

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

FEBRUARY 2019

ISSUE 569

HONORARY PRESIDENT: CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

COMMITTEE: CAROL GOODWIN (CHAIR); PAT BROWN (TREASURER); VERNON BROWN (SECRETARY); DAVE CORBY (PUBLICITY OFFICER); THERESA DERWIN (ORDINARY MEMBER); CAROL GOODWIN (NEWSLETTER EDITOR); WILLIAM MCCABE (WEBSITE); IAN MORLEY; (MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY)  
NOVACON 49 CHAIR: STEVE LAWSON

**WEBSITE:**

[www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/](http://www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/)

**FACEBOOK:**

[www.facebook.com/groups/BirminghamSFGroup/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/BirminghamSFGGroup/)

**EMAIL:**

[bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk)

**TWITTER:**

@BirminghamSF

## **GARETH L POWELL**

***February 8th***

Our first guest for the new year is science fiction author, Gareth L Powell.

He won the BSFA Award for Best Novel (ACK-ACK MACAQUE) in 2013 and he was a finalist for the Best Translated Novel in the Japanese Seiun Awards. His short story "Ride the Blue Horse" was also a finalist in the 2015 BSFA awards.



**March 8th - BSFG member, poet and author Chris Morgan.**

His novels include SILVERSANDS, THE RECOLLECTION, ACK-ACK MACAQUE (and the two sequels HIVE MONKEY and MACAQUE ATTACK). Latterly he has been working on a space opera series. The first novel in the series, EMBERS OF WAR was published in 2018 and the sequel FLEET OF KNIVES is due out this month. Also to be published this year are a novel, RAGGED ALICE and ABOUT WRITING (a non-fiction title).

As well as novels he has published novellas and short fiction, appearing in Tor.com, Newcon Press, *Interzone* and *Clarkesworld*. He has also written for *The Guardian*, *SFX* magazine, *2000 AD* and *The Irish Times*.

He is well-known in the SFF community for mentoring creativity and nurturing new talent and has run creative writing workshops and given talks at UK universities, Arvon Foundation, and various literature festivals and is also very supportive of new writers via his Twitter profile (@garethlpowell). CG

*(Based on information taken from [www.garethlpowell.com](http://www.garethlpowell.com))*

*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.

### ***RODNEY MATTHEWS ART HIGHBURY HALL - Chris Morgan (& Dave Hardy)***

Pauline and I went with Dave Hardy today to view the most wonderful fantasy art exhibition to be staged in Birmingham for many years (or perhaps ever). Rodney Matthews is one of the foremost fantasy artists in Britain today and this was an exhibition covering about 40 years of his output. But don't all rush along--it was on for Saturday evening and Sunday only.

The late Victorian splendour of Highbury Hall (home of Joseph Chamberlain when he was an MP and Colonial Secretary over a century ago) was in extreme contrast to Matthews' distinctively spiky and marvellously detailed art. He has illustrated J.R.R. Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, Mervyn Peake and Michael Moorcock (among others) and is even more widely known for his rock music album sleeves. This album art extends to 143 pieces for groups including Magnum, Praying Mantis, Nazareth, Asia, Hawkwind and The Rolling Stones.



It's true to say that many of these pieces are frightening, featuring swords, claws and fighting machines as well as mutated mantises, spiders, bats and hawks. There are pitched battles, fantasy castles with dozens of pointed towers, walking cities and talking trees, backed by slender mountain peaks, all in glorious alien colours.

Another theme here is futuristic musicians (alien or animal) playing evolved guitars and percussion. Matthews himself has been a part-time rock drummer for most of his life.

The exhibition filled the main entertaining hall of Highbury Hall, two other rooms and the mezzanine. There were perhaps a hundred finished, full colour works on display (up to three feet across), together with dozens of pencil sketches. Most were for sale with high quality prints from £38 to several hundred and originals mostly discreetly marked "POA" (price on application), though I did notice a couple of pencil drawings priced at £10,000 each. Yet the quality, originality and



sheer exciting verve of the work makes them, in my opinion, not overpriced.

Rodney Matthews himself was there, resembling an ageing rock musician (he's 73 now). He was affable and chatty, happy to answer questions and sign merchandise. He and Dave Hardy had a conversation about painting techniques and requisites (Matthews still paints everything rather than creating digitally, and both use the same make of airbrush) and their experiences of rock bands. He was also amused by Dave's anecdote about Hawkwind visiting his home in the 70s. I previously met Matthews in



1985 when he did a signing at Andromeda Bookshop. At that time I interviewed him for the Dutch SF magazine ORBIT.

Many thanks to William McCabe who alerted me and Dave to this exhibition (and was also there).

To see or buy Matthews' art go onto [www.rodneymatthewsstudios.com](http://www.rodneymatthewsstudios.com). But you'll need very deep pockets for his originals!

### ***NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES***

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

***THE KID WHO WOULD BE KING*** - Release date February 15th. A security guard uses his supernatural abilities to track a disturbed man with 24 personalities.

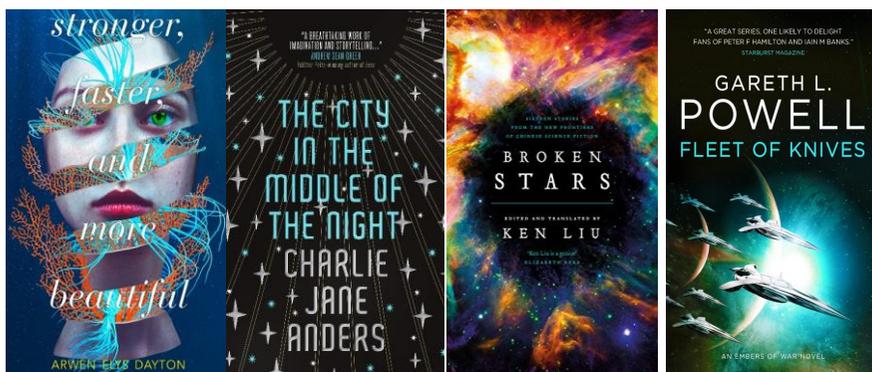
***HAPPY DEATH DAY 2U*** - Release date February 15th. Horror. Sequel. Dying multiple times was easier than the new dangers confronting Tree Gelbman.

***THE HOLE IN THE GROUND*** - Release date March 1st. Horror. Mother believes that disturbing changes to her little boy are connected to a nearby sinkhole.

***CAPTAIN MARVEL*** - Release date March 8th. Set in the 1980's, Carol Danvers becomes a powerful superhero. *CG*

## ***FORTHCOMING BOOKS***

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

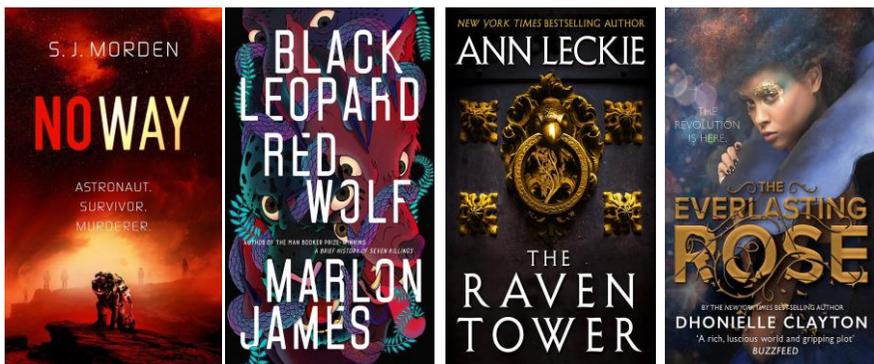


***STRONGER, FASTER AND MORE BEAUTIFUL*** by Arwen Elys Dayton / Harper Voyager / 384 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0008322403 / February 7th. SF. In six parts, it examines the consequences of advanced medical breakthroughs and how they re-shape humanity.

***THE CITY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT*** by Charlie Jane Anders / Titan Books / 400 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1785653193 / February 12th. SF. On the planet of January, when Sophie is exiled into the permanent darkness outside the city, her battle to survive will change the entire world.

***BROKEN STARS*** edited by Ken Liu / Head of Zeus / 464 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1788548106 / February 19th. An anthology of 16 SF short stories by Chinese authors & essays on Chinese SFF publishing and fandom.

***FLEET OF KNIVES (Embers of War 2)*** by Gareth L Powell / Titan Books / 400 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1785655210 / February 19th. SF. The former warship *Trouble Dog* and her crew try to rescue people marooned on an ancient asteroid spaceship, but must contend with alien monsters and an inimical AI fleet.



***NO WAY (One Way 2)*** by S J Morden / Gollancz / 384 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473222591 / February 21st. SF. Eight astronauts were sent to Mars, only one survived. Now he needs to get home.

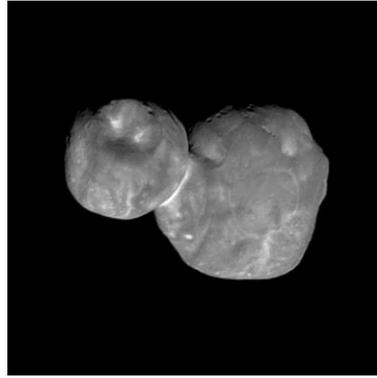
***BLACK LEOPARD, RED WOLF (Dark Star 1)*** by Marlon James / Hamish Hamilton / 640 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-0241315545 / February 28th. Fantasy by Man Booker prize-winning author. A hunter hired to find a lost child, is joined by strange companions all on the same search.

***THE RAVEN TOWER*** by Ann Leckie / Orbit / 432 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0356506999 / February 28th. Fantasy in which gods meddle in the fates of men, and pretender must be removed from the throne.

***THE EVERLASTING ROSE (Belles 2)*** by Dhonielle Clayton / Gollancz / 352 pgs / £10.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473223998 / March 7th. Camellia must race against time to find the missing Princess Charlotte, whilst evading evil Queen Sophia and her forces.  
*CG*

## **NEWS IN BRIEF ...**

No apologies from me, but after the very blurry image last month, I couldn't resist including a more detailed image recently released from NASA/JHU. It was taken by NASA'S *New Horizons* spacecraft of Kuiper Belt object, **Ultima Thule** and is confirmed as a contact binary ie two objects which collided together and "stuck" .... The nominations for **Hugo Awards** are



open until March 15th. Anyone who has purchased a membership to Dublin Worldcon 2019 is eligible to vote. See <https://dublin2019.com/hugo-awards-wsfs/the-hugo-awards/> .... The nominees for the **Philip K Dick Award 2019** (for SF originally published in paperback) have been announced. Three British authors are listed including former **BSFG** guest **Jeff Noon** (**THE BODY LIBRARY**), **Ian McDonald** (**TIME WAS**) and **Claire North** (**84K**). Full list at [www.philipkdickaward.org](http://www.philipkdickaward.org) .... CG

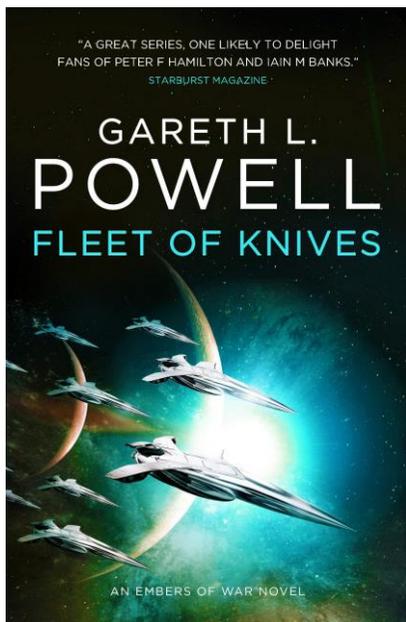
## 📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

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

***FLEET OF KNIVES* (*Embers of War 2*)** by Gareth L Powell  
Titan Books / 400 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1785655210  
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

This is the second novel in Gareth Powell's *Embers of War* space opera series. As in the first novel (**EMBERS OF WAR**) it concentrates on the intelligent spaceship, *Trouble Dog* and her crew. Unlike many SFF novels, the story is set not during but after a massive interstellar war. The characters are emotionally damaged by their actions during the war and this focus on consequences makes for an uncommon and more profound story than many other space operas.

In the first novel, *Trouble Dog* and her crew had joined the House of Reclamation, an organisation devoted to rescuing people in distress. During one of their rescue attempts, they awoke an ancient fleet of self-aware spaceships and *Trouble Dog* convinced them that humanity was worth saving.



As *Trouble Dog* and her crew embark on another mission, this time to rescue a group stranded on an ancient asteroid spaceship, the alien fleet starts to implement its mission to “protect” humanity from itself. Aided by a fugitive Admiral responsible for a major war atrocity, the fleet commences to enforce peace by confining people to planets and destroying any vessel or installation that possesses weaponry. Despite their former acquaintance, that unfortunately includes *Trouble Dog* and her crew.

As they attempt to retrieve the remaining members of the *Lucy's Ghost* crew from the asteroid, they have to contend with multiple threats; ships from the fleet, an unknown alien menace which caused the crash of the *Lucy's Ghost*, and ships from the custodians of the asteroid spaceship, who regard it as a sacred relic.

The second book in a trilogy is always difficult as the author has to build on the setup from the first novel and also set up things for a climactic conclusion in the third book. If handled badly, it can seem just as lots of shuffling pieces around on a chessboard, which makes for a very dull read. Thankfully, this novel is very much not of that mould. It is a great story in its own right and really ratchets up the tension and pace.

As well as excellent storytelling and worldbuilding, it is the depth of characterisation that makes this book really stand out. The individuals are distinct and have realistic personalities and roles. I

particularly liked that the non-human characters, such as the ship AI's and the alien engineer, Nod are clearly different yet still relatable. Events in the book have a real emotional impact on the individuals something which often gets forgotten in many space operas. The real costs to people of the events in the story also means that the reader cares far more about what happens to them. Also, although the fleet and the admiral are clearly the "villains" of the piece, the author takes the time and care to let the reader see some of their motivations and self-justification. This again makes for a more interesting and nuanced take than usual, and adds to the enjoyment of the book for me.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed this book and recommend it to anyone who likes a rare combination of thoughtful yet exciting sf storytelling.

*(Electronic review copy kindly donated by Titan Books)*

**PHOSPHORUS: A Winterstrike Story by Liz Williams**  
**Newcon Press / 92 pgs / £6.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1910835668**  
**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.**

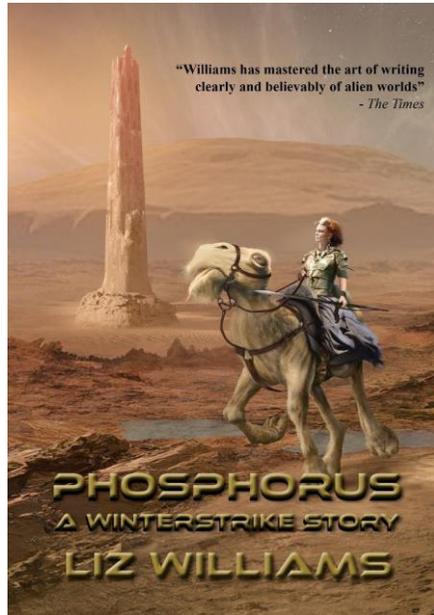
The first thing you notice about this book is the superb Jim Burns cover. Then you realise that it is only a quarter of one panoramic painting. PHOSPHORUS is the third in a set of novellas produced by Newcon Press. This set has a theme of Mars and the other three by Jane Fenn, Eric Brown and Una McCormack have the rest of the montage between them. To get the full impact, you need to buy all four books and place them side by side.

The contents of the books, assuming they are the same quality as this one, are worth the money for the words as well as the covers. The Mars depicted in Liz Williams works is a far future. The red planet has largely been terraformed and humans have built cities linked by canals. The problem is that the cities of Winterstrike and Caud are at war. This is a society of women. Men-remnants are banished to the wilderness and regarded as inferior. Reproduction is by cloning and genetic manipulation. Those familiar with the novel WINTERSTRIKE will know some of the characters in this story. It begins when Canteley is taken to live with her Aunt Sulie. As the war intensifies and the bombs fall closer, Sulie decides it is time for the

two of them to head out to distant Tharsis. There, on the plain beneath Olympus Mons, there is a very ancient city.

This isn't just an adventure for Canteley as far out in space a ship carrying the last member of a warrior race, Kesh is looking for a new planet to restart her race. They have come a vast distance over immeasurable time and finally arrived in the solar system. Kesh has a choice of two possible planets and picks the red one.

It is not necessary to have read any of Liz Williams' other work with this Mars setting as the characters quickly pass out of reach of the centre of action familiar to those who have.



Usually, for a story of this length you would expect one plot line, with a degree of convolution. Here you get two. They are told in alternating chapters until close to the end when the two stories intersect. The dichotomy does not distract from either part of the tale and it is surprising how so much is packed into so few words. It takes skill to do this and if the other novellas in the series are even half as good, the project is a success.

*(Review copy kindly donated by Newcon Press)*

## ***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 [goodwincd@yahoo.com](mailto:goodwincd@yahoo.com)*

**ASTRONAUT TOUR - TONY ANTONELLI, 18th February.** NASA astronaut and Space Shuttle pilot. At Avon Room, University Centre, University of Birmingham. £18. Tickets and details at

<https://pintofscience.co.uk/event/astronaut-tour-antonelli-birmingham>

**CHARIOTS OF FIRE - THE HISTORY OF ROCKETRY, 23rd March, Stoke on Trent.** Andrew Lound (a former BSFG guest) illustrates a history of the rocket using rare images, video etc. The Potteries Museum, Stoke on Trent. ST1 3DW At 2pm, tickets £5, Call 01782 232323 to book.

**CHRIS BAKER (FANGORN): A FANTASTIC VOYAGE, 19th June, Birmingham.** SFF Artist Chris Baker (well known to the group) talks about his work. At RBSA Gallery, 4 Brook Street. Booking Essential. 6 - 8:30pm. Info at [www.rbsa.org.uk](http://www.rbsa.org.uk). Free to RBSA Friends/Non-members £5. Book: Gallery /0121 236 4353 *CG*

### ***CONVENTIONS and EXHIBITIONS***

**APOLLO 50th ANNIVERSARY exhibition, 23rd March - 3rd November, Stoke on Trent.** A special exhibition featuring 50 models, memorabilia etc. Free entry. The Potteries Museum, Stoke on Trent.

**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/](http://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/](http://www.ytterbium.org.uk/)

**TOLKIEN 2019, 7th - 11th August 2019, Birmingham.** 50th Year Anniversary of Tolkien Society, MacDonald Burlington Hotel (New Street). £95 [www.tolkiensociety.org](http://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](http://www.novacon.org.uk)

### ***FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG***

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

April 12th - tbc

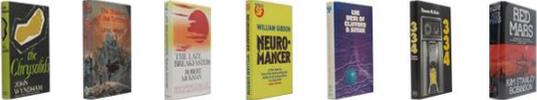
May 10th - SF author **Daniel Godfrey**

June 14th - Fantasy authors **Jeannette Ng and Micah Yongo**

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

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #569** (February 2019) copyright 2019; for Birmingham SF Group. Articles, artwork and photographs must not be 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](mailto: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.

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



BSFG Members: use code BSFG18 for 10% order discount  
Visit [www.durdlesbooks.com](http://www.durdlesbooks.com) email [info@durdlesbooks.com](mailto:info@durdlesbooks.com)  
or call 0121 777 0209

## Durdles Books

www.durdlesbooks.com

Science Fiction  
Fantasy  
Modern Firsts  
Comics



**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](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk)