

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE *FREE* MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 2009

ISSUE 456

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

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Friday 11th September

JUSTINA ROBSON

Justina Robson was born in Leeds and studied philosophy and linguistics at the University of York. She worked in a variety of jobs - including secretary, technical writer and fitness instructor - until becoming a full-time writer.

Justina attended the Clarion West Writing Workshop and was first published in 1994 in the British small press magazine *The Third Alternative*, but is best known as a novelist. Her debut novel SILVER SCREEN (1999) was

NEXT MONTH

October 11th - ALASTAIR REYNOLDS - author of several grand scale space operas, returns to talk to the group.

shortlisted for both the Arthur C Clarke Award and the BSFA Award in 2000. Her second novel, MAPPA MUNDI (2001), was also shortlisted for the Arthur C Clarke Award in 2001. It won the 2000 Amazon.co.uk Writer's Bursary. In 2004, NATURAL HISTORY (2003), her third novel, was shortlisted for the BSFA Award, and came second in the John W Campbell Award.

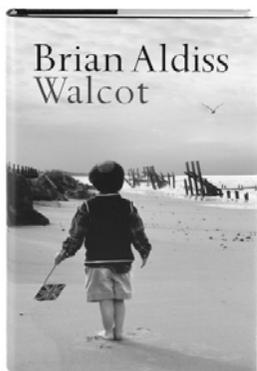
Justina's novels have been noted for sharply-drawn characters, and an intelligent and deeply thought-out approach to the tropes of the genre. She has been described as "one of the very best of the new British hard SF writers".

LIVING NEXT-DOOR TO THE GOD OF LOVE (2005) is a loose sequel to NATURAL HISTORY, inasmuch as it is set in the same universe. KEEPING IT REAL (2006) was the first of a series, the *Quantum Gravity* books which was followed by SELLING OUT (2007) and GOING UNDER (2008). Her latest novel, CHASING THE DRAGON, has just been published.

Justina will be Guest of Honour at our convention, NOVACON 39, in November.

Wikipedia/RGP

NEW BRIAN ALDISS BOOK



Our co-President Brian Aldiss has a new book due any day now. **WALCOT**, a book he regards as his *magnum opus*, will be available as a very handsome limited edition from Goldmark Books in two states - a signed, slipcased edition of 100 copies at £100 and a regular edition of 1000 clothbound copies at £20. At 528 pages this is Brian's longest published novel and is a book fans have been looking forward to reading since its existence was first revealed to the world several years ago. The ISBN for the standard edition is 978-1870507271 – limited edition ISBN not known. Phone orders to 01572 821424 or email info@goldmarkart.com

THE HUGO AWARDS 2009

The Hugo Awards were announced at Anticipation on August 9. The John W. Campbell Award, which is not a Hugo, was also presented at the ceremony.

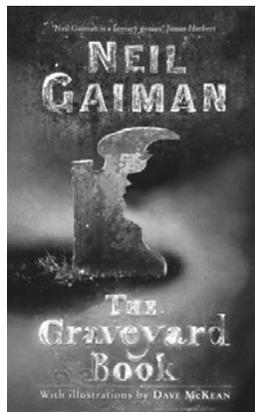
Best Novel: THE GRAVEYARD BOOK by Neil Gaiman

Best Novella: "The Erdmann Nexus" by Nancy Kress

Best Novelette: "Shoggoths in Bloom" by Elizabeth Bear

Best Short Story: "Exhalation" by Ted Chiang

Best Related Book: YOUR HATE MAIL WILL BE



GRADED: A DECADE OF WHATEVER by John Scalzi

Best Editor, Long Form: David G. Hartwell

Best Editor, Short Form: Ellen Datlow

Best Professional Artist: Donato Giancola

Best Semiprozine: WEIRD TALES edited by Ann VanderMeer & Stephen H. Segal

Best Fanzine: ELECTRIC VELOCIPEDA edited by John Klima

Best Fan Writer: Cheryl Morgan

Best Fan Artist: Frank Wu

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: David Anthony Durham

WORLD FANTASY AWARD NOMINATIONS

The nominees for the World Fantasy Awards have been announced. The winners will be announced at World Fantasy Con, held this year in San Jose, California the weekend of October 29-November 1.

Best Novel

THE HOUSE OF THE STAG by Kage Baker

THE SHADOW YEAR by Jeffrey Ford

THE GRAVEYARD BOOK by Neil Gaiman

PANDEMONIUM by Daryl Gregory

TENDER MORSELS by Margo Lanagan

Best Novella

“Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel” by Peter S. Beagle

“If Angels Fight” by Richard Bowes

“The Overseer” by Albert Cowdrey

“Odd and the Frost Giants” by Neil Gaiman

“Good Boy” by Nisi Shawl

Best Short Story

“Caverns of Mystery” by Kage Baker

“26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss” by Kij Johnson

“Pride and Prometheus” by John Kessel

“Our Man in the Sudan” by Sarah Pinborough

“A Buyer’s Guide to Maps of Antarctica” by Catherynne M. Valente

TERRY PRATCHETT CAMPAIGNS FOR THE RIGHT TO TAKE HIS OWN LIFE

Terry Pratchett made an emotional plea for the right to take his own life, when the appropriate time comes, in an interview with the *Daily Mail*.

Pratchett, who had revealed in December 2007 that he had been diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease, spoke out after a controversial judgment in the House of Lords in the case of a woman with multiple sclerosis who had sought guidance on whether her husband would face prosecution if he helped her travel to a clinic in Zurich to die.

“I intend, before the endgame looms, to die sitting in a chair in my own garden with a glass of brandy in my hand and Thomas Tallis on the iPod,” said

Pratchett. "Oh, and since this is England, I had better add, 'If wet, in the library.' Who could say that this is bad?"

The author rejected the idea that allowing assisted suicide would amount to legalizing euthanasia, in which those unwilling to die would be killed off.

"I have seen people profess to fear that the existence of a formalized approach to assisted dying could lead to it somehow becoming part of national health policy. ... If we were ever to end up with such a government, we would be in so much trouble that the problem would become the least of our worries. But neither do I believe in a duty to suffer the worst ravages of terminal illness."

Pratchett praised the decision, which will likely result in the director of public prosecutions setting down rules to clear those who do not have selfish motives from the threat of prosecution.

"We have been so successful in the past century at the art of living longer and staying alive that we have forgotten how to die," Pratchett said. "Too often we learn the hard way. As soon as the baby boomers pass pensionable age, their lesson will be harsher still. At least, that is what I thought until last week.

"Now, however, I live in hope - hope that before the disease in my brain finally wipes it clean, I can jump before I am pushed and drag my evil Nemesis to its doom, like Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty locked in combat as they go over the waterfall."

WHAT'S IN A LETTER (OR TWO)? by Vernon Brown

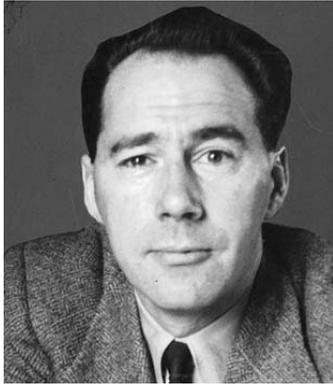
Nowadays when grammar and spelling are honoured more in the breach than the observance, 'know what I mean', it's unsurprising that most people, when asked when Man first reached the Moon, believe that the questioner is asking them "when did a man first step onto the Moon?"

The correct answer is, of course, fifty years ago this month when, on 14th September 1959, Russia crashed Luna 2 near the Sea of Tranquillity, not some ten years later when Neal Armstrong took his first step on the lunar surface. The essential difference between people's perception and memories of the two events is probably that America launched and landed her spaceships in the full glare of publicity while Russia only publicised those that were successful. The world watched via TV those first steps as they happened, give or take a second or so – I remember being glued to the screen with camera cable in hand and winding on the film between takes by feel.

In fact, contrary to folklore and SF, the USSR notched up more notable firsts than did the USA. In 1957 Sputnik 1 was the first artificial satellite to circle the Earth while Sputnik 2 took a dog, Laika, into space, the first animal thus sent. Luna 1 was launched at the Moon in January 1959 but narrowly missed and went into orbit around the Sun before Luna 2 was more successful. Then in October Luna 3 circled the Moon to send back the first pictures of the hitherto unseen dark side.

America was still having problems with her space programme in 1961 when Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space and still later in 1963 when Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman. Then in 1966, despite America's space programme having made great strides after President Kennedy had thrown himself behind it, Luna 9 made the first soft landing on the Moon. But then the Russian's luck ran out. That year the driving force behind their programme, the brilliant rocket expert Sergei Korolev, died, their impetus faltered and the USA got their men to the Moon first. And the world watched! *VB*

JOHN WYNDHAM ON BIRMINGHAM WALK OF STARS?



There's a move to have John Wyndham's name added to Birmingham's Walk of Stars. Wyndham was born in Knowle and lived much of his early life in Edgbaston. Here is someone who thoroughly deserves this honour.

Here's what you need to do:

- 1) Go to the home page
http://www.walkofstars.net/?page_id=20
- 2) Put John Wyndham in the 'name of star' field.
- 3) The pop your name and your email address (a fake email won't help the campaign).
- 4) Click submit.
- 5) Bask in the knowledge that you're helping get John Wyndham on the list of stars to be voted on. If enough people (informally it sounds like 200) support this campaign we'll see his name appear on the voting list.

...AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS'

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions or queries to me at rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk

From our longstanding member Dave Hardy: "Shock! Horror!! A friend recently wrote to me asking if I had written some stories for DARK WORLDS magazine. Looking at their website, <http://www.gwthomas.org/darkworldsindex.htm>, I did indeed find two stories (one a historical adventure set in Canada, one a sword-and-sorcery) by 'David A. Hardy'. And they're definitely not mine!

What's this? A fake David A. Hardy in the SF community (roughly)?

Who IS this pretender? Can any of our readers throw any light upon this travesty?" – Dave (THE David A. Hardy)

<<I notice, Dave, that the historical story is set in 'ancient Briton' (*sic*). Says a lot about the editor, doesn't it. – RGP>>

THE BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY

The British Fantasy Society is proud to present the first in its series of exclusive, annual anthologies. Twenty writers -- from seasoned award-winners to rising stars -- offer twenty never before published tales.

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With an introductory essay from Gail Z. Martin

The only way to own a copy is by being a member of the British Fantasy Society, it is given away exclusively to members and will never appear for sale.

To sign up now -- at only £30.00 a year for UK residents -- please visit www.britishfantasysociety.org where you can pay by cheque or online via PayPal. Your membership also includes a £10 discount on the attendance rate for Fantasycon, our legendary, annual convention weekend as well as quarterly mailings of the society magazines Prism, Dark Horizons and New Horizons.

We hope to launch this exciting new anthology at FantasyCon 2009 - with many of the contributing authors gathered under one roof and available to sign copies of the book - how can you afford to miss the opportunity to own such a unique publication?

WHO WAS THAT ACTOR?

Eagle-eyed members may have seen a familiar face on one of the latest TV adverts for NatWest Bank. "Doesn't that actor look like Tim Stannard!" and similar comments have been reported. Could anyone look *like* Tim Stannard???? Of course not.

Those of us who have known Mr Stannard for more years than we care to divulge, can confirm that it is indeed THE one and only Tim Stannard.

Having retired last year he has obviously chosen a new career. Rumours of him appointing an agent and being shortlisted for a starring role in a Hollywood blockbuster are as yet unfounded. RGP

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NEWS IN BRIEF . . .

.... Publisher **Donald M. Grant** (b.1927) died on August 19. Grant began publishing with Grant-Hadley Enterprises in 1945 and founded a series of small press publishers, culminating in Donald M. Grant, Publisher, Inc. in 1964. In addition to publishing editions of **Stephen King's** *Dark Tower* novels and reprints of **Robert E Howard's** *Conan* books, DMG also published **L. Sprague de Camp's** autobiography Fantasy author **David Eddings**, who died earlier this year, has bequeathed approximately \$10 million dollars to National Jewish Health, nearly one third of Eddings' estate. The remaining portion of the estate will go to Reed College. The portion for NJH will be used to pioneer new approaches in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of childhood asthma. Eddings' wife, Leigh, who died last year, suffered from asthma for most of her life Reno, Nevada won the right to host the 2011 Worldcon, to be called *Renovation*. The event will be held from August 17-21. Guests of Honour include **Ellen Asher**, **Tim Powers**, and **Boris Vallejo**. Reno was unopposed and won with 650 votes Prior to the announcement of the Hugo Awards at Anticipation, **Dave Kyle** presented the Forrest J Ackerman Big Heart Award to **Andrew I. Porter**. Porter has long published fanzines and SF Chronicle The First Fandom Awards were presented at Anticipation to honour those with long-standing in the fannish community. Hall of Fame Award: **James Gunn** and **Ben Indick**; Posthumous Hall of Fame Award: **Walt Daugherty** and the Sam Moskowitz Award for Excellence in Collecting: **Joe Wroz** The winners of the Sidewise Award for Alternate History were announced at Anticipation on August 7. Long Form: THE DRAGON'S NINE SONS by **Chris Roberson**; Short Form: "Sacrifice" by **Mary Rosenblum** **Eric Flint**, the editor

of *Baen's Universe* has announced that the on-line magazine will close following the April 2010 issue, signifying a four-year run for the magazine A writer plans to sue TWILIGHT author **Stephenie Meyer**, accusing her of plagiarizing by lifting passages from an obscure book she wrote called THE NOCTURNE and using them in her vampire romance BREAKING DAWN, the Reuters news service reported: **J. Craig Williams**, who represents THE NOCTURNE author **Jordan Scott**, told Reuters by phone that the passages in question involve few word-for-word similarities but that the two books have similar plot and character points. Meyer's publisher, Hachette Book Group, called the accusation meritless, saying *The Twilight Saga* is entirely Meyer's creation and that she knew nothing of THE NOCTURNE Scientists have announced that the dark plains on Saturn's moon Titan will be named for planets in **Frank Herbert's** six-volume series which began with the novel DUNE. The first plain to bear a Herbertian name is Chusuk planitia, located at 5°S, 23.5°W. Chusuk was a planet reknowned for its fine musical instruments RGP



BOOK REVIEWS



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

***SPIRIT* by Gwyneth Jones**

Gollancz / 534pgs / Hardcover £18.99 ISBN: 978-0575074729 /

trade paperback £14.99 ISBN: 978-0575074736

Reviewed by Vicky Stock



This book takes you through the life of Bibi who is rescued from a fate as a concubine by the wife of the ruling general on the planet of Speranza, Lady Nef. Years later she undertakes a trip to a faraway planet on a diplomatic mission with Lady Nef and her life changes utterly. The book then describes how she survives and comes back a new person but with revenge in mind...

This book is an adaptation of the story of the Count of Monte Cristo, who also gets left for dead then returns to find his enemies. I watched the film and read the book many years ago so some of the smaller similarities rather escaped me. As far as this book goes, I was drawn in from early on to the world and its complexities. The characters are well fleshed out, as both the

humans (or ‘Blues’) and the aliens, even at their weirdest, are very vividly depicted. The book is a long epic and takes a while to get through. Being a busy person I could not sit down for long hours of time to read it, and thus did find that when I got to some of the later chapters where a couple of earlier characters reappeared I had to refer back to find out their importance. There are a lot of characters who appear and reappear in this book but that is due to the sheer expanse of years and lives this book touches on.

There are lots of ideas and themes thrown into the mix. The book sits in the science fiction genre (despite the rather Fantasy-sounding title and imagery used on the cover), and is quite highly political, also touching on motherhood, madness, love and friendship, growing up, etc. Another strong theme is that of displacement from your body, especially when travelling vast distances which is vividly depicted by Jones.

The parts of the book I identified with most were the events leading to the betrayal, and the imprisonment which is wonderfully and starkly depicted in all its horror. The revenge part of the tale, while covering a big chunk of the book, didn’t connect with me quite so much, maybe because the protagonist, after all her passion earlier on, has become rather cold and more withdrawn. The emotions of several other characters are depicted and which we now need to learn about and empathise with. By this point you have a rough idea what is going to happen in the story, so there is a lack of suspense. I enjoyed reading more about Jones’ world and the colourful aliens at this point, though the upper levels of society seem rather less interesting to read about than the gritty lower levels depicted earlier in the book when Bibi is working her way up in Lady Nef’s household.

Overall I enjoyed this book but it is a long read, not something to just whip through! It is complex with lots of themes and hints at conspiracies and perhaps other stories in Jones’ other books on this world. The conspiracy theory is a little vague so I was not completely sure of the exact situation surrounding who had betrayed Bibi. I would recommend this as a good read, if gritty at times, and you do grow attached to the characters sufficiently enough to connect well with the book.

V/S

***ZOE’S TALE* by John Scalzi**

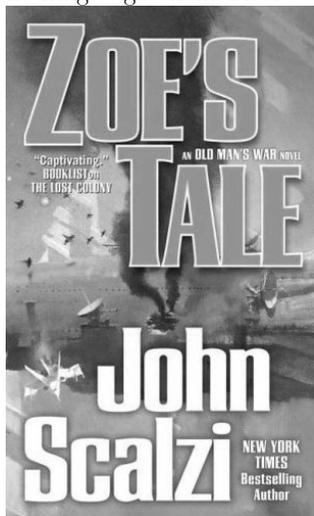
Tor / 330 pgs / £6.99 paperback ISBN: 978-0330506038

Reviewed by Dave Hardy

“I was hoping *you’d* review this book,” said Rog, with a malicious grin. “And not just because it says this!” He indicated the words on the cover: ‘An Old Man’s War Novel’. Yeah, right. But I took it anyway, and actually it does help to be able to read these books from the perspective of, let’s just say, someone of advanced years. . .

I say ‘these books’ because it quickly became clear that I needed to know more about the background of this one, which is actually the story of a teenager who is the daughter of John Perry, who was 75 years old in the first book. . .

So, to start at the beginning: on their 75th birthday, men and women can choose to join the army, aka the Colonial Defense Force (*sic*) or CDF for two years (which will really be ten) and be rejuvenated - indeed reborn, in a new body, or rather an enhanced, young version of themselves. The downside is that they are then likely to die shortly anyway, by being shot or meeting some other violent end. But there is always the possibility that they will make it through the next ten years, when they will have the option of continuing as they are or becoming a colonist on another planet - which is what the CDF is all about: protecting colonists from alien races who want their worlds and will stop at nothing to get them. Real estate, it seems, is in short supply in the galaxy.



It turns out that Zoë Boutin-Perry is actually the adopted daughter of John Perry and Jane Sagan (who is his superior officer in OLD MAN'S WAR, though she actually belongs to an even more elite force and looks like his dead wife; but that's another story), now ‘retired’ and become colonists. As a result of the rejuvenation process, CDF members are sterile. Zoë's real father was Charles Boutin, a scientist whose story is told in another book in the series, THE GHOST BRIGADES. To their eternal gratitude he has given consciousness and self-awareness to a weird race called the Obin, as a result of which, and because they believe that he is dead, Zoë is revered almost as a god. The responsibilities of this and the effects of them on her young life form a large part of this story. Her parents are

administrators on the colony world of Roanoke, and for a while Zoë is allowed to find her place among her peers; making a best friend of Gretchen, establishing a relationship with Enzo, falling out, making up, and all the girly things that one would expect. But all this is not helped by the fact that she is shadowed everywhere by a pair of giant, frightening Obin ‘bodyguards’ – who actually provide comic relief for a lot of the time, though their presence becomes much more serious later.

I was very impressed by the way in which, in the first book, the author gets inside the head of an old (!) man and describes his experiences as he sees and feels them, and in this book quite successfully does the same from the viewpoint of a teenage girl. Quite an achievement!

From the quotes inside from various reviewers it is clear that a lot of people compare Scalzi with Heinlein, and in particular Heinlein's ‘juvenile’ novels, like TUNNEL/FARMER IN THE SKY. I can see why, and although

these are not marketed as juveniles (and aren't), with a little judicious editing they would make an excellent introduction for younger readers, especially girls who think SF is not for them... But in *Zoë*, Scalzi succeeds in creating a young character with a lot of life and warmth, and who reacts to the situations in which she is placed in a believable manner. Matters come to a head when a Conclave fleet appears in the sky above Roanoke with the intent to destroy the colony completely, and it is down to her adoptive parents – and to Zoë herself – to attempt to save their planet, and help humanity escape the greater implications that would ensue.

On one level this is a coming-of-age novel; on another it is almost a galaxy-wide space opera. On both levels I think it succeeds, and I'm now getting Scalzi's other books, one of which, *THE LAST COLONY*, apparently parallels this one, but from quite a different viewpoint. Definitely recommended. *DAH*

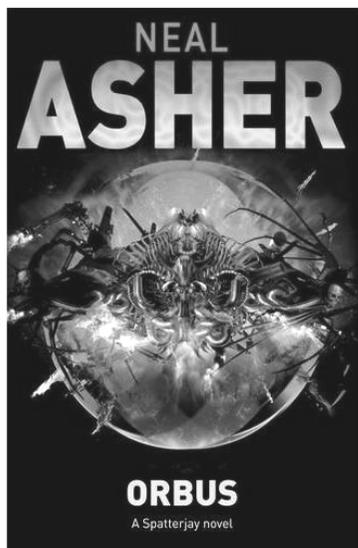
<<Well, there you go, Dave. I haven't known you for nearly 40 years without knowing a little bit about what books make you tick. I thought this one would be just your type. The 'Old Man' bit was purely coincidental – and 'malicious grin'??? Me? Never! – RGP>>

***ORBUS* by Neal Asher**

Tor / 438 pgs / hardcover £17.99 ISBN 978-0230708723 /

trade paperback £11.99 ISBN 978-0230737051

Reviewed by William McCabe



There's been a resurgence of the space opera in the last decade or so. We've had Banks, Reynolds and Hamilton producing massive works that last 1,000 pages or are heavy enough going to make it feel like they do. In this book Neal Asher is working on a much smaller scale. Not only is the book smaller but the pace is strong enough to stop it seeming any longer. There is still the regular changing of viewpoints but there's much less switching of plotlines and jumping back and forward in time. This makes for a much easier read. The cast is also much smaller. Maybe the scale inflates if you take into account the whole of the series or add in all of the books set in the same universe, but this is just one book and it actually stand up on its own. There are characters, situations,

and plot lines that appeared in previous novels but they have enough explanation here to cover that. It may help to know things like the exact nature of the 'history' between Vrell, Orbus, and Sniper but you can get by on what's here.

So here's the story... Orbus seems to be fighting off the spatterjay virus and is starting to feel much more human. He is now captain of the freighter *Gumard* on a mission to the Graveyard – the no-man's land between the Polity and Prador regions of space. This may have something to do with clearing out various Prador spies in the area. Sniper is either cargo or a stowaway on board the *Gumard* - depending on how you define an artificially intelligent war drone with enough weaponry to level a city or two. Vrell is also in the Graveyard taking his revenge on Vrost and taking over the ship that the Prador King sent to hunt him down. It is during the ensuing carnage of this revenge that the true nature of the spatterjay virus that infects the Prador King's Guard is revealed and the potential consequences for those on the ship and the rest of the universe.

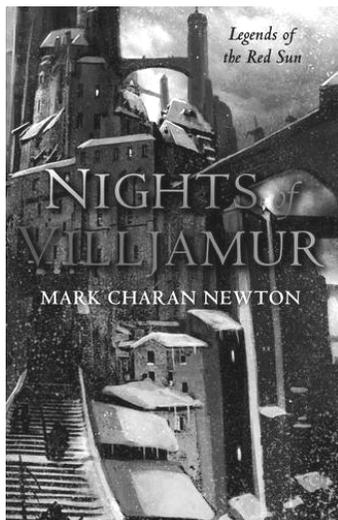
So it's not a thrill-a-minute ride but that's only because there is a plot. It's a good easy read with no real dull moments. There are monsters and battles and explosions all making good summer reading.

WAM

***NIGHTS OF VILLJAMUR* by Mark Charon Newton**

Tor / 451 pgs / £16.99 hardback ISBN 978-0230712584

Reviewed by Graham Thorpe



A convoluted, confused plot, unlikeable characters and an aimless storyline makes this one of the less enjoyable books I have read.

The underlying story is of a world in chaos at the approach of an ice age. The old emperor dies and his daughter Rikka faces an attempted coup by her chancellor (shades of STAR WARS). Her loyal Captain of the Night guard must face the undead and thwart assassination attempts to keep her alive.

Subplots include a detective investigating the murder of one of the councillors in the capitol, while struggling with complications in his personal life, and the story of Kapp Brimir, a streetwise womaniser who kills a palace worker to steal his identity to enter the Palace with his own agenda.

The book lacks pace, and fails to engage the reader in the problems of the main characters, while the political intrigue, because of its lack of focus also falls short.

The concept of the world is interesting with its various races, especially the Garudas, an avian race used as sentries and scouts, but too little is made of

them, and the many cultures and races really needed a glossary to make them more accessible. Also the sweep of action was confusing without a map to refer to.

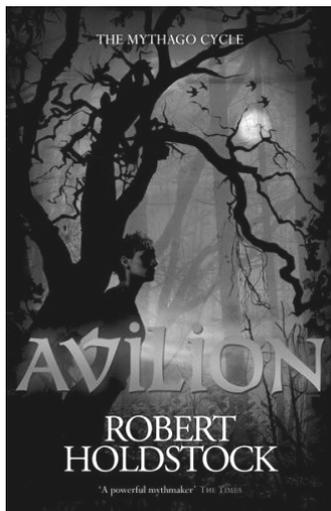
This was a disappointing handling of an intriguing world and its potential.
Not recommended. GT

***AVILION* by Robert Holdstock**

Gollancz / 342pgs / hardcover £18.99 ISBN: 978-0575082991 /

large format paperback £12.99 ISBN: 978-0575083011

Reviewed by Dave Corby



AVILION is Robert Holdstock's official sequel to MYTHAGO WOOD, which was published in 1984 and won the 1985 World Fantasy Best Novel award. The book is described as the 'official' sequel to MYTHAGO WOOD, despite the fact that Robert has written some 5 other novels, all considered part of the *Mythago Wood* cycle. AVILION does provide a brief overview of what has come before, so it is not absolutely crucial to have read the earlier text first, but I would suggest that it is best to do so.

I reviewed MYTHAGO WOOD last year and found it to be an enjoyable novel, more fairy tale than fantasy, with a pleasant grounding in recognisable English countryside and yet a pleasing otherworldly-ness shared by

the best fairytale. As a direct sequel AVILION shares these characteristics, giving the book a comfortably familiar demeanour to anyone who has read the first one.

Not having read the intervening 5 novels I cannot comment on their stories and their relationship to AVILION; nonetheless, AVILION's story takes place continuing directly on from MYTHAGO WOOD, so it does seem to be a direct sequel, and I did not find any lack of understanding for not having read the other novels. Central characters from the first novel take a slightly more background, but important, role in this story; instead the text focuses on the children of MYTHAGO WOOD's main protagonist, Stephen Huxley, and his mythago partner Guiwenneth. Thus their children Jack and Yssobel are half human and half mythago, a fact which is central to AVILION's story.

The book tells two coming-of-age tales that draw together into one story; along the way Jack will discover the real world outside of the wood, and Yssobel will meet various recognisable characters from more traditional myth. The writing itself is clean, with short, well-focussed chapters. At 342 pages one might be tempted to imagine there is some filler, but in general the story keeps up a good pace, and the text is concise without sacrificing narrative or description.

The story itself is inventive and fills its invention with solidity and depth, but sometimes feels arbitrary. The nature of the setting allows for the story to spring forth aspects out of the minds of the characters, and this can sometimes feel mildly disconnecting, although it does reinforce the fairy-tale feel. In particular, the motivations of some of the characters seem like casual whim, even when those same characters are deadly earnest about the importance of their concerns; Yssobel especially seems almost randomly flighty, and yet the most dedicated to the importance of carrying out her impulses.

In the end I found AVILION reasonably satisfying and quite enjoyable, and would be happy to recommend it to readers who enjoy a more fairy-tale style of fantasy. This series strikes me as being unlike anything else I have read, and so at least offer an original read. I would certainly recommend this book if you liked the first novel and are looking for more. That way you can see if your taste runs to this brand of fantasy, and, if so, AVILION will provide more of the same. DC

***THE FOREST OF HANDS & TEETH* by Carrie Ryan**
Gollancz / 310 pages / £9.99 hardcover ISBN 978-0575090842
Reviewed by William McCabe



The afterword on page 310 talks of “going to that first zombie movie” and “debating how to survive the zombie apocalypse”. This is the first time in the book that the word ‘zombie’ is used. Despite that, this is the story of a group of people and their life in the aftermath of ‘the zombie apacalypse’. It’s a book for teenagers so the strongest characters are all of that age except for some repressive authority figures who are concealing the true nature of the world and forcing the teenagers to comply with regulations that seem to have no real purpose.

Mary lives in a small village surrounded by chain-link fence. Beyond the fence is the Forest of Hands and Teeth where the Unconsecrated (zombies) are. If you go too close to the fence they will attack. They claw at the fence and sometimes a few will break through. They don’t move too fast which makes them easy to destroy but there are many of them so the fence has to be kept up and patrolled regularly. The Sisterhood, who are the authority on most things, say that all there is beyond the forest is more Unconsecrated.

Then everything changes. An outsider comes down a fenced-off path to the village and is immediately confined by the Sisterhood. Mary is the only one outside of the order to see her arrive. Then the hordes of Unconsecrated finally break through into the village. Mary escapes with a few of her friends down the path that the outsider arrived from. All they can do now is follow the path and hope that there is life beyond the forest.

If you take this as a children's book and ignore the lack of credible adult characters along with the usual conceits of books for teens then this is a nice easy uncomplicated read. WAM

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@rogpeyton.fsnet.co.uk

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.

Books to be discussed:-

17th September - **MISSPENT YOUTH** by **Peter F Hamilton**

Future dates - 15th October, 19th November

THE MISFiTs are an informal group of local SF fans who meet regularly at 7pm at the Wagon & Horses, Oldbury on the third Friday of each month. Real ale, good food, great company. Next meeting is on 18th September. More details from Martin Tudor (empties084@btinternet.com).

FANTASYCON 2009 will take place on the weekend of September 18-20, at the Britannia Hotel, 1 St James Street, Nottingham. Ian Watson will be the Master of Ceremonies. The confirmed GoHs are: **Jasper Fforde, Brian Clemens and Gail Z Martin**. Details from British Fantasy Society website <http://s256537080.websitehome.co.uk/>

The British International Comics Show will be held 3rd and 4th of October at the Thinktank, Millennium Point, Curzon Street, Birmingham B4 7XG. For more details go to the website <http://www.thecomicsshow.co.uk/>

OCTOCON, the annual Irish SF Convention will be held 10th and 11th of October 2009 at The Camden Court Hotel, Camden Street, Dublin 2. See <http://2009.octocon.com/> for further details

NOVACON 39 – the Birmingham SF Group’s own convention - will be held at the Park Inn, Nottingham over the weekend of 13-15 November 2009. Guest of Honour is JUSTINA ROBSON. Full details from 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or email alice@altair-4.co.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

October 9th – SF author ALASTAIR REYNOLDS

November 6th – to be announced

December 4th – CHRISTMAS SOCIAL – skittles, buffet, prizes, fun!!!

January 2010 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and AUCTION

February – QUIZ versus the B’ham University SF Group

March – Gollancz editor JO FLETCHER returns with more amusing and interesting anecdotes of life in publishing

April – Author and satirist ADAM ROBERTS

BRUM GROUP NEWS #456 copyright 2009 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rogpeyton@hotmail.co.uk). 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.

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Tickets will soon be on sale for our Christmas Social – buffet and skittles at the Selly Park Tavern as usual. See Pat on the door at the next meeting for further details and to get your name on the preliminary list

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, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG