but carefully paced. There is one problem. This is not a trilogy. The ending sets up further mysteries that have yet to be unravelled. Excellent reading for all ages.

PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)

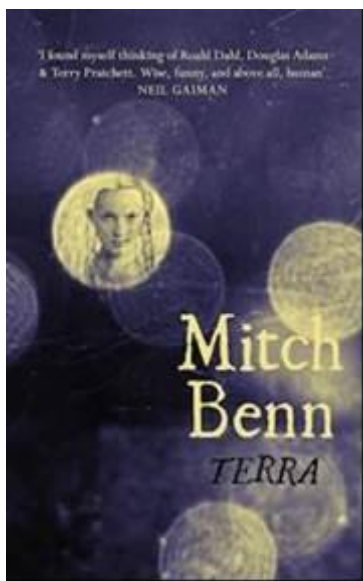
TERRA by Mitch Benn

Gollancz / 254 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575132108

TERRA'S WORLD by Mitch Benn

Gollancz / 277 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575132122

Reviewed by William McCabe

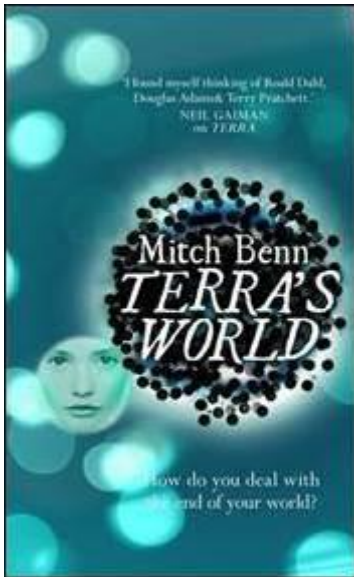


When Terra was only a few days old her parents were driving home, arguing as always, when a lemon-shaped spaceship appeared in front of them. In panic, they swerved off the road and ran away. It was some time later that they realised they had left the as-yet-unnamed Terra in the back of the car. Lbbp, driver of the aforementioned spaceship, believing that the parents had abandoned their baby, took her home with him to Furr (a planet, invisible from Earth, somewhere in Orion's belt). Despite initial complaints from his colleagues at home, he gives her the name Terra (although that is unpronounceable to his species). All this is accomplished in the first 30 pages of book 1.

Eleven years later, Terra is in her first year at the academy. She is generally accepted by her peers and has made friends with some. Things change. The first change is the interface. The interface is a new teaching device designed to plug in to your brain and feed you everything you need to know. Terra falls asleep using one. She dreams. On Furr only babies dream. Her dreams involve her and her friends flying through the air on large winged animals. That doesn't happen on Furr. Since she was plugg

in to the interface all of this goes out live across Furr's equivalent of the internet. The next morning all kinds of people are calling and banging on the door to find out what has happened. The Fnrms have no concept of fiction either. Soon Terra is writing her own stories and they are becoming very popular. This leads to the discovery that all of those films about the humans (called Ymns on Furr) destroying alien invaders from species no-one has heard of might not actually be real.

The last part of book 1 deals with an invasion from another race of Fnrms who are generally thought of as more primitive by the group that Terra has come to know.



In book 2 Terra has returned to Earth and, now Furr has decided that the Ymns aren't so dangerous and uncivilised, all of Earth knows where she's been. After two years Terra and her (original) family have "disappeared" having moved and changed identities countless times to avoid the press.

Billy Dolphin is a 13 (or thereabouts) year old schoolboy who doesn't like the way the world has changed since Terra returned. Most of all he misses science fiction. Since everyone knows that there are aliens out there and what they look like and where they come from, people are less likely to invent different ones. At school he likes Lydia and the new girl Tracey because they have both read SF (William Gibson anyhow). Then he finds out that Lydia is really Terra and Tracey is an insectoid alien bounty hunter and before he really has time to process this he's off with Terra on an alien spaceship to find out what has happened on Furr and why she hasn't heard from them for months.

Furr hasn't actually got the concept of fiction properly yet. They know what it is but they can't really tell the difference between that and truth yet. So when a janitor at the academy tells people that he's the Gfjk-Hhh (a planetary hero that a prophecy from thousands of years ago said would return someday) just about everyone believes him. The planet is now in the grip of a new pseudo-religious frenzy with executions for dissidents on a daily basis ... and that isn't all. There's a rogue black planet that is the stuff of legends. It wanders the galaxy and every time it passes a

living planet that planet winds up black and dead and it's headed toward Fnrr.

Mitch Benn is well enough known for his work as a comedian and writer of comic songs for most people to guess at the light comic style that both of these books begin with. It's the sort of glib, simple tone that you might associate with Terry Pratchett, Douglas Adams or the early Vonnegut - depending on your age. Rather than persist with it throughout, he does manage to pick up the pace and drop the jokes when there are action scenes or anything important to say and that lasts for the final half or third of each book. Despite the lack of notice to that effect, these are children's books. Benn wrote them in reaction to the lack of good appropriate material for his two young daughters. That means that the stories are generally simple with no real twists to the plot. There are also oddities that don't really stand up to scrutiny. For instance, the inhabitants of Fnrr don't appear to have vowels in their language and can't really pronounce them, yet her adopted parent still names her Terra although none of his race will be able to pronounce that name. These books are probably perfect for 12 year old girls but lose a little the further you get from that. Even so there are still some nice observations like the shorter your name for "Science Fiction" the more serious you are about the subject. WM

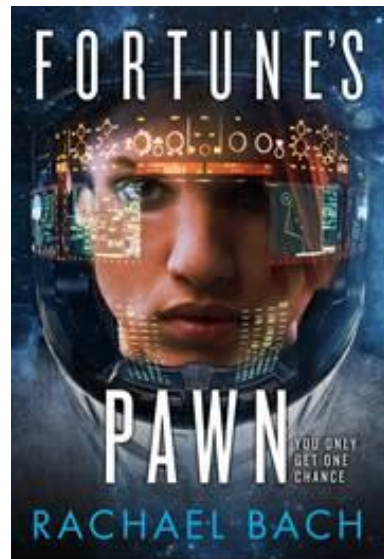
(Review copies kindly donated by Orion Gollancz)

***FORTUNE'S PAWN* by Rachel Bach**

Orbit / 320 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-0356502359

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

This is the first book in Rachel Bach's *Paradox* series and was published in 2013 while the next two *HONOUR'S KNIGHT* and *HEAVEN'S QUEEN* are to be published this year (2014). The heroine, Devi (Deviana) Morris is an armoured mercenary living and fighting within the 'Paradoxian' stellar empire. She is good, very good at being an armoured warrior but this is not enough for her. After serving terms in the Royal Army and in Paradox's top private armoured company where she has excelled, she has gone as far as she can go without becoming a 'Devastator'. Devastators



being the Sainted Kings' best armoured warriors (with the best combat armour in the known galaxy). However membership is only by invitation, no applications please. In an attempt to become 'noticed' in the shortest possible time, Devi applies for and is appointed to the security team of *The Glorious Fool*, a tiny trade ship. Normally ship security would be far beneath her notice, but the *Glorious Fool* isn't an ordinary trader, it's a trouble magnet. So much so that a year's security work under the *Glorious Fool's* captain is the equivalent of at least five years anywhere else. And so it proves to be.

FORTUNE'S PAWN strikes me as an old fashioned SF novel with a dauntless hero(ine), sinister villains and scary aliens, but one written with a modern verve. It has a feisty, determined and outrageously courageous heroine in Devi Morris as well as a good cast of supporting characters in the *Glorious Fool's* captain and crew. In addition Rachel Bach has developed an interesting cast of aliens (some friendly and many not) in the stork-like Aeon, the tyrannasoid Xith'cal and the jellyfish-like Lelgis. These creatures are all competing with, and raiding on each other, as well as on the Paradoxians and their human rivals, the Terran Republic. FORTUNE'S PAWN is a highly readable book; in fact it took me less than a day to finish it.

While making comparisons with other authors' work is always problematical it is sometime part of a reviewer's role in order to help possible readers. To me, whilst good, FORTUNE'S PAWN does not have the richness and depth of characters and settings as David Weber's *Honorverse* books or Elizabeth Moon's *Serrano Legacy* and *Vatta's War* series. However that said, FORTUNE'S PAWN is well worth reading and if the following books in this series are to the same standard they will be too.

JTP

(Review copy kindly donated by Orbit)

THE CAUSAL ANGEL by Hannu Rajaniemi

Gollancz / 292 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-05750888979

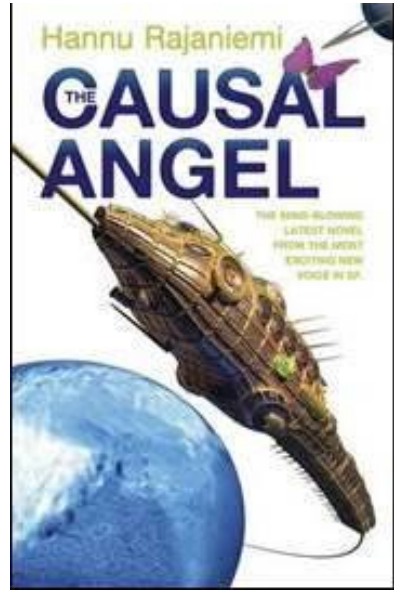
Reviewed by Tim O'Mara

This book presents several challenges to an old and old-fashioned reader of science fiction. Hannu Rajaniemi has a reputation as being among the hardest of hard SF writers, and it feels perilous to avoid or dismiss difficulties when their author has a PhD in the field of string theory, and a day job as director of a commercial research organisation, ThinkTank Math. And there is an arcane literary challenge in that some of the characters come straight from the *Arsène Lupin* novels of Maurice Leblanc. Lupin is a French master criminal something on the lines of

Robin Hood, with an eyeglass and top hat, and one of the few to prove a match for his contemporary, Sherlock Holmes, or rather Herlock Sholmes as he appears in Leblanc's stories. Jean le Flambeur (John the Gambler) also appears as Paul Sernine (anagram- geddit?) in **THE CAUSAL ANGEL**. There are further echoes of Jules Verne and C. S. Lewis, plus a final little difficulty in that the book is third in a trilogy!

I was glad to see the Victor Gollancz publisher's mark on the review copy, as this is a name often found on many classics of the SF genre, old and new. And the name has been something of a support during what has proved to be a demanding time.

Let us begin asking the meaning of the title - who or what is the causal angel? I believe it is the character named Mieli. This is a Finnish name, short for Mielikki, the forest goddess, and also a Finnish word meaning 'mind'. She has the appearance of an angel; she was raised in the Oort Cloud, which seems to be where the Finns settled after Earth became too uncomfortable due to independent rogue software called 'wildcode'. Hannu Rajaniemi himself is Finnish, and also writes SF in that language. If you think settling the Oort Cloud strange, then how do you find Australia recreated as a walking city on the planet Mars? And causality itself is no longer certain in the quantum world depicted here.



The book opens with the destruction of Earth: “Alone of the timeless beach, Joséphine Pellegrini finds herself disappointed by the end of the world.” This feels like good strong SF, where straightaway we meet a being, old and detached enough to wish to view such an event, and also able to treat it as a kind of performance. It goes on: “As Ragnaröks go she has seen better . . . this is merely the final withering of an ancient placenta, long since overdue.” We are in a time distant from the present, but still within the Solar System; much of the book turns upon vast changes taking place there, and how and where to seek refuge from them. Joséphine has a brooding presence throughout the story, ancient and suffering in body, relentless and crystal clear in mind, and a descendent of Napoleon's Joséphine in the Arsène Lupin originals.

The far future action centres around Saturn, its rings and satellites; the reader needs some idea of the meaning of Trojan asteroids and Lagrange Points. The way people live, with access to multiple versions of themselves, and the existence of at least partially self-sustaining software, have the feel of some strange fantasies, even though firmly based I believe on current theories of quantum physics.

Although much of the interest of science fiction lies in appreciation of the genre itself, lasting evaluation should be based on the same criteria as any other literature: an effective story, interesting characters, elements such as knowledge and humour, and ultimately a confidence that the author understands at least some of the important things that make up our humanity, and how we choose or are sometimes forced to live. I find it difficult to measure *THE CAUSAL ANGEL* against such criteria. The quantum science persists as a barrier, and while the literary background lends the story some mythical and even heroic elements, I am not sure how far the book presents a possible reality in which recognisable human beings have to endure and attempt to thrive.

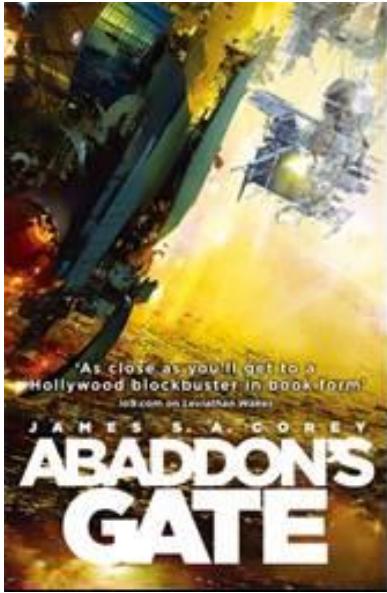
Therefore I leave the book feeling some frustration with my only partial understanding. However Rajaniemi certainly deserves further interest and the obvious place to start is to read the first two novels in the trilogy: *THE QUANTUM THIEF* and *THE FRACTAL PRINCE*. *TO'M* (Review copy kindly donated by Orion Gollancz)

***ABADDON'S GATE* by James S.A. Corey**

Orbit / 539 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-1841499932

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

ABADDON'S GATE is the third novel in James S.A. Corey's *Expanse* series and I regret that I have not read the previous two. This is not because I found this book difficult to follow as the author has provided sufficient information to adequately set the scene. In itself *ABADDON'S GATE* is strong enough so that reader's enjoyment is not diminished even if the previous two instalments have not been read. It is an excellent book flowing well and welding together the storylines of the main characters in a masterful way creating a rich and enthralling tapestry. I expect that the first two books of this series will also be very good and certainly intend to read them as soon as possible and then enjoy rereading *ABADDON'S GATE*. I also eagerly await the fourth instalment *CIBOLA BURN*. Fans of Neal Asher and Gary Gibson should also enjoy this series.



In these books mankind has spread throughout the solar system and split into three political groupings: Earth, Mars and the Outer Planet Alliance (OPA). Sometime before the events taking place in *ABADDON'S GATE* an alien 'protomolecule' has been found dormant within the outer solar system where it has lain dormant for about two billion years. On discovery it was somehow activated resulting in havoc and the destruction of Ganymede before it fell into the atmosphere of Venus where it created a ring-like massive artefact/structure (the gate) which leads to a starless space and is now in an orbit outside that of Uranus. Fleets of the three political and antagonistic groups are speeding to the

ring both to study it and prevent the others from gaining an advantage.

ABADDON'S GATE is told from the points of view of four pivotal characters. Firstly, Jim Holden and the crew of the private corvette 'Rocinante' who are reluctantly ferrying a documentary crew to the gate to cover the unfolding events. Secondly, Carlos de Baca, Bull to his friends and acquaintances, who is security chief on the OPA battleship *Behemoth* allegedly the biggest and baddest weapon platform in the solar system. If he wasn't an Earther he would have been at least the ship's executive officer and possibly its captain. Thirdly there is Clarissa Melpomene Mao who is travelling on the Earth Fleet support ship *Corisier*, she's there to destroy Jim Holden for 'crimes' against her family. Finally, Annushka Volovodov, Pastor Anna to her congregation, is on the Earth Navy battleship, *Thomas Prince* as part of the UN Secretary General's humanitarian committee advisory group. Pastor Anna is to play an unexpectedly pivotal role in the inevitable conflict between all protagonists on both an individual and individual basis.

As I've said before in previous reviews I do not care much for the publicity term 'must have' but I'm afraid that James S. A. Corey and the *Expanse* series has well and truly crashed onto my list of must have authors and books.

JTP

(Review copy kindly donated by Orbit)

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

OUT OF THIS WORLD FILM SEASON, 8th August -18th September, Birmingham. Season of films in the Outdoor arena at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, B12 9QJ. Featuring ALIEN, BACK TO THE FUTURE, INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS and STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE. Prices £10 per film. Events go ahead regardless of weather. Tel: 0121 446 3232 or email info@macarts.co.uk

BRITISH SCIENCE FESTIVAL, 6th - 11th September, Birmingham. In partnership with Birmingham University, various events (talks, tours, screenings etc) across the city. Programme details at www.britishscienceassociation.org/british-science-festival/

BIRMINGHAM LITERATURE FESTIVAL, 2nd - 11th October
Tickets are now available. Lots of different literature themed events at various venues around the city. Includes Malorie Blackman (Childrens/YA SF) on 9th October, photography competition in honour of Joel Lane, Knightwatch Press (Horror) readings etc (11th October 3pm venue tbc)
Details/tickets at www.birminghamliteraturefestival.org/

PETER F HAMILTON SIGNING, 11th October, Birmingham. Peter F Hamilton will be signing copies of his new novel, THE ABYSS BEYOND DREAMS. Waterstones High Street at 12pm. Further details at 0121 631 4353

CONVENTIONS

BRISTOLCON, 25th October, Bristol. Guests of Honour include Jasper Fforde, Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Emma Newman. At the Doubletree Hotel, Bristol. Tickets £20 at www.bristolcon.org

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

DYSPROSIUM (EASTERCON), 3rd - 6th April, London. Guests of Honour are Jim Butcher, Seanan McGuire, Herr Doktor and Caroline Mullan. To be held at the Park Inn, Heathrow, London. Attending £60, Supporting £25. Details at www.dysprosium.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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

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

December 5th - **Christmas Social**

January 9th - **Annual General Meeting**

February 13th - Quiz

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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