

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

DECEMBER 2015

ISSUE 531

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WEBSITE: www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/

EMAIL:

bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk

FACEBOOK:

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CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

4th December

The Christmas Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak from 7 till 11pm. The postcode is B29 7HQ for anyone travelling by car. By bus, from the centre of



Birmingham take a 45 or 47 bus from outside Boots, opposite New Street Station's old entrance on Smallbrook Queensway, or from near Boots in High Street. NB Bus stops are changing so check the destination sign carefully. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - it is about 15 minutes ride. The Selly Park Tavern is

January 8th - AGM and Book Auction. Please donate your books - all proceeds go to support the Brum SF Group

on the left a few stops past the Edgbaston Cricket Ground and the stop after the Nature Centre. Remember, the Skittle Alley is behind the main pub. Walk down the side of the Tavern into the car park and it is on your right.

NEWS IN BRIEF



British astronaut **Tim Peake** will be the first Briton to go to the International Space Station when he launches from Russia on 15th December Artist **Richard Powers**, whose work appeared on many SF book covers in the 1950's and 60's, has been inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame. **Beatrix Potter** was also one of the inductees for this year. The induction

recognises artists for their “distinguished achievement in the art of illustration” **Novacon 46** will be on the 11th - 13th November 2016. The Guest of Honour will be **Juliet E McKenna**. Membership will be £46 (until 31st December. The site (www.novacon.org.uk/n45) will shortly be updated to reflect these details and to allow purchase of memberships The **World Fantasy Convention** has announced that the current trophy, the “Howard” will be replaced after this year's awards. The trophy is a bust of the author **H P Lovecraft**, who is considered by some to be an inappropriate choice due to his racist views. In response, a previous World Fantasy winner, **S T Joshi** has announced that he will return his two awards in protest **Orbit**, which only entered the US SF market in 2008, is to increase its US publications by 50% to 90 new SF titles per annum **Kurt Vonnegut's CAT'S CRADLE** is to be adapted for TV by US channel FX Sky Arts is to show a new four part mini-series, *The Nightmare Worlds of H G Wells* that will feature four stories: “The Story of the Late

Mr Elvisham”, “The Purple Pileus”, “The Moth” and “The Devotee of Art”. Ray Winstone will be a narrator and Michael Gambon and Rupert Graves will also appear CBS has announced that a new *Star Trek* series will debut in January 2017 Microsoft invited major SF writers (including **Ann Leckie**, **Greg Bear**, **Seanan McGuire** and **David Brin**) into their research laboratories to “expose them to what some people might think is science fiction”. The resulting SF anthology is available as a free ebook (available from www.amazon.co.uk and others) Another new SF anthology **WAR STORIES FROM THE FUTURE** (featuring stories by **David Brin**, **Madeleine Ashby** etc) is also available as a free ebook download at www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/books/war-stories-from-the-future. NB For any downloads, **always check the offer has not expired before downloading.** *CG*

WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The World Fantasy Awards winners were announced at the World Fantasy Convention held in Saratoga Springs from November 5th to 8th. The Awards for Lifetime Achievement are announced in advance of the event.

Novel: THE BONE CLOCKS by David Mitchell (Sceptre)

Novella: WE ARE ALL COMPLETELY FINE by Daryl Gregory (Tachyon)

Short Fiction: “Do You Like to Look at Monsters?” by Scott Nicolay (Fedogan & Bremer)

Anthology: MONSTROUS AFFECTIONS edited by Kelly Link and Gavin J Grant (Candlewick)

Author Collection (Tied): GIFTS FOR THE ONE WHO COMES AFTER by Helen Marshall (ChiZine)

THE BITTERWOOD BIBLE AND OTHER RECOUNTINGS by Angela Slatter (Tartarus)

Artist: Samuel Araya

Special Award Professional: Sandra Kasturi & Brett Alexander Savory, for ChiZine Publications

Special Award Non-Professional: Ray B Russell & Rosalie Parker, for Tartarus Press

Lifetime Achievement Winners: Ramsey Campbell and Sherri S Tepper

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



THE THING ITSELF by Adam Roberts / Gollancz / 368 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575127722/ December 17th. SF. Tension builds between two men in an Antarctic research station as they learn they are not alone.

WARRIOR WOMEN edited by Paula Guran / Prime / 336 pgs / £11.95 paperback / ISBN 978-1607014584 / December 17th. Anthology of SF/Fantasy tales featuring warrior women. Stories by George RR Martin, Elizabeth Bear and Seanan McGuire etc.

THE STAR DIARIES (Penguin Modern Classics) by Stanislaw Lem / Penguin Classics / 352 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN

978-0241240021 / January 1st. SF. Collection of short stories featuring space traveller Ijon Tichy.

MORNING STAR (Red Rising 3) by **Pierce Brown** / Hodder & Stoughton / 416 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1444759051 / February 11th. SF. Darrow, one of the oppressed Helldivers has infiltrated the elite Gold Society and works to bring it down.



CITY OF BLADES (Divine Cities 2) by **Robert Jackson Bennett** / Jo Fletcher Books / 448 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1848669581 / January 7th. Fantasy. In a ruined city, the dead seek revenge for the destruction of their goddess.

DRAKE by **Peter McLean** / Angry Robot / 400 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857665102 / January 7th. Urban Fantasy. Don Drake is a demon-summoning hitman whose latest job puts him on everyone else's hitlist.

STEAL THE SKY by **Megan O'Keefe** / Angry Robot / 400 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857664891 / January 7th. Fantasy. As a face-changer murders government officials, conman Detan is trapped and hunted by the city elite.

A FIRE UPON THE DEEP (SF Masterworks) by Vernor Vinge / Gollancz / 608 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473211957 / January 7th. SF. Far future space opera. An ancient artefact destroys thousands of worlds. A rescue mission must retrieve a family of scientists who hold the key to saving civilisation. CG

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

THE FORBIDDEN ROOM - Release date December 11th. Horror. Submariners trapped deep underwater are haunted by a strange woodsman.



STAR WARS VII: THE FORCE AWAKENS - Release date December 18th. SF. A continuation of the *Star Wars* saga, set 30 years after the overthrow of the Empire by Luke Skywalker.

KNIGHT OF CUPS - Release date January 1st. A screenwriter living in Los Angeles tries to make sense of strange events.

MY GUARDIAN ANGEL - Release date January 5th. Dead sister of an eleven year old girl protects her from her bad parents. CG



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)

MUSIC IN THE BONE and other stories by Marion Pitman
Alchemy Press / 199 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1911034001.

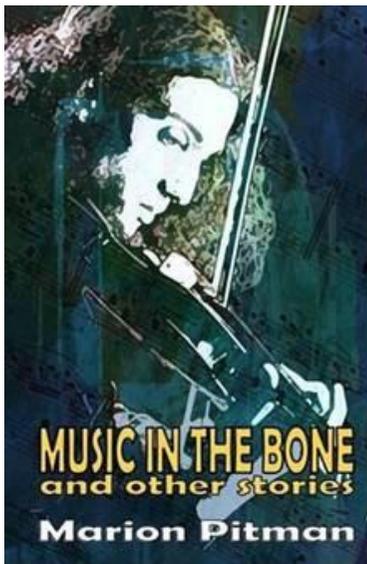
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

This hugely entertaining collection of nineteen stories and a poem is the best of Marion Pitman's fiction from the last 35 years. Almost every piece contains elements of the supernatural, though with a great variety of style and treatment.

There's humour in "The Cupboard of the Winds" (would you like to find a deity living in your airing cupboard?), in "Eyes of God" (full of extreme grotesqueness that shouldn't be taken too seriously), and in "Dead Men's Company" (a new take on sex slaves among 18th century pirates).

Sex, tastefully done, is an ingredient in several stories, notably coupled with music in the title story and in "Saxophony", both told from a female position. "Music in the Bone" is arguably the strongest story here, building tension cleverly with musical performances, couplings and sharp changes of key leading to an unexpected climax.

There are more-or-less traditional ghost stories, including "Out of Season", "Looking Glass", "Christmas Present"



and "Forward and Back, Changing Places", though in all of them Pitman manages to surprise the reader (always the most difficult thing about ghost stories).

A surprise ending is not always necessary or suitable. There are folk-tales re-worked here, such as the exquisitely told "The Seal Songs", set in the Hebrides, where the climax is fitting, predictable and not at all disappointing.

Not all the stories make sense, by which I mean that there are wonderfully surreal tales such as "Disposal of the Body", where a visit to a family funeral becomes, by degrees, something entirely different. And there's "District to Upminster" which, if you took it seriously, would inhibit you from catching another train ever again. And I suppose that "Overnight Bus", which is about many things including stalking, travelling in South Africa and cricket, deserves a mention here for an astonishingly surreal dream sequence in the middle of it.

To complete the genres there's SF ("Sunlight in Spelling", with enough good ideas for a novel), a really unpleasant horror story of the "payback time" sort ("Indecent Behaviour") and a fantasy western ("Meeting at the Silver Dollar").

What's exceptional about this collection are the arrangement and the poetic skills of the author. Longer and shorter stories alternate, though not slavishly - and I urge you to read the book in the order it's presented. As a poet, Pitman has a great talent for finding the right word and creating the desired atmosphere, while maintaining a tight hold on her material. She never lets style obscure plot or clarity and she knows that one of the greatest secrets of writing fine short stories is brevity - cutting out all repetitions and inessentials.

You can always judge the quality of an author collection by its weakest story. This is a collection without weak stories.

(Review copy kindly donated by Alchemy Press)

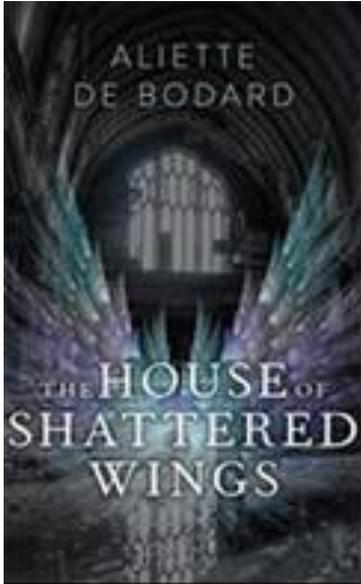
CM

THE HOUSE OF SHATTERED WINGS by Aliette de Bodard

Gollancz / 416 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473212558

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

The **HOUSE OF SHATTERED WINGS** is set in a ruined Paris. This is a world where angels fall periodically to Earth, their wings removed and with no memory of why they have



been cast out. These Fallen are suffused with magic and gangs of humans will kill them to gain temporary magical powers although like all drugs, eventually angel essence will kill the user.

To protect themselves, the Fallen band together into Great Houses. These compete in ruthless and Machiavellian power games which resulted some years ago in a Great War. This has left Paris devastated, its river polluted and the humans forced into either scratching a living or if skilled, gaining protection from the

diminished houses. At the start of the story, House Silverspires rescues a newly fallen and disoriented angel, Isabelle from a gang who want to kill her for her magical flesh. They also capture a strange man, Phillipe who seems more than human and who has a mysterious link to Isabelle from having ingested some of her flesh.

While under house arrest, Phillipe and Isabelle unwittingly unleash a malign entity that hides in shadows and progressively stalks and kills the members of House Silverspires one by one. Phillipe, as the activator of the “curse” now starts to have visions, which are clearly someone’s memories. These

memories show the house in earlier times, its missing and charismatic leader, Morningstar and his betrayal of the originator of the curse. The shadow killer is clearly the revenge of this person and is meant to bring about the total destruction of House Silverspires. As the other houses manoeuvre to take advantage of the stricken House, Phillipe is forced reluctantly to try and unravel the nature of the creature and the identity of the betrayed Silverspires member.

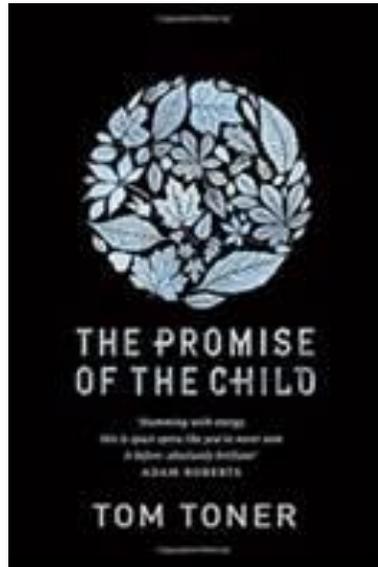
I found this very much a novel of two halves. In the first half I thoroughly enjoyed the world-building which is superb and detailed - the crumbling and derelict Paris and the diminished but still warring Houses work very well. The organisation of the Houses and their human and Fallen members are interesting and the slow reveal of the absent Morningstar and the consequences of his actions keep you engaged. However once the initial threat is uncovered, it felt to me like there was a significant loss of menace and pace. There is still a threat to the House but as they have been “off-stage” for too long, their ultimate revelation feels anticlimactic. It also felt to me that the characters’ motivations and actions were less credible and inconsistent with their previous characters - for instance, Morningstar and the head of House Hawthorn, Asmodeus. Also several plot points feel either unresolved or incompatible with earlier established facts - especially the relationship between Isabelle and Phillipe. I have read some of Aliette De Bodard’s SF short stories which I have thoroughly enjoyed. This book again demonstrates her impressive imagination but sadly the ending did not live up to the promise of the beginning. CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Orion Gollancz)

THE PROMISE OF THE CHILD by Tom Toner
Gollancz / 544 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473211360

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

I suspect the reception for this novel will be very clearly split into two camps - those who love it and those who hate it. It is a space opera set in 14,647 AD. Humans have spread across the galaxy, now occupying a 1300 light year diameter sector. They have never found any sentient aliens. Instead humanity is now divided (or “prised”) into various sub-species with different adaptations. At the apex of power are the Amaranthine “Immortals”, kept alive and unaging by some kind of drug/medical development. Their Emperor is the oldest of them who is still sane and their extended lives have allowed them to develop significant mental powers such as teleportation etc.



The story is told mainly from the viewpoint of three different characters. Firstly, Lycaste, a beautiful young man who has inherited a rich estate and lives a bored and unfocused life until an unintended crime forces him to go on the run. Secondly, there is Sotiris, a high status immortal who becomes involved in complicated politics (by someone called Aaron Long-Life) to replace the present Emperor. Finally, there is Corphuso, an inventor who has designed a mysterious, powerful device called the “Shell” or “Soul Engine”. This machine and its hapless inventor are fought over and passed between different factions.

However just extracting this much sense from the story takes a lot of effort and it takes a long time before the three strands start to come together and we finally begin to see the connections. The author has a good vocabulary and there is some excellent prose. However, the pace is almost glacial with a lot of dwelling on small scenes which do not always appear relevant to the plot development. While some will love this slow unravelling, others will find it exasperating and often perplexing (and I tend to fall into the latter camp as I prefer more structure and energy in the fiction I enjoy). Also I personally found the characters lacking in emotional depth and it was difficult to really care what happened to them. For a SF novel it is also very light on actual scientific detail and it felt like something which will appeal to those who appreciate style over action and emotional involvement. The author is clearly talented but this book takes significant time and effort to read and will not be to a majority of people's taste. CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Orion Gollancz)

THE REALT by James Brogden

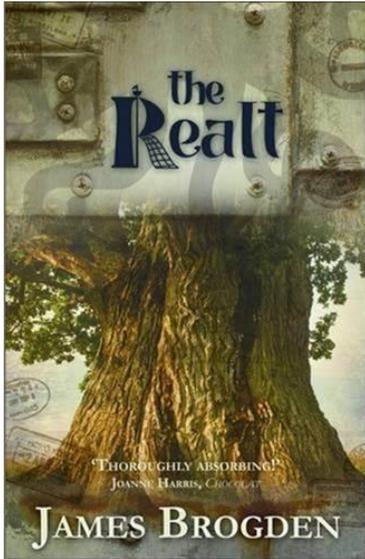
Snow Books / 299 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-1909679535

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Where do we go when we dream? How real are our dreams? Can we influence them? All questions that have exercised minds down the millennia. Scientists have studied sleep, psychologists and oneiromancers have tried to interpret dreams. Fiction has come up with a number of interesting ideas, including the suspicion that everything we think is real is actually a dream. Graham Joyce's first published novel, **DREAMSIDE** focused on the idea of lucid dreaming, a technique by which dreams can be affected by the dreamer. That idea is also used by James Brogden in this novel. The biggest dream cop-out was probably in the TV series *Dallas*

where in order to bring back a character by public demand, they had to make the whole of the previous series into a dream. Having the action ‘dreamed’ is not the best approach to convincing a reader that they have a legitimate story to tell. Fortunately, Brogden avoids this trap.

This is the second volume in a trilogy. In the first volume, *TOURMALINE* Bobby Jenkins finds himself on the other side of consciousness. There is another world, Tourmaline that some people can reach in their dreams. Those whose bodies lie in comas find a kind of freedom here despite



being hunted by the authorities of this other place. Bobby, though, has physically passed through the membrane into the dreamworld. There he met Allie Owens and fell in love. At the end of *TOURMALINE*, the island-sized raft that Allie and the other coma victims have made their home is attacked by the authorities that want to rid themselves of these interlopers. Allie survives but Bobby is thrown back into the waking world, known here as the Realt. With him comes a monster

which, initially takes up residence at the bottom of a Birmingham canal.

Back in the Tourmaline Archipelago, which is now embroiled in war, Allie’s concern is survival, especially as she finds that she is pregnant with Bobby’s child. Bobby’s intention is to get back to Tourmaline and Allie. Everyone has always been told that the two sides must be kept apart and nothing intrude in either direction or there will be dire consequences. Yet modern weapons have appeared on one side in the war. Bobby discovers that there are ways to cross over and that both

sides - from Realt and Tourmaline - actually have a large chamber like an amphitheatre, where representatives from both sides meet and discuss issues. They are held apart by a dividing membrane. Bobby needs to get into the chamber to get back to Allie even though the division would be breached.

Meanwhile, the monster or araka, can manifest as several separate entities which take up residence in the brains of some of Birmingham's criminal underworld and begin to create havoc, especially as their hosts now seem to be indestructible.

This is a novel which wanders in a number of directions before coming together as a complete whole and a grand finale. The most convincing aspects of it are the ones in the Realt, especially where the dark side of Birmingham comes to the fore. Without this, the novel would have much less impact. In a few places, the effects of subornation are described. These are events when a dreamer crosses over and brings with them the images of their nightmares. The novel would have been enhanced by more of these and their dramatic effects.

The concept of a dreamworld that has a reality of its own is an effective device for this fast-paced adventure that will provide a few hours of enjoyment to the majority of readers. *PM*

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

THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE, 20th November - 16th January at Repertory Theatre, Centenary Square. Tickets £13 - £35. Box Office 0121 236 4455 or www.birmingham-rep.co.uk

LATE NIGHT SF FILMS, 28th November - 12th December, The Mailbox. The Everyman cinema at The Mailbox is showing ALIEN (28th November), FLASH GORDON (5th December) and TOTAL

RECALL (12th December) all at 11pm. Cost £10 from venue or www.everymancinema.com/special-events/late-nights/

CTHULHU CALLING DAY, 28th November, Walsall. KnightWatch Press launch a Cthulhu-themed anthology **NEW TALES OF THE OLD ONES** with author readings, music and refreshments. Southcart Books, 20 Lower Hall Lane, Walsall. WS1 1RL.

GEORGE ORWELL'S 1984, 9th - 12th December, Birmingham Theatre School. Tickets £8 www.birminghamtheatreschool.com. Old Fire Station, 285-287 Moseley Road, B12 0DX. Tel: 0121 440 1665

YULEMOOT, 5th December, Birmingham. Christmas gathering of the Tolkien Society (www.tolkienociety.org/events/yulemoot-2015) at The Old Contemptibles, 176 Edmund Street, B8 2HB. Free Entry - 5pm till late.

TIM PEAKE LAUNCH PARTY, 15th December, Various venues. Live link with NASA/ESA coverage of the launch of UK astronaut, Tim Peake to the International Space Station.

- Think Tank, Millennium Point, Birmingham. 10 - 4pm. Think Tank Ticket (£12.75) required for entry but screening is Free (www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank/visit).
- Leicester Space Centre, Leicester. 09:30 - 12:00. Talks, workshops etc followed by live screening. Free Entry but must book. (NB does not appear to require separate venue entry but should check with Space Centre). Tel: 0116 261 0261 or www.spacecentre.co.uk/

AN EVENING WITH CHRIS HADFIELD, 19th January, Birmingham. Canadian astronaut talks about his history as a military pilot and astronaut. 7:30pm at Birmingham Symphony Hall. Tickets £28, £44 and £95 (VIP). Tel: 0121 780 4949 or www.thsh.co.uk/event/spend-an-evening-with-chris-hadfield/

CONVENTIONS

MANCUNICON (EASTERCON), 25th - 28th March 2016, Manchester. Guests of Honour are Aliette de Bodard, David L Clements, Ian McDonald and Sarah Pinborough. To be held at the

Hilton, Deansgate, Manchester. Attending £60 (until 30th November).
Details at www.mancunicon.org.uk/

SATELLITE 5, 28th - 29th May 2016, Glasgow. Guests of Honour
Jaine Fenn & Ed Buckley. At the Marriott Hotel, Glasgow. Attending
£55. Details at www.satellite5.org.uk/

**FANTASYCON BY THE SEA, 23rd - 25th September 2016,
Scarborough.** Guest of Honour Adam Nevill. At the Grand and Royal
Hotels. Tickets £50 + £35 Awards Banquet.
<http://fantasyconbythesea.com>

BRISTOLCON, 29th October 2016, Bristol. Guests of Honour Ken
MacLeod, Sarah Pinborough and Fangorn. Doubletree Hotel. £20.
Details at www.bristolcon.org

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

January 8th - **AGM and Book Auction**

February 12th - **Annual Quiz**

March 11th - SF author **Christopher Priest**

April 8th - SF/Fantasy author **Jacey Bedford**

May 13th - **tbc**

June 10th - author, editor and publisher **Ian Whates**

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reproduced in whole or part without the consent of the editor and/or
the respective authors. This issue produced by Carol Goodwin
(goodwincd@yahoo.com). Opinions expressed herein do not
necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership
or, for that matter, the person giving the 'opinion'. Thanks to all the
named contributors in this issue.

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