

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JANUARY 2016

ISSUE 532

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Annual General Meeting and Book Auction

8th January



A Happy New Year to all our members from the committee. We hope that you enjoyed your Christmas and that the New Year will be a good one.

January is once again the time for the Annual General Meeting followed by the Book Auction. The Annual General Meeting is a legal necessity. A new committee needs

February 12th - Annual SF Quiz

to be elected and it is the time for you to voice your views on the Group and any changes you would like to be considered. Full details of the committee member roles and requirements were included in previous newsletters. To stand for a Committee post you must be a member of the group and ideally should have been a member for at least 12 months.

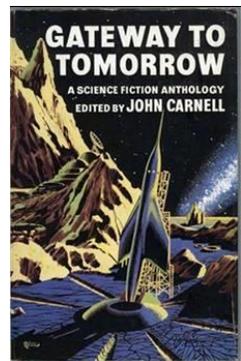
The AGM is usually completed very quickly and we can get on with the main event of the evening - **the Auction**. Rog will once again be trying to empty our wallets/purses with as little pain as possible. But we do need items to sell so please donate. All of the proceeds go to help the running of the Brum Group - without the money raised from auctions we would probably have to increase membership fees. So please bring a few items - books, magazines, fanzines, artwork, posters, DVD's, CD's etc. CG

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, off New Street.

The doors open at 7.30pm and the meeting will normally commence at 8.00pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar on the ground floor, and be seated in plenty of time. The entrance fee for our January AGM is free and the August and December socials are ticket only events. All other meetings the entrance fee is £3.00 for members and £4 for non-members

NEWS IN BRIEF

British artist **Gerard Quinn** died in November. He was active mainly in the 1950's and 1960's when he worked for *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* magazines. Some of his work also appeared on covers of Robert A Heinlein and Arthur C Clarke books British author **George Clayton Johnson** has died. He was most remembered for co-writing LOGAN'S RUN but also wrote episodes of *The Twilight Zone* British author **Peter Dickinson** died on December 16th. He was known mainly for his Children's and Crime writing and was awarded an OBE in 2009 for services to literature. He was twice nominated for the World Fantasy Award. His science fiction *Changes*



trilogy, set in a Britain where people are driven to destroy all technology, was adapted and shown on BBC television in the 1970's. He was married to fantasy writer Robin McKinley.... Australian/British SF author **Tom Arden** (real name **David Rain**) has died aged 54. He is most remembered for his 5 volume *Orokon* series. Other work included a *Dr Who* novella and four novels. He also wrote SF/Fantasy short stories, some of which were published in *Interzone*. His reviews also regularly appeared in *Interzone* in the 1990's to 2000's Voting for the **Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF)** is now open. Declared candidates are Anna Raftery and Wolf von Witting. Details are at <http://taff.org.uk/#vote2016> and voting closes on April 7th Initial responses to a questionnaire on the future of **Eastercon** were discussed at Novacon. As many people had not seen the questionnaire, it has been re-opened and can be seen at <https://eastercon.wordpress.com/> along with the initial conclusions A team has been set up to discuss a UK bid for **Worldcon 2024**. Details at <http://file770.com/?p=26185> *CG*

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



STARBOUND (Lightship Chronicles 2) by Dave Bara / Del Rey / 368 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0091956424 / January 14h. SF. The *Starbound* spaceship investigates a mysterious space station.

ANCESTRAL MACHINES (Humanity's Fire 4) by Michael Cobley / Orbit / 464 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0356501772 / January 14h. SF. A smuggler must rescue his crew from the Warcage - two hundred worlds yoked to an artificial sun.

OCCUPY ME by Tricia Sullivan / Gollancz / 272 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473212961 / January 21st. SF. A woman pursues a killer who has possessed the body of another man.

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY by Charlie Jane Anders / Titan Books / 320 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1785650550 / January 26th. SF/Fantasy mix. A witch and a scientist try to save the future.



THE BANDS OF MOURNING by Brandon Sanderson / Gollancz / 448 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473208254 / January 28th. Fantasy. New series in the *Mistborn* universe where a Wild West mixes with magic and science.

THE HUMAN DIVISION (Old Man's War 5) by John Scalzi / Tor / 512 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1447290476 / January 28th. SF. Lt Harry Wilson must preserve the Colonial Union after a terrible revelation.

GRAFT by Matt Hill / Angry Robot / 448 pgs / £5.39 paperback / ISBN 978-0857664990 / February 2nd. SF. When mechanic, Sol steals a car he is caught up in a trans-dimensional human trafficking conspiracy.

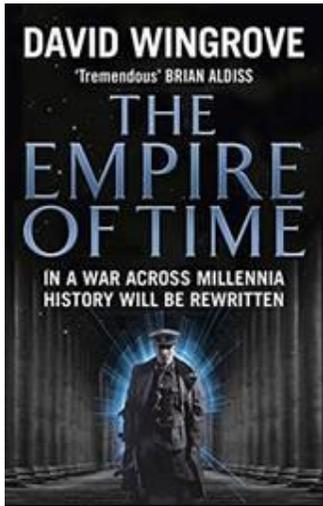
THE TIGER AND THE WOLF (Echoes of the Fall 1) by Adrian Tchaikovsky / Macmillan / 608 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0230770065 / February 11th. Fantasy. In a world of warfare, shape-

shifting and twisted politics, Maniye (daughter of the Wolf Clan's chief) tries to escape from captivity. 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)**

***THE EMPIRE OF TIME* by David Wingrove**
Del Rey / £8.99 paperback / 468 pgs / ISBN: 978-0091956165
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



Themes and approaches in writing often tend to go in cycles, with a particular idea cropping up not once but several times in quick succession. One of the currently popular settings seems to be Russia. Jaspur Kent's quintet of vampire novels is set during the Romanov dynasty (his vampires are bad news) while Peter Higgins has opted for a Russianesque background for his fantasy trilogy. David Wingrove is another travelling in the Steppes. None of these writers is influenced by each other, the books being written entirely independently from each other.

Wingrove doesn't stick only to Russia but wraps his story up in time travel, paradox and an ongoing war between the Russians and the Germans. Otto Behr comes from a time far in our future even though the opening scenes are set in the thirteenth century. Otto and his kind are agents that travel backwards and forwards in time with the express purpose of either changing the time-line, or preventing the Russians from doing so. Both sides have singled out key historical figures or battles and put agents in place to influence the time stream. If they are killed, someone else will change events so that they do not die in that time or place. Sometimes, they may have to relive an event a number of times before the right result is achieved. This is the case for Otto when he meets Katerina. She is the daughter of a Russian fur trader and he falls in love with her. She, however is promised to another man. Otto has to change events

frequently in order to eliminate his rival. This is strictly against the rules as forming relationships with the local people can jeopardise the time line.

This is a novel that has been meticulously planned. Not only is an intense knowledge of past events needed to keep the time-stream flowing smoothly but an idea of what might have happened if events had happened differently. Little other than Russian and German history is considered here but considering the times that attempts have been made to invade and capture Moscow, the narrowing of the perspective to just these two nations seems justifiable. Wingrove has also had to consider the future narrative as at one point Otto has to ensure that the breakthrough that enabled time jumping actually happened. He is a warrior. At times he has to be ruthless.

The story-line could have become extremely confusing with the shifts in time and changing events but it is to Wingrove's credit that this does not interfere with what is a fast paced action thriller, touching down at various places in history. As time loops around his characters, so the seemingly trivial does, or will, gain importance as the story unfolds.

This is the first book of a trilogy so it is inevitable that there are strands that are unresolved by the end. Nevertheless, this is a very enjoyable read.

(Kindly donated by Del Rey Books)

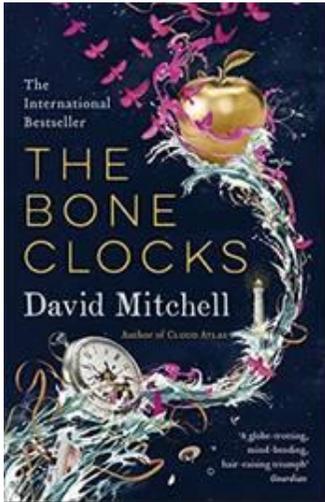
***THE BONE CLOCKS* by David Mitchell**

Sceptre / £7.99 paperback / 613 pgs / ISBN 978-0340921623

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

I saw that this had just won the World Fantasy Award so I read it to find out how much SF/fantasy it has. As in **CLOUD ATLAS**, there's some SF and some fantasy, though mostly this is literary fiction.

Mitchell is a perceptive writer, particularly talented at creating entertainingly offbeat characters in widely different milieux. His depictions of the teenage Holly Sykes and the undergraduate Hugh Lamb in the recent past (1980s, 1990s) are a joy to read, full of wit and clever revelation. Gradually the narrative progresses, via different narrators and Mitchell's familiar novella structure, into the future. But over half the novel has gone by before we arrive at anything substantially futuristic (2025), and the previous SF/fantasy elements have been restricted to very brief episodes easily dismissed as hallucinations.



Only after page 397 do we learn about the reincarnation theme and the war between two groups of supermen (and women) with super powers. There's an exciting (though baffling) battle between the two groups. Later on, in 2043, we see the planet, via the microcosm of one small corner of Ireland, descending into dystopia and barbarism.

Somewhere in the middle of the book is political satire and literary feuding. I noticed Lord Sugar and *The Apprentice* (carefully renamed to avoid legal action) receiving a kicking.

So this contains many themes, several tropes of SF and plenty of characters turning up again and again in major and minor roles. Mostly it's Holly Sykes' novel; she's there at the beginning and the end.

Mitchell has done an excellent (if occasionally patchy) job. This is a difficult and demanding novel, partly SF and partly not, though wholly worth reading. NB Copy not supplied by Sceptre/Hodder--I bought it. *CM*

***EVOCATIONS* by James Brogden**

Alchemy Press / £11 paperback / 263 pgs / ISBN 978-0992980993

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

What factors help us to decide to try a new author? Reviews and recommendations from friends help but I have also found that hearing someone speak and enjoying what they say can be a good (albeit not infallible) pointer to a writer worth investigating. As some of you may remember, James Brogden is a local writer who was a guest at the BSFG in March 2013. Since that appearance he has published two further novels (TOURMALINE and THE REALT, both published by Snow Books) and this short story collection, *EVOCATIONS* (Alchemy Press). I must confess that I have not read his novels but have enjoyed some of his short stories in previous anthologies.

EVOCATIONS is a collection of sixteen of James' short stories, most previously published elsewhere with a couple of new additions. The stories all contain an element of the fantastical but are also rooted in the real (and mostly modern) world. Some of the stories also verge into horror.

The first story "The Phantom Limb" concerns an amputee who finds his phantom arm can reach into another world and is a short but effective little horror story.

In "The Evoked" we see the author's Australian background combined with a consideration of the old meaning of the Winter solstice and the festival of Yule. There are lots of ideas in this story and I felt that whilst good it would have benefited from more space to expand.

"The Last Dance of Humphrey Bear" is one of my favourites. A child's favourite toy (*Humphrey Bear* is an Australian Children's TV programme) holds the last breath of a dead child. It has emotional depth and deals very sensitively with some dark themes.

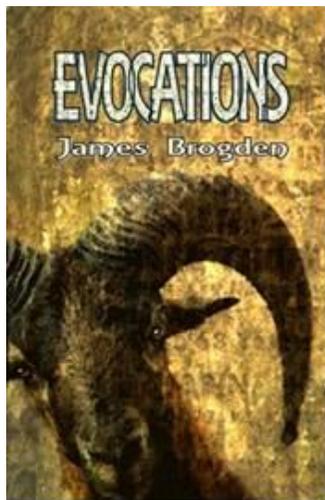
"How to Get Ahead in Avatising" is a nice little satire on the price people may have to pay for fame and combines mythological archetypes with clever swipes at "spin" and personality worship.

"Junk Male" is about a couple of students who create a fake identity to reply to unsolicited post and the unintended consequences. This is one of the stories which illustrate the author's ability to deftly combine humour with horror.

"The Decorative Water Feature of Nameless Dread" is another story I really liked. It is an affectionate combination of Lovecraftian monsters and Middle England. It is written with a light touch and I found it very funny.

"The Gestalt Princess" is a charming but unconventional love story which I enjoyed, even with a steampunk setting (of which I am normally not the greatest fan).

"The Smith of Hockley" and "If Street" both show another one of this author's strengths - exploring the intersections between local locations and ancient things and people.



“Mob Rule” is probably my least favourite in the collection. The idea behind the story is good (difficult to describe without giving away the premise) but I just didn’t like any of the characters or the conclusion.

By contrast, the short story “The Gas Street Octopus” is excellent and the one-liner ending will make you smile (or groan, depending on whether you like puns!)

“DIYary of the Dead” is a first-rate horror story where the mundane is slowly “peeled back” to reveal the macabre.

“The Curzon Street Horror” looks at the arcane rites that might have been involved in the start of the railways in Birmingham and again shows Brogden using a local location as the starting point to something weird.

“The Remover of Obstacles” is about dodgy car mechanics that again looks at ancient things concealed beneath a modern veneer.

“Made from Locally Sourced Ingredients” is a ghoulish look at trendy restaurants and the advisability of knowing where your food comes from. Whilst not for the faint-hearted this is still a very enjoyable and ingenious story.

The final story in the collection “The Pigeon Bride” is essentially a fairy tale but in a modern urban setting. As with the original fairy stories, there is a grim element and a price to be paid for the “happy” ending.

An extract from the author’s novel, **TOURMALINE** ends the collection. It introduces a mysterious girl but is too short to give much feel for the story. A better guide would be the review published in **BSFG Newsletter #507 (December 2013)**.

Based on this collection, James Brogden has an impressive imagination. He is exceptional at taking small everyday elements and transforming them into the bizarre. I also like his use of Midlands locations and how he connects the mythological past with the more “rational” present. His stories also demonstrate a mischievous and satirical sense of humour (including some clever puns) and were one of the things I really relished in this collection. On a minor note, there are no SF stories but that is the only reservation I have about recommending this book to readers.

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 5TH WAVE - Release date January 22nd. SF. Cassie tries to save her young brother during deadly alien attacks on Earth.

CAPTURE THE FLAG - Release date January 29th. Animation. A young surfer and his friends try to stop a billionaire re-writing history.

LAZER TEAM - Release date January 29th. SF Comedy. Earth receives a coded message saying that they are not alone in the galaxy.

GOOSEBUMPS - Release date February 5th. Horror Comedy. *Goosebumps* author R L Stine's daughter fights demons released from her father's books.

DEADPOOL - Release date February 10th. New *Marvel* film. Former Special Forces man gains accelerated healing powers and becomes the anti-hero, Deadpool.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES - Release date February 12th. The characters from Jane Austen's story face the new challenge of a zombie army!
CG

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

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/

AN EVENING WITH MELINDA SALISBURY, 5th February, Birmingham. Fantasy author launches her new book **THE SLEEPING PRINCE** at Waterstones High Street from 6pm. Tel: 0121 631 4353 or tweet to @waterstonesbham to reserve a seat.

SOUTHCART VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE, 13th February, Walsall. Local author readings with a theme of love, fear and blood from 10:30. Southcart Books, 20 Lower Hall Lane, Walsall. WS1 1RL.

CONVENTIONS

PICOCON, 20th February 2016, London. Guest of Honour Paul Cornell. Imperial College Union. Cost £12. Details at www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/

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 £75 (from December 1st). Details at www.mancunicon.org.uk/

SCI-FI WEEKENDER 7, 17th - 20th March, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales. Commercial multi-media convention. Literature guests include Adam Nevill, Stan and Anne Nicholls, Sam Stone, Emma Newman etc. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See www.scifiweekender.com

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**

July 8th - SF fan and convention organizer **Dave Lally**

August 12th - **Summer Social Meal** - venue tbc

September 9th - **tbc**

October 14th - astronomer and lecturer **Andy Lound**

November 4th - **tbc**

December 2nd - **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