

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MAY 2011

ISSUE 476

HONORARY PRESIDENTS: **BRIAN W ALDISS, O.B.E.**  
& **HARRY HARRISON**

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);**  
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Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2011

## JOHN MEANEY

John Meaney grew up in London and Slough with his brother Colm (not the same as the *Star Trek* actor Colm Meaney). He has been studying martial arts since childhood and has a black belt in shotokan karate (so be very careful what you say to him about his books!). He originally studied at Birmingham University and holds a combined degree in Physics and



**Tuesday June 7th - SPECIAL MEETING - IAIN M BANKS**  
at the Birmingham Libraries Theatre.

**Friday June 10th - Our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Birthday Party**  
with **BRIAN ALDISS** and **HARRY HARRISON** (health  
permitting)

Computer Science from the Open University. He has done postgraduate work at Oxford University and is a part time IT consultant.

His first published work was “Spring Rain” in the July 1992 issue of *Interzone*. His novelette “Sharp Tang” was shortlisted for the British Science Fiction Association Award in 1995. His first and second novels, *TO HOLD INFINITY* and *PARADOX*, were on the BSFA shortlists for Best Novel in 1999 and 2001. *TO HOLD INFINITY* was also selected as one of the *Daily Telegraph's* ‘Books of the Year’. He also writes thrillers (*EDGE* and *POINT*) as ‘Thomas Blackthorne’.

He and his wife Yvonne (maker of colourful waistcoats to SF fandom) recently moved to Wales.

This is John’s first visit to the Group.

RGP

***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 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 this meeting is £3 for members, £4 for non-members*

## ***DID WE REALLY INVITE GEORGE FORMBY?: THOUGHTS ON OUR LAST MEETING by Rog Peyton***



Well, what can I say? I never expected to see impressions of George Formby from any speaker at the Brum Group. (Well, it’s not exactly science fiction, is it?). But that’s exactly what we got from Robert Rankin – and if you missed it, you missed a treat!

After telling us about his childhood and his father, who was a storyteller extraordinaire – a very funny account somewhat expanded from the version he first recounted at his previous visit to the Group - he started to tell us about George Formby, while he unpacked and plugged in his guitar that he’d tuned to sound like a ukulele.

To find out that a

record I've lived with for over 50 years, "Johnny B Goode", was written by Formby and not Chuck Berry was a revelation – how could I have been so misguided? Hearing this and "All Along the Watchtowers" (also written by Formby, apparently) sung in George Formby's unique style exactly as they were supposed to be sung, is a Brum Group highlight that will stay with me forever!

*RGP*

## ***OUR 40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION!***



**In addition to our Party on our normal meeting night on June 10th, the Brum Group is hosting a special event together with Birmingham Libraries on Tuesday June 7<sup>th</sup>. It's an evening with Iain M Banks!**

**The event will be at the 250-seater Birmingham Libraries Theatre. The evening will start at 7pm so please get there early (6.30pm recommended). Tickets will be £4.00 each and can be obtained from me – Rog Peyton, 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3QL. Cheques should be made payable to 'Birmingham SF Group'.**

**Iain's books will be available for signing. If there's a particular book you want signed, please let me know well before the event so that I can ensure I have sufficient copies.**

## ***NEW WORLDS Magazine Revived!***



The Directors of the Daves Dream Company - Dick Jude, David Hodson, David Tamlyn, Roger Gray and Felix Jude- West - have reached an agreement with Michael Moorcock to revive the seminal science fiction magazine *New Worlds*. Michael has kindly agreed to lend his name to the masthead of the magazine and to contribute editorial pieces. The magazine will appear in both electronic and traditional print on paper formats and be backed up by an extensive website that will feature exclusive editorial features free to all interested readers.

It is anticipated that the new incarnation of the magazine will debut in September/October 2011, initially on a quarterly publishing schedule. Subscribers will receive both the electronic and printed versions of the magazine. Subscription rates and details will appear on [www.newworlds.co.uk](http://www.newworlds.co.uk) when the website goes live in June/July 2011. The website will be hosted by colleagues from Storm Books, a specialist electronic publications publisher, owned and managed by Phil Ryan, one of the founders of *The Big Issue*.

They are now actively seeking contributions of all kinds from writers and artists. Until the website is active they ask that any potential contributors contact David Hodson via email on [hodson798@btinternet.com](mailto:hodson798@btinternet.com).

## ***2011 HUGO NOMINATIONS***

The 2011 Hugo nominees were announced on April 24. This year's winners will be announced at this year's Worldcon, Renovation in Reno, Nevada the weekend of August 17-21. Renovation has announced that it received 1,006 nominating ballots for the Hugo Award, the first time more than 1,000 ballots have been received for nominations. The ballots represent 21 countries on 6 continents. In 2010, 864 nominating ballots were received

### ***Best Novel***

CRYOBURN by Lois McMaster Bujold

FEED by Mira Grant

THE HUNDRED THOUSAND KINGDOMS by N.K. Jemisin

THE DERVISH HOUSE by Ian McDonald

BLACKOUT/ALL CLEAR by Connie Willis

### **Best Novella**

THE LIFECYCLE OF SOFTWARE OBJECTS by Ted Chiang

“The Maiden Flight of McCauley’s Bellerophon” by Elizabeth Hand

“The Sultan of the Clouds” by Geoffrey A. Landis

“Troika” by Alastair Reynolds

“The Lady Who Plucked Red Flowers beneath the Queen’s Window” by Rachel Swirsky

### **Best Novelette**

“The Jaguar House, in Shadow” by Aliette de Bodard

“Plus or Minus” by James Patrick Kelly

“Eight Miles” by Sean McMullen

“The Emperor of Mars” by Allen M. Steele

“That Leviathan, Whom Thou Hast Made” by Eric James Stone

### **Best Short Story**

“Ponies” by Kij Johnson

“For Want of a Nail” by Mary Robinette Kowal

“Amaryllis” by Carrie Vaughn

“The Things” by Peter Watts

### **Best Related Work**

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN: IN DIALOGUE WITH HIS CENTURY: VOLUME 1 (1907-1948): LEARNING CURVE by William H. Patterson, Jr.

THE BUSINESS OF SCIENCE FICTION: TWO INSIDERS DISCUSS WRITING AND PUBLISHING by Mike Resnick & Barry N. Malzberg

WRITING EXCUSES, SEASON 4 by Brandon Sanderson, Jordan Sanderson, Howard Tayler, and Dan Wells

CHICKS DIG TIME LORDS: A CELEBRATION OF DOCTOR WHO BY THE WOMEN WHO LOVE IT edited by Lynne M. Thomas & Tara O’Shea

BEARINGS: REVIEWS 1997-2001 by Gary K. Wolfe

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



.... Actress Elisabeth Sladen (b.1948) died on April 19. She portrayed determined journalist Sarah Jane Smith in *Doctor Who* from the beginning of “The Time Warrior”(1973) through the end of “The Hand of Fear” (1976) which led to the creation of the Sarah Jane Adventures, on which she starred. She also appeared in *K9 AND COMPANY* (1981) and the independent video production

DOWNTIME (1994) .... BRAVE NEW WORLD is among top 10 books Americans most want banned! Huxley's vision of a totalitarian future comes third on American Library Association's list of 2010's 'most challenged' books. The reasons: insensitivity, offensive language, racism, sexually explicit .... A little-known Spanish playwright, Enrique Gaspar, was the first with the idea of time



travel via a mechanical contraption. His novel, EL ANACRONOPETE, was published in Spain in 1887, seven years before H G Wells's THE TIME MACHINE and will have its first UK publication as THE TIME SHIP: A CHRONONAUTICAL JOURNEY, next year .... The 2013 World Fantasy Con will be held in Brighton, UK from October 31-November 3, Lindgren 2013 .... Shaun Tan has been announced as the recipient of the 2011 Astrid Memorial Award for children's literature. The award, which comes with a 5 million kroner prize (approximately \$800,000), is given for Tan's body of

work in children's literature .... POWER AND MAJESTY by Tansy Rayner Roberts (Voyager) won the Australian Ditmar Award for Best Novel .... Four new members will be inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, housed at the Science Fiction Museum in Seattle, Washington. The induction ceremony will take place as part of the Science Fiction Awards Weekend, to be held June 24-26, 2011. They are Vincent Di Fate, Gardner Dozois, Harlan Ellison and Moebius

....

RGP

### **RECOMMENDED SF BOOKS – Rog Peyton**

...And here's the next ten – the third. Please note that these 10 books are NOT my favourite ten – I've just picked books from the 100 at random. Another 10 next month. Please remember that I may be able to supply most of these titles – just email me and I can bring orders to the Group meetings.

The five currently in print are:-

**Ray Bradbury – FAHRENHEIT 451** (1953). Books burn at this temperature... The story of a future when books are banned and a fireman's job is to burn them. Nearly 60 years on (it's never been out of print!) and it's currently #1 bestseller in US chains. (Voyager 978-0006546061 £7.99)

**Eric Brown – ENGINEMAN** (2010). A newly rewritten, expanded version of the 1994 book that also includes all of the *Engineman* short stories. The Enginemen pilot the bigships through the nada continuum with the power of their minds. Stunning ideas and stunning imagery make this one of the very best SF novels of the past 20 years. (Solaris 978-1907519420 £7.99)

**Ken Grimwood – REPLAY** (1986). Available in the Fantasy Masterworks series, it really should have been in the SF series. Jeff Winston at 43 suddenly has

a fatal heart attack and awakens in his 18-year-old body back in 1963 – with all of his memories of the 43 year life intact. The biggest-selling book I ever had at Andromeda – I’ve sold over 2000 copies of this superb novel. (Gollancz 978-0575075597 £7.99)

**Daniel Keyes – FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON** (1966). Expanded from the 1950s short story, this tells the story of Charly, a retarded person who is used in experiments to increase his intelligence with extraordinary results. (Gollancz 978-1857989380 £7.99)

**Mary Doria Russell – THE SPARROW** (1996) and **CHILDREN OF GOD** (1998). One fantastic novel split into two parts. THE SPARROW was the winner of the Arthur C Clarke Award. A first contact novel that is beautifully written, is thought-provoking and utterly unputdownable. The first part is in print and the second only available through print on demand. (Black Swan 978-0552997775 £9.99 and 978-0552998116)

And those currently out of print...

**James Blish – THE SEEDLING STARS** (1957). A ‘fix-up’ novel from several short stories featuring the ways mankind adapts to alien lands by changing its basic metabolism.

**Edmund Cooper – A FAR SUNSET** (1967). When the starship *Gloria Mundi* crashlands on an alien planet, only one man survives. Alone, with no chance of returning to Earth, he must befriend the aliens and live as best he can.

**Frank Herbert – DRAGON IN THE SEA** (1956) (aka 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY SUB; aka UNDER PRESSURE). Herbert’s first novel and arguably his best. In the endless war between East and West, oil has become the ultimate prize. Nuclear-powered subtrugs brave enemy waters to tap into hidden oil reserves.



**Raylyn Moore – WHAT HAPPENED TO EMILY GOODE AFTER THE GREAT EXHIBITION** (1978). At the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Philadelphia, Emily Goode suddenly finds herself transported 100 years into the future. How does a refined Lady of excellent breeding cope with 20<sup>th</sup> century life? A thoroughly charming novel with some very amusing scenes. There was only ever one edition of this book (Starblaze) and there was a gorgeous Kelly Freas cover – possibly one of his best pieces of artwork.

**Bob Shaw – ORBITSVILLE** (1975). A Dyson sphere has the diameter the same as the orbit of the Earth and a terraformed inner surface area five trillion times that of Earth's landmass. Awesome! *RGP*



## BOOK REVIEWS

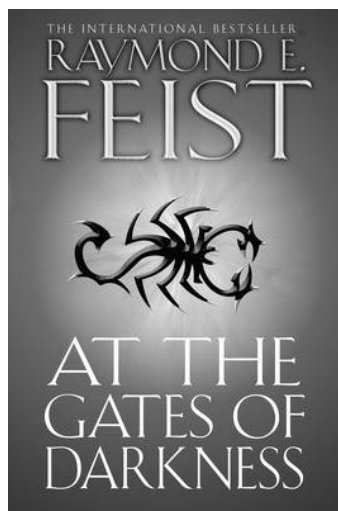


**(REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

### ***AT THE GATES OF DARKNESS* by Raymond E. Feist**

**HarperCollins / 322pgs / £6.99 Paperback ISBN: 978-0007264728**

**Reviewed by Jim Pearce**



AT THE GATES OF DARKNESS is the concluding volume in the two-part *Demon War* series which began with RIDES A DREAD LEGION. Actually the series started about 20 books earlier with MAGICIAN the first book set in the author's *Midkemia* universe, with one of the main characters being Pug, the magician of the above title.

As with all of Raymond Feist's books AT THE GATES OF DARKNESS is a multi-strand adventure following a number of characters in their epic struggle against the forces of evil; in this case a horde of demons and a mad magician (not Pug, he is a hero leading a secret group known as the 'Conclave of Shadows'). This adventure climaxes in a battle in the Valley of Lost Men. As in the previous books, the forces of good prevail, at least temporarily. Other members of the Conclave active in this story include two Star Elves, Gulamendis (a Demon Master) and Laromendis, his brother who is a master of illusion and the Star Elves (the Taredhel), having been hounded off their world by the demons in the first part of this saga. These two and a human Demon Master, Amirantha, provide Pug with 'expert' support and research into demonology.

Another strand follows Sandreena, a Knight Adamant in the 'Order of the Shield of the Weak', the martial arm of the Temple of Dala. She and Amirantha have a troublesome history.

Other significant characters include General Kasper (See TALON OF THE SILVER HAWK), Creegan a Father Bishop in Sandreena's order, James (Jim) Dasher Jameson the Head of Intelligence for the Kingdom of the Isles (one



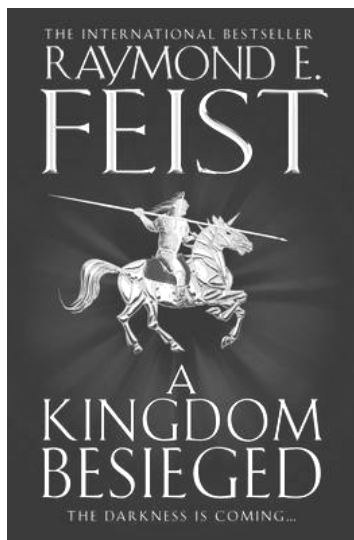
of the major nations in Midkemia). In the background is the enduring influence of Marcos the Black, Pug's dead father in law.

After 20 volumes the overall saga is becoming a bit tired and formulaic, particularly during the last few books. That said the book is an enjoyable gentle easy read with many interesting characters. The *Midkemia* chronicle continues with *A KINGDOM BESIEGED*. JTP

### ***A KINGDOM BESIEGED* by Raymond E. Feist**

**HarperCollins / 408pgs / £18.99 hardcover ISBN: 978-0007264766**

**Reviewed by Jim Pearce**



*A KINGDOM BESIEGED* takes place five years after the conclusion of *AT THE GATES OF DARKNESS*. In *A KINGDOM BESIEGED* Pug, the magician and his colleagues in the 'Conclave of Shadows' are still investigating the causes of the demon incursions into Midkemia and in this book a different aspect of the *Midkemia* saga is pursued.

There are two main strands to this story, one being the invasion of the Kingdom of the Isles by the Keshian Empire one of the other major nations in Midkemia. This is recounted by following separate investigations into rumours of something ominous happening in Kesh by James (Jim) Dasher Jameson and Sandreena, a Knight Adamant in the 'Order of the Shield of the Weak' the martial arm of the Temple of Dala. The actual assault on the Kingdom's western frontier is seen from the viewpoint of Martin conDoin the second son of the area's Duke and a distant relative to the King of the Isles. Secondary to this, and no doubt to be enlarged upon in a subsequent book, the story follows Martin's older brother Hal who is away from home at a 'university' for nobles on the Island of Roldem, the third of the major powers in this part of Midkemia. His experiences bring him into contact with Tal Hawkins (see the *Talon of the Silver Hawk* trilogy) and his son.

The second major strand concerns the two demons, Child and Belog, following the fall of the demon kingdom in which they live. Their part in this book concludes with a very interesting and unexpected development.

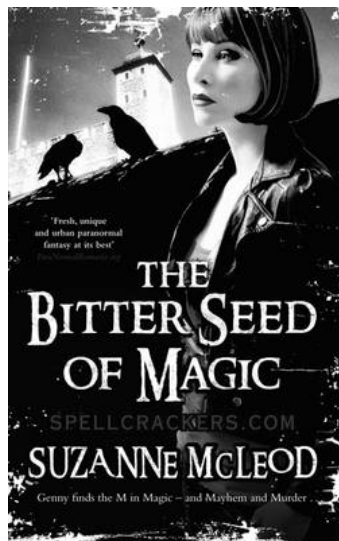
Minor strands involve Pug, the magician, Magnus his son, the Star Elves, Gulamendis and Laromendis, Amirantha and a number of other characters first seen in previous books.

In my review above I commented that the overall saga is becoming a bit tired and formulaic. Not so with this book – it is a welcome refreshing addition to the *Midkemia* chronicles. JTP

### ***THE BITTER SEED OF MAGIC by Suzanne McLeod***

**Gollancz / 403pgs / £12.99 large paperback ISBN: 978-0575084322**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**



Urban fantasy is the umbrella that includes contemporary supernatural fiction and includes vampires and other creatures of folklore. Unusually for this field, this series of novels are home grown and set in London. This is the third featuring Genny Taylor. She is the only full-blooded sidhe in the city even though her father was a vampire. Although she cannot cast spells she can absorb them or crack them. Her job with Spellcrackers.com is to remove spells from places they shouldn't be and round up mischievous sprites, like the pixies that rampage through Trafalgar Square.

This London is not one that we are familiar with since very few humans play a part in the action. The police force seems to be staffed by trolls and witches. It is they that call in Genny when a dead faeling (half human/half fae) is found in the Thames. She is asked to remove the spells that the body is wrapped in – a glamour and a stasis spell that stop the body fading. This seems easy enough but she is then arrested for stealing the stun spell which she used on a dryad who would not take no for an answer. Even before this moment, Genny had problems. All the other supernatural beings want to break the curse which prevents the birth of new, full-blooded fae. They think that if she had a child the curse will be broken. Thus she is pursued by suitors trying their luck. As she gets drawn into the powerplay between vampires, witches and goddesses, she begins to uncover more about her own background than she really wished to know.

Although this is a clever, action-packed novel the series has reached a point that to fully appreciate the nuances it is better to start with volume one, *THE SWEET SCENT OF BLOOD*. PM

## ***FORTHCOMING EVENTS***

*All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers 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 are always welcome - please send to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] binternet [dot] com*

**The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group** meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm to 7pm monthly, in GP5 on the 5th Floor at the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, B3 3HQ. It's a small friendly group meeting to discuss SF & fantasy books. Contact person is Pam Gaffney on (0121) 303 3398.

Future books to be discussed to be announced

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

**Tuesday June 7th – SPECIAL MEETING – IAIN M BANKS.** Co-organised with Birmingham Public Libraries, this will be held in the 250-seater Theatre in the Library complex.

June 7<sup>th</sup> (a Tuesday!) – Special event organised with Birmingham Libraries – an Evening with **IAIN M BANKS**.

**June 10th - Happy Birthday BSFG! 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Meeting** to be held at the Old Joint Stock with special guests (health permitting) **BRIAN ALDISS** and **HARRY HARRISON**.

**July 15th** – SF author and mathematician **IAN STEWART**

**\*\*\* PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE TO FRIDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> \*\*\***

**Aug 12th - SUMMER SOCIAL** at the Black Eagle

**Sep 9th** – Brum Group members **STAN NICHOLLS** (author of the *Orc* fantasy series) and **PETER WESTON** (author of *WITH STARS IN MY EYES*) will discuss the history of SF fandom in London and Birmingham.

**Oct 14th** – SF author **DAVID WINGROVE** author of the *Chung Kuo* sequence.

**Nov 4th – tba**



**NOVACON 41** will be held over the weekend of November 11th to the 13th at **The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Road, Nottingham. NG5 2BT.** The Guest of Honour will be SF author **JOHN MEANEY.** Further details can be found on the website <http://novacon.org.uk/>

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #476** (May 2011) copyright 2011 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] 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 and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

Photo of Robert Rankin on page 3 is copyright Pat Brown.

**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 Secretary, 4 Foxwell Road, Bordesley Green East, Birmingham, B9 5SG