

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MARCH 2015

ISSUE 522

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Friday 13th March



*PETER
COLEBORN &
JAN EDWARDS –
ALCHEMY
PRESS*

This month's meeting we will welcome Peter Coleborn and Jan Edwards to talk to us about running the Small press company, Alchemy Press who specialise in producing SF,

Fantasy and Horror books.

Peter Coleborn created The Alchemy Press in the tail end of the

April 10th - Mathematician, writer and Brum Group member, **Professor Ian Stewart**.

1990's after a long stint editing (and doing numerous other things) for the British Fantasy Society. The first title was a slim volume, **THE PALADIN MANDATES** by Mike Chinn; and in the first few years The Alchemy Press published and co-published a handful of books including the award-winning **WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED** by Kim Newman. Following an interregnum of half-a-dozen years the press returned, first with **RUMOURS OF THE MARVELLOUS** by Peter Atkins in 2011, scriptwriter on several of the *Helraiser* movies. Since then, they have published nearly 20 editions, including some excellent anthologies - **THE ALCHEMY PRESS BOOK OF URBAN MYTHIC** and **THE ALCHEMY PRESS BOOK OF PULP HEROES** series. The latest title is **TELL NO LIES** a collection of short stories by John Grant. In 2014 The Alchemy Press was the recipient of the Best Small Press Award presented by the BFS. Further details can be found at www.alchemyvpress.co.uk.

Jan Edwards is a writer with a passion for folklore and mythology. She has thirty-six fantasy stories published, was short-listed for a BFS Award for Best Short Story, edits for the award winning Alchemy Press (with the inimitable Jenny) and has a collection of her own supernatural short fiction coming out in early 2015. More details at <http://janedwardsblog.wordpress.com/>

They will also be joined by authors Mike Chinn (**GIVE ME THESE MOMENTS BACK**) and David Sutton (**DEAD WATER AND OTHER WEIRD TALES**), who will be launching their new collections on the evening.

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

STARGAZING LIVE 2015

The annual *BBC Stargazing LIVE* is back in 2015. Normally held in January, it has been moved to March to coincide with the **solar eclipse** which will be visible in the UK on March 20th. It aims to encourage everyone, from the complete beginner to the enthusiastic amateur, to make the most of the night sky. Local events include:

- **SPACE NIGHT, 19th March, Worcester.** The Hive is hosting a Space event with activities for both children and adults. The event runs from 5pm to 8pm and all events are free. The **Birmingham Science Fiction Group** will be represented. The Hive, Sawmill Walk, The Butts, Worcester, WR1 3PB. See www.thehiveworcester.org
- **STARGAZING LIVE, 20th March, Leicester.** At the Leicester racecourse from 9am - 6pm and from 6pm - 9:30pm. There will be lots of hands-on science, stargazing and other activities. Admission is free but admission is on a first-come, first-served basis. See www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b019h4g8
- **SPACE DAY, 21st March, Droitwich Spa.** The West Midlands branch of the British Interplanetary Society is hosting SPACE DAY on Saturday 11th January at Droitwich Library. There will be lots of organisations associated with space and science present not least our own **Birmingham Science Fiction Group**. There will also be talks, displays and children's activities. The event is free admission and the address is Droitwich Library, Victoria Square, Droitwich Spa, WR9 8DQ. The event runs from 9.30am to 4.30 pm. Further details can be found at www.bis-space.com *CG*

AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS

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

Cannon Hill Writers Group and **Hall Green Library** invite all Brum Group members to the official launch of **SALVO 8**, on Saturday 21st March from 2 - 4 pm in the upstairs meeting room of Hall Green Library. SALVO 8 is a showcase for the work of the members and includes fiction and poetry.

Several members of the Brum Group have work included in it. These include **Chris Morgan, Pauline Morgan/Dungate, Theresa Derwin, Lynn Edwards** and **Jan Edwards**. The volume is edited by Lynn Edwards (as Lynn Cochrane). There will be readings from the volume and the opportunity to buy copies. *PM*

Professor Richard Doron

I have received news from Professor Richard Doron (via Rog Peyton) who I believe is an old friend to some members of the group. He is about to publish his first Kindle eBook and writes:

“There is no reason whatsoever why you should be interested (it's been years since we last communicated) but during that time I've written over 50 short stories in a variety of genres. Many have won prizes in competitions around Warwickshire. I'm dividing most of them into 4 collections, the first is now available from Amazon.

I'm not asking you to invest 99p in a copy (there isn't much SF) merely to spread the word so folks might take a 'Look Inside' **SHORT STORIES OFF THE WALL: AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE LIGHT, DARK AND BIZARRE** by Richard Doron. Thanks.” CG

NEWS IN BRIEF



Actor, director and author **Leonard Nimoy** died on February 27th at the age of 83. He began acting as a child and appeared in a number of lesser roles including many Westerns and **THE MAN FROM UNCLE**. Cast as Spock in the *Star Trek* pilot, he was the only actor retained. After the *Star Trek* TV series finished, he appeared in the original TV version of *Mission Impossible* and appeared in many plays. His first autobiography was titled **I AM NOT SPOCK** but he later embraced the character and produced a second volume, **I AM**

SPOCK. He acted in many of the *Star Trek* movies, (including the JJ Abrams reboot, where he played the older Spock against a younger version of himself (Zachary Quinto)). He also directed **THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK** and **THE VOYAGE HOME**. He was also a writer on **STAR TREK VI**. His other directing success was the non-SF comedy, **THREE MEN AND A BABY**. Other SF credits include the role of Dr William Bell in the TV show *Fringe* Author **Melanie Tem** has died. She was married to Steve Rasnic Tem, with whom she often collaborated. She won the Bram Stoker Award for best debut novel (**PRODIGAL**) and her short story “The Man on the Ceiling” won the Bram Stoker, World Fantasy and International Horror Guild Awards The **Kitschies shortlist** for ‘intelligent and entertaining works of genre fiction’ has been announced

and the winners will be announced on March 4th The **Gemmell Awards** for fantasy will this year take place in a new venue at the Nine Worlds Geekfest, and will take place at 8pm on August 8th Author **Michael Moorcock** will publish a new novel in July, after a gap of 10 years. The novel, **THE WHISPERING SWARM** will be set in London and will blend “actual autobiography with supernatural fantasy and historical fiction” The UK will have a **Solar eclipse** on March 20th. In Birmingham it is estimated there will be 91% coverage of the sun. The eclipse starts at 8:25 am, maximum darkness at 9:31am and ending at 10:41 am Scientists at Cornell University have modelled the type of **life which could exist on Titan**. The model is a methane-based, oxygen-free cell (an azotosome) and was part inspired by **Isaac Asimov’s** 1962 essay, “Not as We Know It” about non-water-based life. CG

NEBULA AWARD NOMINATIONS - Novels

The nominees for the Nebula Award have been announced. The winners will be announced at the Nebula Awards Weekend on 4th - 7th June. Other categories at www.sfwa.org

THE GOBLIN EMPEROR by Katherine Addison (Tor)

TRIAL BY FIRE by Charles E Gannon (Baen)

ANCILLARY SWORD by Ann Leckie (Orbit)

THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM by Cixin Liu (Tor)

COMING HOME by Jack McDevitt (Ace)

ANNIHILATION by Jeff VanderMeer (Fourth Estate)

BSFA AWARD NOMINATIONS – Novels

The shortlist for the 2014 British Science Fiction Association Awards have been announced. The winners will be announced at Dysprosium (Eastercon 2015) on Sunday April 6th. Details for other categories can be found at www.bsfa.co.uk

THE RACE by Nina Allen (Newcon Press)

CUCKOO SONG by Frances Hardinge (Macmillan)

EUROPE IN AUTUMN by Dave Hutchinson (Solaris)

WOLVES by Simon Ings (Gollancz)

ANCILLARY SWORD by Ann Leckie (Orbit)

THE FIRST FIFTEEN LIVES OF HARRY AUGUST by Claire North (Orbit)

LAGOON by Nnedi Okorafor (Hodder)

THE MOON KING by Neil Williamson (Newcon Press)

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

DIVERGENT: INSURGENT - Release date March 20th. Beatrice Prior continues her fight against a powerful alliance.

HOME - Release date March 20th. Animation. Runaway alien makes friends with girl on a quest.

ROBOT OVERLORDS - Release date March 27th. SF. Earth has been conquered by alien robots.

SEVENTH SON - Release date March 27th. Young Thomas is apprenticed to the local Spook to learn to fight evil spirits and witches.

THE SIGNAL - Release date March 27th. Three friends wake to find they may have been abducted by aliens. *CG*

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



THE FALL OF THE FAIR ISLE by Rowena Cory Daniells / Solaris / 1000 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781083024 / March 12th. Fantasy. When Fair Isle is invaded, Imoshen must choose between duty and her betrothed

THE GLORIOUS ANGELS by Justina Robson / Gollancz / 512 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575134010/ March 19th. SF. A stranger arrives in a remote town with news of forthcoming political turmoil.

OLD MAN'S GHOSTS by Tom Lloyd / Gollancz / 400 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575131217 / March 19th. Fantasy. Mistakes from the past return and Enchei must confront demons, mages and vengeful noblemen.

A QUANTUM MYTHOLOGY by Gavin G Smith / Gollancz / 576 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575126992 / March 26th. SF. Space opera set in the past, present and future.



THE LAST GASP by Trevor Hoyle / Jo Fletcher Books / ? pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1848664555 / April 7th. SF. Desperate race to find solution when pollution depletes the world's oxygen levels. Re-issue of 1984 novel.

THE DEAD LANDS by Benjamin Percy / Hodder & Stoughton / 416 pgs / £13.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1444770049 / April 9th. SF. In post-apocalyptic USA, the only haven is Sanctuary citadel until a stranger promises new green land - but can he be trusted?

DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH (SF Masterworks) by Robert Silverberg / Gollancz / 256 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473211926 / April 9th. SF. One man's journey across a once colonised alien planet and the mystery of the sentient natives.

THE ADJACENT by Christopher Priest / Gollancz / 432 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575105380 / April 10th. SF. First paperback publication. Complicated story set in altered realities and twisted timelines including World Wars I and II and the near future.

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

A GIRL WALKS HOME ALONE AT NIGHT screening, 27th March, Birmingham. Horror about a hijab-wearing vampire. Part of Flatpack Festival. 8:15 pm at the Electric cinema Tickets £8 at www.theelectric.co.uk



BOOK REVIEWS



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

MERRY-GO-ROUND and Other Words by Bryn Fortey

Alchemy Press / 349 pgs / £9.99 enlarged paperback / ISBN: 978-0957348967

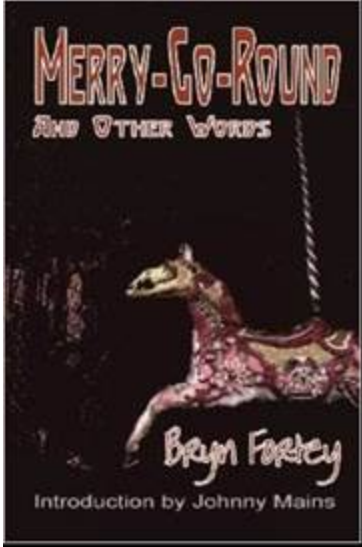
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan (Abridged)

In choosing a book to purchase, a number of factors are taken into account, either consciously or subconsciously. The cover is always one. Good ones draw the eye and give a hint of what kind of book will be found between the covers. An intriguing title may well cause the book to be taken off the shelf but in the age of the celebrity the name of the author may well be a deciding factor. So it is my job to help you decide if Bryn Fortey is a name worth watching out for. For some of you, the question uppermost in your minds will be ‘Who?’ For those of the older generation, brought up reading such volumes as the FONTANA BOOK OF HORROR, or the historians of horror fiction the name may be more familiar.

This collection can be regarded, not just as a tribute to the author but also to the enduring quality of horror fiction. Stories published early in the last century by greats such as M.R. James are still thought of with affection and still hold insights into human behaviour. So, too, do those printed more recently. A good story should not be judged by the era when it was written. Bryn Fortey’s fiction, as represented here, covers a period from the 1970s to the present time. Within these covers you will find twenty-one (or perhaps twenty-two) stories and six groups of poems.

The discrepancy in the number of stories relates to the first and last pieces. ‘Shrewhampton North-East’ is a ghoulish little story revolving around the nightmare of train travel. In this case the narrator and his mother are stranded at the eponymous station along with nine others, some

of whom have been waiting for three days. ‘Shrewthampton North-West’ which resolves the situation owes much to Lovecraft.



Here the title story is second for aesthetic reasons. One thing I would like to have seen in this book is the first date of publication of each story. This is because ‘Merry-Go-Round’ has a number of familiar themes and knowing how they fitted into the history of the horror genre would give an indication of the degree of originality.

The collection also contains science fiction. ‘Ithica Or Bust’ belongs to the school of zany science fiction that only those with a good grasp of ancient Greek myth will fully appreciate. ‘Remnants’ is a very different kind of science fiction, dealing with the issues arising when a colony ship crashes on a planet. Instead of everyone pulling together for survival, nastier basic instincts have surfaced. To add to the unconventional approach, Fortey brings the reader in towards the end of the attempt to survive, allowing him to play with the unexpected. ‘The Oscar Project’ begins in a bleak, dystopian future, for which many blame Christianity. The main character is conscripted to work on a project to view the past, until an accident allows him to interact with it. Despite certain similarities to Moorcock’s ‘Behold the Man’ the approach, origins and motivations of the characters are different.

Music plays an important part in this collection, both the stories and poems. ‘Denton’s Delight’ follows jazz saxophonist Hal Denton, on the downward spiral after hitting the big time too young. Now without the creativity he once had – until he plays at a South Wales Jazz club.

Vampires who feed on things other than blood? This is the inspiration behind ‘The Pawnshop Window’. On the day they buried Louis Armstrong, another trumpeter remembers what might have been - a poignant story. Other musically themed stories include ‘First Words’ where Fortey is blending at least three disparate ideas into one brief story. It shouldn’t work, but somehow, it does.

Perhaps the stories with most impact are those that take a small idea and paint it in such a way to set the reader thinking about the possibilities. In ‘Wordsmith’ best-sellers are taken from the depths of the

psyche of the insane. Another seemingly small idea drives the horror behind 'Skulls'. Eric Brown's superpower is the ability to recognise who will die soon; that person's head appearing as a skull.

Poems are often far more personal than fiction. A good poet, and Bryn Fortey is one, often expose more of themselves through poetry than any other kind of writing, including autobiography. They give an insight into the soul of a person. The poetry here is divided into six groups. The first, highly personal and poignant, are messages to his wife and son and as such, we are privileged to be able to share them. The second and fifth groups show Fortey's passion for music. Science fiction images and ideas can sometimes be conveyed more powerfully in just a few words. The third group does this, especially 'A Taxi Driver on Mars'. Those in the fourth group begin with two memories, the poet looking back from his autumn years before looking the other way, wistfulness followed by a trip into darkness with 'Nightfall' - a poem to produce shivers. The final ones provide a sense of dread a fitting group to be placed just before the final story.

If I have any criticism of the poetry, it is the layout. Where a poem goes onto more than one page, the other part would have been better on the facing page so that whole of the structure can be seen with one glance. Often the structure of a poetic form adds to the appreciation of the word pattern.

Always with an author that a potential reader might not be familiar with, the question remains - why should I buy it? For anyone who values quality poetry, that is one good reason. For others - these stories have variety but the best of them show how a range of ideas can be meshed together to form small gems. Not everyone will like all the stories but it is worth savouring the best, and trying to figure out how Fortey manages to juxtapose the impossible and make it work.

PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Alchemy Press)

PHOENICIA'S WORLDS by Ben Jeapes

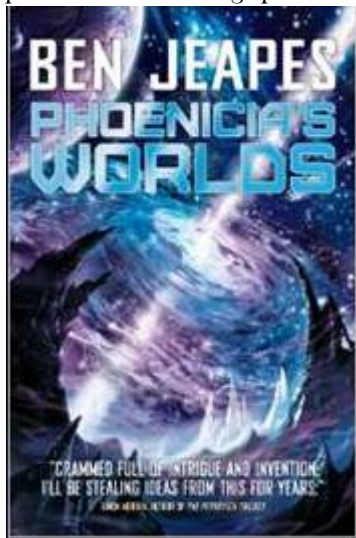
Solaris / 351 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781081266

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

Abingdon-based Ben Jeapes came to talk to the Brum Group in April 2003, and talked about his late lamented Big Engine small press. But he is also a popular YA (young adult) author of books such as **THE XENOCIDE MISSION** (2002) and **THE NEW WORLD ORDER** (2004). Ben has now broken into the world of adult fiction - and an excellent debut it is too. Basically it is the story of two brothers (originally

three but one, Felipe, makes an early departure - though he remains an important presence).

La Nueva Temporada is Earth's first and so far only colony world. It was chosen because it appeared to be earthlike - which it is, except that it proves to be in the grip of an Ice Age. Only a narrow strip of it is habitable



by humans. It was reached by the only starship, *Phoenixia* powered by a 'Matter Annihilation Drive', and took forty years to make the trip, though the drive would only thrust for ten before shutting down, its crew and colonists in slow sleep. Yet Earth has a wormhole, through which people and objects can pass; but not objects as huge as *Phoenixia*. So the starship carried a wormhole terminus, which when opened allowed traffic back and forth daily. Since the bulk of the book depends upon it I don't think I'm giving too much away by saying that without warning the wormhole explodes, with disastrous results.

Most of the story centres around brother Alejandro - Alex - Mateo, and later his younger brother Joaquin - Quin. Their family is one of the leading - one might almost say ruling - classes on La Nueva Temporada, and they are hijos ('hee-ho's') because they were the first to arrive on the planet. Alex wants only to stay and take an active part in the terraforming of his world until it begins to warm up and humanity can expand across its surface. But the wormhole catastrophe puts an end to that, and he is forced to make the long, slow journey back to Earth in order to establish a new wormhole terminus. But when he gets there he finds that not everyone on Earth agrees with the plan to reopen it.

It is his much younger brother Quin, who hates La Nueva Temporada and everyone on it, who has to stay behind and watch his world collapse around him; only to become its ultimate saviour. Quin was born just as the wormhole collapsed, so has never known his world as it was or should be. We learn about his life in a series of jumps, from a few years to decades, and his childhood and teen years are very well handled, shaping him as a future adult. So are the way that society and governments evolve on the two worlds; yet Jeapes doesn't go into long passages of exposition or explanation, allowing the story to evolve at its own pace. Likewise the science: we know that the wormholes take advantage of

quantum physics, but they have just become an accepted part of this future history. The story ends in a way that makes it clear there is plenty of room for a sequel. The characters are real and you care about them, and the worlds are believable too. This is one of the best hard SF novels I have read in a long time, and it is refreshing to find a 'new' author who can handle the subject so capably. In my book - and in his! - Jeapes is well able to join the ranks of Hamilton, Robinson and Reynolds. I look forward to his future output (no pun intended). Highly recommended.

As an artist I cannot resist a mention of the cover, which on the paperback is by Dominic Harman. For once it is a good old-fashioned illustrative cover; indeed, those sharp, pointy mountains would be at home on a cover from the fifties! It shows signs of having been painted very quickly, yet it serves its purpose in attracting the eye. Which is what a cover is supposed to be all about, and other publishers would do well to remember this.

DAH

***SALVO* edited by Lynn M Cochrane**

The Cannon Hill Writers' Group / 120 pgs / £6.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0953230938;

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.

People can write for many contrasting reasons and the intended audience can be very different for different pieces. This book evidences this very well; this is a showcase anthology of work by the Cannon Hill Writers' Group, a local writers' group and includes work by several Brum Group members including **Theresa Derwin, Jan Edwards, Lynn Edwards** (as Lynn Cochrane), **Chris Morgan** and **Pauline Morgan** (as Pauline Dungate. It is always difficult to review something which is so varied, both in themes and styles. This little book contains over 50 pieces of prose and poetry and obviously there will be some that suit some people more than others. It also needs to be borne in mind that the writers themselves have very differing levels of experience, ranging from some very new to writing to some who have been professionally published. That being said I did find many pieces which I enjoyed and although I have not enough space to discuss every piece in detail I will try and provide an idea of the variety and highlight a few of the works which I liked.

The poems and prose here contain a mixture of pure fiction, some clearly autobiographical pieces and some clearly very personal stories. Although the majority of the work is in real world settings, there is some science fiction, fantasy and horror.

In the science fiction realm there is 'Nanna' by Margaret Miller which starts with an old lady telling children her story of the colonisation of

a new planet. Although using familiar themes it is still well-written and builds a believable and likeable character. 'The Harrowing' by Lynn Cochrane is a study of a disaster but observed subtly from the side-lines. It concentrates on ordinary characters slowly adjusting their lives due to civilisation collapse, and the actual detail of what has happened is only inferred from its effects.

There is also some horror and fantasy although for some of the stories the boundaries are a bit blurred. Theresa Derwin has a funny little story called 'Mikey' which starts as an interview about discrimination, but with a twist. There is also 'The Hag's Piano' which is very atmospheric but would benefit from expansion - although to be fair it is billed as an extract. For fantasy fans there is 'A Woodland Dream' by Helena Hempstead, a modern variation on the theme of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*.

Of the more mainstream work, I liked 'September 1st 1939: Evacuation' by Joyce Lancashire and 'Memories of Trains' by Z. Burszytn which both feel like very personal recollections of war memories. They may not be the most polished but the recall and recording of these memories is clearly important to the authors and does engage the emotions.

There were also various stories which used humour, of which the most amusing in my opinion was 'The Start of the Habit' by Chris Morgan, about two ladies with awful husbands.

Finally, this volume contains a number of poems in various styles, including rhyming, non-rhyming and even a haiku. I have difficulty assessing what is good or not with regards to poetry and am hesitant to offer an opinion. I can only say that some did not work for me but I certainly enjoyed some of the poems. I liked 'The Vigil' by Helena Hempstead and 'Rook' by Elaine Oakley for the emotions they captured which felt very real. Lastly, but by no means least, the collection ends with an excellent poem by the late Joel Lane called 'The Chosen Woodlouse' which in just three short verses contains a lot to think upon.

CG

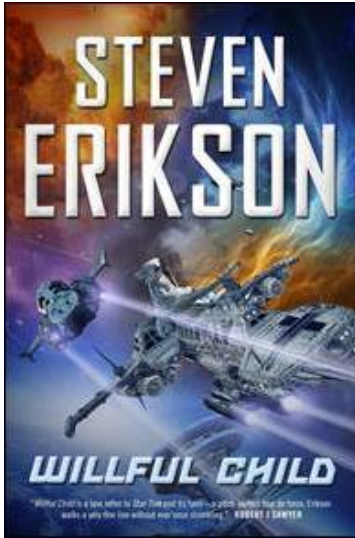
(Review copy kindly donated by Pauline Morgan)

WILLFUL CHILD by Steven Erikson

Bantam Press / 349 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0593073070

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The first thing to do about this book is to forget the hype as the intelligent reader will immediately become suspicious. Publicists only go overboard for one reason - they desperately want you to buy this book. The question to ask is why is the hype necessary?



Steven Erikson has gained a huge following during the publication of his ten volume epic fantasy series, *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*. He has written another novel and a selection of stories in the same world. His best book by far is **THIS RIVER AWAKENS**, an exquisitely written novel about young people at an age when the decisions they make reflect the rest of their life. It was his first novel and only recently republished. First time round it didn't spark the interest his fantasy has. It should have done.

The first clue that this book, **WILLFUL CHILD**, is not High Fantasy, is the space ship on the cover. For a publisher to issue a book very different from an author's usual output is always a risk. Some fans will take a look at the packaging and put it back on the grounds that they 'don't read that space stuff'. The first danger is losing the readers expecting more of the same. They need to be supremely confident that more of the reading public will look further than the name - the most prominent thing on the cover - and at least read the blurb. This is another problem in that names get associated with types of books and thus alienating those who might enjoy it when a writer goes off in a different direction.

Most of us readers of SF, whatever our era, have something that defines the beginning of that interest. For the older generation, it may well have been Dan Dare in *The Eagle*, for others, *Dr Who*, *Star Wars* or *Fireball XL5*. Erikson's early influences obviously included *Star Trek*. **WILLFUL CHILD** is both a parody and an homage to the TV series

The technology that enabled humans to venture into space was delivered by accident. A century later, Captain Hadrian Sawbuck gets his first command, the ASF *Willful Child*. He is younger than most captains and his attitude is that of a kid with a new toy. His first mission is apparently simple - to catch a smuggler. He doesn't make the same mistake others would, but identifies the right ship. However his victory is short-lived as the AI doing the smuggling proceeds to take over his ship and sends it straight into a war zone and a series of diplomatic incidents. The result is mayhem.

Anyone who is familiar with *Star Trek* will know some of the decisions the captain makes would not be tolerated in a modern navy -

space or otherwise. For example, having all the significant command crew members on a hostile planet at the same time would be a courts martial offence, but then Star Trek was modelled after the adventures of Horatio Hornblower where a captain was expected to lead. Erikson exaggerates this trait in the antics of his hero.

The important thing about this book is that it should not be taken seriously. It will appeal to those who enjoy seeing their fictional heroes parodied and those who like the idea of farce with spaceships. Anyone who expects this to be an SF version of Erikson's epic fantasy will very quickly get the rug pulled out from under their feet. It is always good to try something new, whether as a reader or a writer, though this might not have made it to the bookshelves if Erikson hadn't already got a formidable reputation.

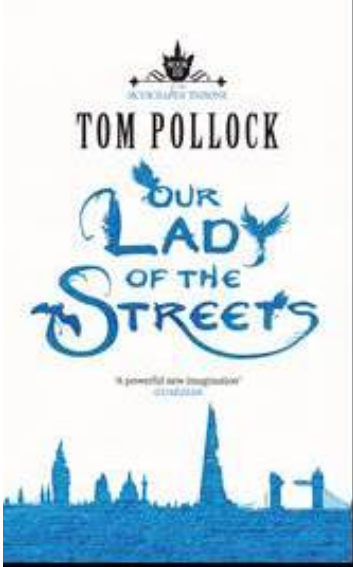
PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Transworld)

OUR LADY OF THE STREETS (The Skyscraper Throne 3)

Jo Fletcher Books / 438 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1780870144

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin



This is the final book in the Skyscraper Throne trilogy (reviews of the previous two books can be found in Newsletters 518 and 520). In this urban fantasy, the two main protagonists, Beth and Pen have been re-united after Pen's return from the mirror world of London Under Glass (Book 2 - THE GLASS REPUBLIC). Unfortunately, the goddess of London, Mater Viae has also returned and she wants to reclaim her throne. In the process she is re-making the city and ordinary inhabitants are dying, trapped in superheated "Fever Streets" or kidnapped by Mater Viae's creatures, the Claylings for unknown sinister purposes.

In the previous books, thanks to the weird alchemy of the Chemical Synod, Beth had taken on many aspects of the goddess and her health is now linked to the health of the city and the damage caused by Mater Viae means that both Beth and the city are dying. The beleaguered Beth and Pen and her small group of friends must find a way to defeat Mater Viae.

The only alternative remaining to them is to make allies of old enemies but can they be trusted and what will the ultimate cost be to Beth and Pen?

As I have said before Tom Pollock has a vivid imagination and I have thoroughly enjoyed these books. In particular, he has brought a freshness to the urban fantasy field that does not rely on old traditional “creatures”. However, in **OUR LADY OF THE STREETS** I did feel that the author was to some extent a victim of his own success. In providing us with so many themes and plot strands, in the final book it feels like there is not enough space to address everything in sufficient detail. There are still plenty of good ideas but some characters and situations who the reader cares about are given little space especially the people of the **THE GLASS REPUBLIC** and Pen and Espel’s romance. Also, the character, Filius Viae from the first book (**THE CITY’S SON**), although involved to some degree is left to some extent in limbo. The story still has plenty of action and is well-paced and easy to read. However, and again I think this is due to lack of space, the “big bad” Mater Viae is kept “off-stage” for far too long and does not feel like a nuanced villain.

Despite my caveats, if you like urban fantasy I would still recommend this series. Tom Pollock, to my mind has a great deal of talent and given this promising start I look forward to watching him progress. *CG (Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)*

MITOSIS by Brandon Sanderson

Gollancz / 44 pgs + extras / £8.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473209350

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Brandon Sanderson is a former winner of the David Gemmell Award for Best Fantasy Novel. That book, **THE WAY OF KINGS** was a brilliant, well-deserved winner. It would certainly have increased his popularity amongst readers. One can only suppose that that success is part of the reason behind this book.

MITOSIS is a beautifully produced little hardcover. The question remains, is it worth the money. Maybe to a collector. A general reader may feel cheated. **MITOSIS** is a 44 page novella. It is set in the same world as the novel **STEELHEART**. The idea behind it is that a number of people, called Epics,



are mutants with super-powers. Most of them use their talents the wrong way. Steelheart's touch turned things to steel, resulting in a steel city. In the novel, he was overthrown by the Reckoners. In this short story, an Epic called Mitosis arrives in the city and has to be dealt with by the Reckoners. His talent is that he is able to subdivide himself into an infinite number of clones. Kill one and there were plenty more to deal with.

The following pages in this book are very good drawings of three of the Epics that do not feature in 'Mitosis' the story, but along with their characteristics give a good idea what the Reckoners are up against. The final 25 pages of this slim volume are the beginning of **FIREFIGHT**, the sequel to **STEELHEART**.

At one point, samplers like this were given away at conventions, though marketed with an original short story, it could have become valuable that way. This will look good on the shelf. It is up you to decide if it is worth the money.

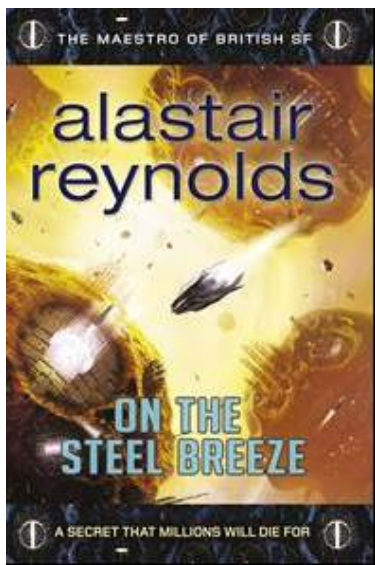
PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Gollancz)

ON THE STEEL BREEZE by Alastair Reynolds

Orion / 517 pgs / £8.99 enlarged paperback / ISBN: 978-0575090477

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



The trilogy is a strange creature and is constantly evolving. The original concept was to have three books all telling the same events but from radically different points of view. The framework was concise and enclosed. Then readers and publishers wanted more of characters they had come to love. Authors, too, discovered more that they wanted to say. Sometimes it was to develop the characters in different directions, sometimes it was to produce more of the same. In some cases, the trilogy grew into a series some of which appeared to have no finite ending and the characters remained ageless. Mostly, each book can be read in isolation, in any order. A variation is

the trilogy that is one large novel which has to be split into separate tomes, not only because of the sheer volume of words but because the cost of buying separate volumes is greater than what can be reasonably asked for

one. The worst of these are fantasy and appear to end mid-sentence, leading to frustration and impatience as reader is denied the next instalment for a period of up to a year. Some writers, particularly SF writers are developing a new form of the trilogy. The potential for the range in time, distance and technology allows a more expansive view. The volumes of the trilogy are set at different points on the projected time-line of a future history. Characters may or may not be continuous but there is a definite connection. Paul McAuley and Peter F. Hamilton have used this technique. So has Alastair Reynolds.

Reynolds' earlier novel, **BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH**, introduced the Akinya family. After the collapse of the 'Western' nations of the Northern Hemisphere, African entrepreneurs were able to take advantage of the gaps left behind. The Akinyas accumulated a huge fortune by investing in renewable technologies. In **BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH** younger members of the family embark on what is effectively a treasure hunt, following the clues left behind by their grandmother Eunice, in order to discover their inheritance. The novel introduced a remarkable set of off-world societies. Elephants played a part in the psyche of the characters, as do the people who have chosen to adapt their bodies to an aquatic lifestyle. These are links between the Akinyas in the two novels.

In **ON THE STEEL BREEZE** technology has moved on. People, although not immortal, have increased their longevity greatly. Humanity has headed out for the stars, aiming to colonise a particular planet that would require generation ships to reach if life-spans were as short as they are now - Reynolds does not believe in the development of FTL drives or short-cuts through wormholes. Chiku Akinya has a choice. She can stay on Earth and live a quiet, comfortable life, she can head out after Eunice Akinya's ship with the prospect of finding a way to unlock the physics of space travel, or she can go with the colonists as part of the expeditionary ark to the planet of Crucible. The solution is for Chiku to be cloned, have her personality stripped down and rebuilt into the three new Chikus, and be in three places at once. Chiku Yellow, who stays on Earth, turned off the link that exchanged knowledge with her counterparts. She would have remained in the situation of not knowing their fate indefinitely except that she is approached by one of the Aquatics who say they need her help. Chiku Green, who went after Eunice's ship, did return from her mission but is effectively dead. It is possible to retrieve her memories but only if Chiku Yellow is willing.

Once the process for sharing memories is unblocked, she is able to exchange memories with her other third. By this means we get an understanding of what is happening on the fleet ships heading for the

Crucible. These are hollowed out asteroids and have been accelerating a long time. The problem is that they cannot slow them down. The original plan had been to work on the problem in flight but after an accident that destroyed one of the ships, the government banned further research into the problem.

Both Chikus have other issues to contend with. High level sentient AIs have been banned. Any found will be destroyed. This is to protect humanity from possible subjugation. They are good at hiding. The one that has survived will do anything to remain extant. The one in the solar system has sent a part of itself with the ark. Both parts not only are good at surviving but also keeping information from the humans they were originally designed to serve. Both Chikus have nasty surprises in store for them. They have one advantage, Eunice and her forward planning.

Reynolds has created a highly complex scenario which has the asset of being a very believable forecast of future human development with enough space from now to make it feasible. It also moves away from the Americanised future by considering a resurgence of Africa as a centre of civilisation. He is also a proponent of the school of science that keep their space exploration within the bounds of the Theory of Relativity. Travel beyond the Earth's atmosphere takes time so other, more possible technological developments are envisaged to enhance the plausibility of what is an exciting thriller, the outcome of which is never certain. The book is beautifully written and the characters react naturally.

While it is not necessary to have read **BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH**, some of the subtleties here will be understood better if you have. Enjoy.

PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Gollancz)

CONVENTIONS

SCI-FI WEEKENDER, 19th - 22nd March, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales. Commercial multi-media convention. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See www.scifiweekender.com

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 £70, Supporting £25. Details at www.dysprosium.org.uk

EDGE-LIT, 11th July, Derby. Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guest of Honour Samantha Shannon. Tickets £30 from 01332 290606 or www.derbyquad.co.uk/special-event/edge-lit-4

NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 7th - 9th August, London. Multi-media with strong literature strand. Guests of Honour tba. Tickets £85 (early rate) at <https://nineworlds.co.uk/>

BRISTOLCON, 26th September, Bristol. Guests of Honour Jasper Fforde, Jaine Fenn and Chris Moore. Doubletree Hotel. £20 (£25 from May 1st). Details at www.bristolcon.org

NOVACON 45, 13th - 15th November, Nottingham. Guests of Honour are Anne and Stan Nicholls. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £45. Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

April 10th - Mathematician and writer **Professor Ian Stewart**

May 8th - **tbc**

June 12th - SF author **Stephanie Saulter**

July 10th - **tbc**

August 14th - **Summer Meal**

September 11th - **tbc**

October 9th - **tbc**

November 6th - author **Emma Newman**

December 4th - **Christmas 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