

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JANUARY 2019

ISSUE 568

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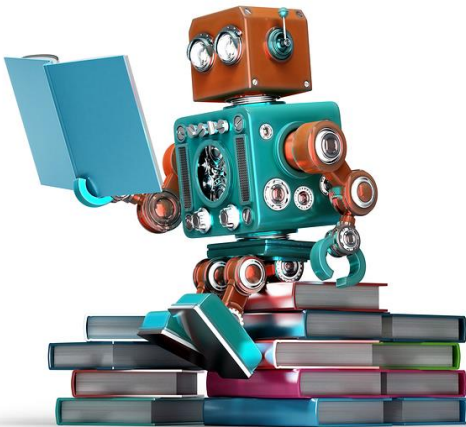
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THE AGM AND BOOK AUCTION

January 11th



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.

Apologies if this newsletter is somewhat later than normal. As you are aware, we now use a commercial printer. They have a

February 8th - SF author Gareth L Powell.

shutdown period between Christmas and New Year which has consequently delayed printing and posting. However, I believe that it should still arrive before the meeting (weather and post permitting!)

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 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. 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.

This year there will be some changes. Firstly, after many years' service, Vernon Brown will be stepping down as Chairman. I (Carol) will be standing for his post, although I will also re-stand for the post of Newsletter Editor. There is precedent for this, and indeed Pat Brown has been holding two posts (Treasurer and Membership Secretary) this year. On that note, Ian Morley has volunteered to stand for the role of Membership Secretary.

The AGM is usually completed very quickly and we can get on with the main event of the evening - **the Auction**. But we do need items to sell so please donate. All of the proceeds go to help the running of the Brum Group. 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 for members and £6 for non-members.

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

GLASS - Release date January 18th. A security guard uses his supernatural abilities to track a disturbed man with 24 personalities.

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON: THE HIDDEN WORLD

- Release date February 1st. Animation. A dragon called Toothless falls in love.

ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL - Release date February 6th. SF. An abandoned cyborg girl is restored but has no memory of her past.

LEGO MOVIE 2: THE SECOND PART - Release date February 8th. Animation. The Lego citizens are threatened by invaders from outer space. CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



THE GUTTER PRAYER (*Black Iron Legacy 31*) by Gareth Hanrahan / Orbit / 544 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356511528 / January 17th. Three thieves must stand together against a malevolent power stirring beneath the city's streets.

OUR CHILD OF THE STARS by Stephen Cox / Jo Fletcher Books / 496 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1786489951 / January 24th. SF. A family protect an alien child from the sinister forces who are looking for him.

DRAGON HEART by Peter Higgins / Gollancz / 416 pgs / £18.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473212169 / January 24th. A family battle to

survive and protect their daughter when the heart of a dragon starts to beat in her chest.

GOLDEN STATE by **Ben H Winters** / Century / 336 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1780897264 / January 24th. SF. In Golden State the worst crime is to lie – until a police veteran discovers those in charge of the truth are the ones twisting it.



THE LAST by **Hanna Jameson** / Viking / 400 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0241349175 / January 31st. SF. After a nuclear war, twenty people are stranded in a Swiss hotel but one is a killer.

THE INGENIOUS by **Darius Hinks** / Angry Robot / 400 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857667892 / February 5th. Political exiles seek a way out a strange city adrift in time and space.

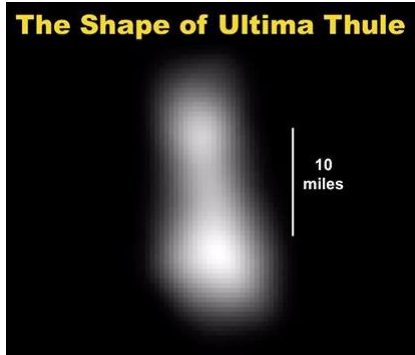
FOG SEASON (Port Saint Frey 2) by **Patrice Sarath** / Gollancz / 368 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857667779 / February 5th. The Mederos sisters use their talents to rebuild their family fortunes but a new detective with his own special abilities is on their trail.

IN THE NIGHT WOOD by **Dale Bailey** / Harper Voyager / 224 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0008329167 / February 7th. A couple seeking a new start inherit Hollow House, but soon feel haunted and menaced.

CG

NEWS IN BRIEF ...

By the time you get this newsletter, the image on the left will be out of date (from NASA/JHU). It was taken by NASA'S *New Horizons* spacecraft on January 1st. This is the same spacecraft that took the spectacular photos of Pluto. It shows a Kuiper Belt object, **Ultima Thule** In celebration,



Brian May (*Queen* musician and astronomer) has written a new song about it. The song also includes some words spoken by **Prof. Stephen Hawking**. This can be listened to at www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3Jm5POCAj8&feature=youtu.be

Also by the time you receive this newsletter, hopefully the Chinese robotic spacecraft, **Chang'e-4** should have landed on the Moon in the Von Karman crater on the far side of the Moon In other space related news, many tributes have been paid to **Dr Nancy Roman**, who died recently. Dr Roman was known as “Mother of the Hubble” for her work on the Hubble Space Telescope. She was the first woman to hold an executive-level position at NASA. She was a passionate advocate for women in sciences and in 2017 was one of the figures created by **Lego** for their Women in NASA set. She was awarded a Women in Aerospace Lifetime Achievement Award and also NASA'S Exceptional Scientific Achievement Award *SF Concatenation* co-editor and SF Fan, **Graham Connor** has died at the age of 61. A qualified physicist with a career in aerospace, he was also an SF-enthusiast. He was on the committee of various cons and in 1987, jointly with Jonathan Cowie he launched *SF² Concatenation* (then in paper form) Worldcon 2019 in Dublin has announced a new category of Hugo Award for Best Art Book The **Nine Worlds Convention** (UK) responded to critical tweets by announcing that there will be no 2019 convention but aim to start up again in 2020. The option on a 2019 hotel expired during the process of appointing a new committee after the original team bidding withdrew The annual **Goodreads Choice Awards** for 2018 were

announced. **VENGEFUL** by **VE Schwab** won Best SF novel, **CIRCE** by **Madeline Miller** won Best Fantasy, and **ELEVATION** by **Stephen King** won Best Horror The **Orwell Foundation** is launching a new prize for novels and stories that address social and political themes. It will include a £3000 cash prize to be awarded annually around June 25th (**George Orwell's** birthday) **Audible.com** have announced their Best of 2018 lists for audio books. The SF Novel winner was **ROSEWATER** by **Tade Thompson**, Fantasy Novel was **SPINNING SILVER** by **Naomi Novik**, Fiction Novel was **CIRCE** by **Madeline Miller**, and YA Novel was **CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE** by **Tomi Adeyemi** Debut YA fantasy writer, **Tomi Adeyemi** did not do herself any favours by accusing the highly successful and prolific author, **Nora Roberts** of plagiarism and “trying to shamelessly profit off it” for using a similar title to her book. In a dignified response, **Nora Roberts** who has herself been a victim of plagiarism, explained that a) titles can't be copyrighted and b) her novel had already been written, titled and in production at the time so there was no way the title had been imitated. Although **Ms Adeyemi** issued an apology, she did not then remove her original tweet for some time There is a bid to hold **Eastercon 2020 in Birmingham**, at the **Hilton Metropole (NEC)**. The bid will be voted on at this year's **Eastercon (Ytterbium)**. The bid is called **Concentric**. Further details are available at www.concentric2020.uk/ **Ytterbium (Eastercon 2019)** is offering **20 low income accommodation bursaries**. These are for anyone in receipt of either universal credit or **Housing/Council Tax Benefits**. Awards will be made on a first come, first served basis and are worth £120 (paid direct to the hotel). If interested, please contact Chair@Ytterbium.org.uk A new adaptation of **H G Wells' classic THE WAR OF THE WORLDS** will be shown on the **BBC** sometime this year. It will star **Eleanor Tomlinson, Rafe Spall, and Robert Carlyle** Canadian author **Margaret Atwood** was awarded the **Order of the Companions of Honour** for services to **Literature** in the **Queen's New Year Honours List**. Fantasy author **Philip Pullman** was also honoured by a knighthood for his services to **Literature**. *CG*



BOOK REVIEWS

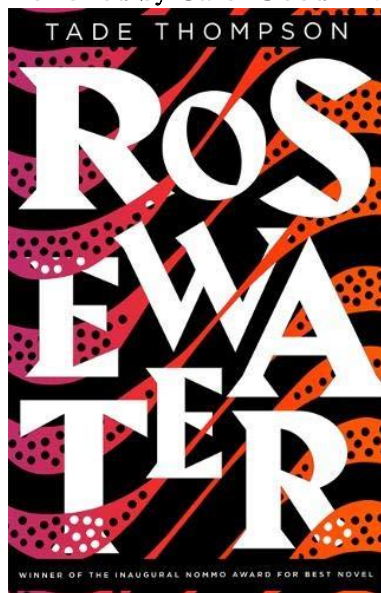


(**REVIEWERS** please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwinced@yahoo.com **Deadline** for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting)

ROSEWATER (The Wormwood Trilogy 1) by Tade Thompson

Orbit / 416 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356511368

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.



When a novel has won many plaudits and even awards, I sometimes feel that it is more difficult to review than with something I have read with no preconceptions. There is almost a pressure to not go against the flow and disagreeing with more “eminent” voices by writing something that is not a completely glowing review can seem a bit presumptuous. However I feel it important to give my own honest opinion.

ROSEWATER was originally published in the USA by a small press and has now been re-issued by Orbit, with a further two novels in the trilogy planned. It was a finalist

for the John W Campbell Memorial Award and won the inaugural Nommo Award (for African writers) for Best Speculative Fiction Novel.

A few alien “meteors” have landed on Earth, London is destroyed and the USA has gone silent with no-one aware of its fate. In Nigeria, an alien “biodome” has appeared and over about twenty years, the town of Rosewater has grown up around it. Mostly the dome appears inactive with few noticeable effects here of the “invasion”. One effect is the release of microscopic fungal spores into the air to create a “xenosphere”. A few people are able to use this and can mind-read, psychically find things/people and communicate telepathically with each other. Once a year the alien

biodome also opens and anyone nearby will be healed, although this is not perfect leading to badly mis-shapen, insane, violent or even “empty” re-animated bodies, which the local police force then has to brutally destroy. The story is told by Kaaro, a very gifted sensitive. Initially using his new abilities to enhance his career as a thief and petty criminal he is latter conscripted by a secret government agency to find people and objects and to telepathically interrogate “terrorists”. Over the space of the novel he gradually comes to realise that sensitives like him are dying off and out of self-interest starts to investigate the origins of his gift and the disease that is threatening him.

The writer clearly has talent and the novel is ambitious and I can to an extent see why other people are so enamoured of this book. The worldbuilding is very detailed and presents a very believable, if not particularly pleasant society. The alien invasion story also works on two levels and is clearly also a metaphor about the effects of colonialism, much as the 1956 film **THE INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**, played upon fears of communist invasion and takeover. Some reviewers have commented that the slow, microscopic invasion and alteration of humans is also a new departure but I disagree. For example, John Carpenter’s **THE THING** and the 2005 TV series, *Threshold* have also used the concept to a degree. The narrative structure is also quite challenging. Everything is told from Kaaro’s point of view, but subsequent chapters jump back and forth across about twenty years, in no particular order and the reader has to work hard to piece together the exact chronology of events and their significance and at times I found this very confusing. Also, Kaaro himself is not written to be a pleasant character. He is violent, misogynistic, narcissistic and extremely self-centred. In particular I found his treatment of women hard to read. Although the character is consistent with the society he has sprung from, as he is the narrator this means there is little or no relief for the reader and I found this book a very depressing read with many disturbing elements such as “necklacing” of people etc. In essence, this book is a kind of “grimdark” SF (ie dystopian, violent and with characters who possess few redeeming qualities). Fans of

that kind of SF/Fantasy may well enjoy this book but it was one I really struggled with despite the obvious abilities of the author. CG

***OUR CHILD OF THE STARS* by Stephen Cox**

Jo Fletcher Books / 496 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1786489951

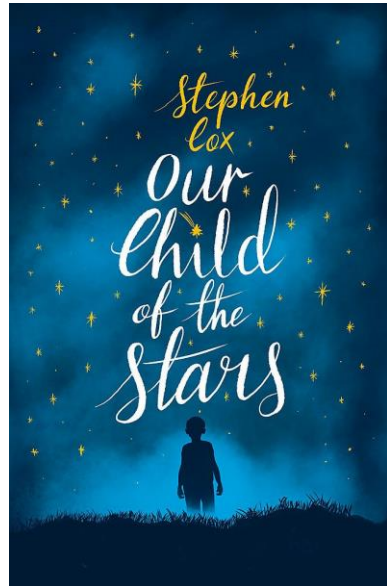
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

Unlike *ROSEWATER*, this debut SF novel by author Stephen Cox is one that I had not read any pre-publicity so had no expectations either way. It is set in a small town in the USA in the late 60's. Molly and Gene are a married couple who are struggling to rebuild their marriage after a series of crises. Then the Meteor crashes into their town of Amber Grove and changes their lives forever.

Molly is a nurse at the local hospital and amid the disaster she has to take care of a desperately ill but alien child dragged from the wreckage. Amid the paranoia of a cold war, she and a small group of friends and family must nurture and protect the child from those who see it only as an asset to be interrogated and experimented upon.

This is a novel that surprised me and in a very good way. From the description above it may sound very cliched but this is a novel full of charm and it certainly captivated this reader. This is a novel that I thoroughly enjoyed reading and really wanted to know what happened to the characters.

The author cleverly opens the story two years after the Meteor crash, and we see a loving mother/child relationship as they prepare for the excitement of Halloween. It is only as the chapter unfolds that we realise that Cory, the child is not human but by then the reader is already enchanted by him. The story then goes back through Molly and Gene's difficulties over the years leading up to the



Meteor crash, which in part drive Molly's decision to protect the alien after its mother dies during the crash. To protect him from cynical government scientists and military interests, Cory is smuggled out of the hospital and hidden in their house. As they help Cory heal both physically and mentally, they also heal their marriage. It is a story all about characters, family and doing the right thing even when it is not the easiest path. However, as well as the domestic scenes there is also plenty of action, paranoia, pursuit and peril that adds pace and excitement to the narrative.

This is an impressive debut novel and the characterisation is its absolute strength. Gene and Molly have both flaws and virtues but I loved their fierce love for their strange child. Cory is also delightful; his initial trauma, his loneliness and fear despite the security of his adoptive parents, his unique view and delight in our world. It is so refreshing to read a story about fundamentally decent people and in contrast to much of the grim, dark SF/Fantasy that is out there, this was an absolute joy to read. I also think that it will have a wider appeal than to just committed SF fans. A very satisfying, heart-warming book that I loved.

CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organizers before travelling. Any information about forthcoming SF/Fantasy/Horror events is always welcome - please send to Carol at goodwinced@yahoo.com

THE ALEX FILM FESTIVAL, 14th - 20th January. Free films screenings including LABYRINTH (14th), THE WIZARD OF OZ (17th) and THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (18th). At the Alexandra Theatre, Suffolk Queensway. Book at www.atgtickets.com/

MISTRESS TO THE MIDNIGHT play, 1st - 2nd February. Spoof of a classic British horror film. Old Joint Stock Theatre. £10 at www.oldjointstock.co.uk or 0121 200 0946.

WOLVERHAMPTON LITERATURE FESTIVAL, 1st - 3rd February, Wolverhampton. Various events and prices. SFF events include HOW TO FIND A LITERARY AGENT with **Anna Stephens**

& G X Todd (£2) and WRITING THE FANTASTIC with Stephen Aryan, Anna Stephens & G X Todd. Book at <http://wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk> or 0870 320 7000.

HOLLY BLACK & CASSANDRA CLARE tour, 2nd February, **Birmingham**. Authors will be talking and launching their new titles, **THE WICKED KING** and **QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS**. Hosted by Waterstones at The Glee Club, 70 Hurst Street, B5 4TD. 12:30pm Cost £7 - £32. Book at www.waterstones.com

MYSTERY HORROR MOVIE MARATHON, 3rd February. Three mystery horror movies back to back all for single price of £9.95. Mockingbird Theatre. 4 -10pm. Custard Factory, Digbeth. At www.mockingbirdcinema.com/ Tel: 0121 224 7456 *CG*

CONVENTIONS and EXHIBITIONS

REDEMPTION '19, 18th - 20th January 2019, **Sheffield**. At Royal Victoria Hotel. Guests of Honour tbc). Tickets £70 at <http://redemptioncon.org.uk>

PICOCON 36, 16th February, **London**. At Imperial College Union. Guests of Honour Andrew Bannister, Simon Morden, Gavin Smith, Lottie Bevan & Alexis Kennedy. Price £12. www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/

YTTERBIUM (Eastercon 2019), 19th - 22nd April, **Heathrow**. Guests of Honour: Frances Hardinge, Sydney Padua, John Scalzi & CD. At the Park Inn, Heathrow, London. Membership £80 at www.ytterbium.org.uk/

TOLKIEN 2019, 7th - 11th August 2019, **Birmingham**. 50th Year Anniversary of Tolkien Society, MacDonal Burlington Hotel (New Street). £95 www.tolkiensociety.org

WORLDCON 2019, 15th - 19th August 2019, **Dublin**. Guests of Honour Ian McDonald, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Steve Jackson, Diane Duane, Ginjer Buchanan and Bill & Mary Burns. Convention Centre. 210 Euros. <https://dublin2019.com/>

NOVACON 49, 8th - 10th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour is Mike Carey. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £49. Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

January 11th - AGM and Book Auction

February 8th - SF author Gareth Powell

March 8th - Poet, Author and BSFG member, Chris Morgan

April 12th - tbc

May 10th - SF author Daniel Godfrey

June 14th - Fantasy authors Jeannette Ng and Micah Yongo

July 12th - SF authors, Christopher Priest and Nina Allan

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Durdles Books is run by Ian & Lou Morley, BSFG members
Some expensive items but we have books to suit all budgets



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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. Details of how to join/pay can be obtained at a meeting or by email to bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk