

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

DECEMBER 2014

ISSUE 519

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CHRISTMAS SOCIAL ***5TH DECEMBER***



The Christmas Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak from 7 till 11pm. The postcode is B29 7HQ for anyone travelling by car. By bus, from Birmingham centre take a 45 or 47 bus from outside Boots, opposite New Street Station's old entrance

January 9th - THE AGM - Reports on 2014 and election of next year's Committee.

on Smallbrook Queensway, or from near Boots in High Street. Bus stops are changing so check the destination sign carefully. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - it is about 15 minutes ride. The Selly Park Tavern is on the left a few stops past the Edgbaston Cricket Ground and the stop after the Nature Centre. Remember, the Skittle Alley is behind the main pub. Walk down the side of the Tavern into the car park and it is on your right.
CG

NOVA AWARDS - 2014

The 2014 Nova Award winners for excellence in British and Irish fanzines were announced at Novacon 44 on November 16th in Nottingham.

Fanzine: *Vibrator* edited by Graham Charnock

Fanwriter: Christina Lake

Fanartist: D West

WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The World Fantasy Awards winners were announced on November 9th at the World Fantasy Convention held in Washington from November 6th to 9th. The Awards for Lifetime Achievement are announced in advance of the event.

Novel: A STRANGER IN OLONDRIA by Sofia Samatar (Small Beer)

Novella: WAKULLA SPRINGS by Andy Springs & Ellen Klages (Tor.com 2/10/2013)

Short Story: "The Prayer of Ninety Cats" by Caitlin R Kiernan (*Subterranean* Spring 2013)

Anthology: DANGEROUS WOMEN edited by George R Martin & Gardner Dozois (Tor US: Voyager UK)

Author Collection: THE APE'S WIFE AND OTHER STORIES by Caitlin R Kiernan (*Subterranean*)

Artist: Charles Vess

Special Award Professional (tie): Irene Gallo for art direction of Tor.com

William K Schafer for *Subterranean* Press

Special Award Non-Professional: Kate Baker, Neil Clarke & Sean Wallace for *Clarkesworld*

Lifetime Achievement Winners: Ellen Datlow & Chelsea Quinn Yarbro

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 goodwinced@yahoo.com

GOOD MEMORIES – by Vernon Brown

An old friend and long-time BSFG member died on 26th October after a long illness that left her house bound before she was confined to her bed for several years. Her funeral on 7th November was attended by a number of Group members.

Helen Eling was a vivacious friendly person, whose presence enlivened any meeting. I remember her being in the thick of things at Novacons and, on one occasion, being inveigled into a very smooth ballroom jive with her. I don't know where she obtained all the energy that she expended but I do know that Group meetings and conventions became a little quieter when she could no longer attend them. - *Vernon Brown.*

I first met Helen in 1971 when she joined the Brum Group, coming along with Stan for the social side as she was not an SF reader. But she got on with everyone and was soon coming to Novacons as well. She started helping out in every way she could – registrations, raffles, etc., and she became an integral part of the BSFG and Novacons being a committee member on several of the early Novacons. Arline and I became very good friends with Stan and Helen and we met up many times outside of fannish activities. Going to their house for a dinner party was always something to look forward to as she was an excellent cook and hostess.

And a great shock came at a Novacon disco when I found out she jived and it was the same jive that I knew!!! The first time I'd met anyone I could dance with properly since the days when I was first taught to jive.

An interesting story came to light at the funeral, which I'd never heard before. Stan & Helen met at a dance 2 days before Helen's 18th birthday (1955). The next day Stan was shipped out to Egypt as part of his national service in the army. They corresponded for about a month and when Stan came back for a 2-day leave, Helen met him at New Street Station and Stan proposed that weekend! Talk about a whirlwind romance!!!

Helen was lost to us and fandom when she became ill - we hadn't seen her for about 15 years - but I shall always remember her as the best dance partner I ever had. - *Rog Peyton*

My earliest memory of Helen was at the first Brum Group meeting at the Imperial Hotel that I attended when I came back to Birmingham (from Norfolk, so I missed its start) in 1973. She was sitting on the edge of a table, surrounded by members who were laughing at a story she was telling. I was impressed by how vivacious she seemed. Standing proudly by her side was a chap with a large mop of dark hair. I didn't know who either of them were at the time, of course, but was soon introduced to them as Helen and Stan. The last time I saw Helen must be 12 years ago, just as her illness began to take hold of her. - *Dave Hardy*

My lasting impressions of Helen from the mid-seventies when I first met her are of a gregarious, friendly and compassionate person. She was always so helpful and would make a point of befriending those who seemed alone or lonely. Helen was also an excellent dancer, I remember her partnering Vernon in an energetic yet beautifully controlled jive. - *Pat Brown*

Knight Watch Press Xmas Party – Theresa Derwin

You're invited to the KWP Christmas Party on Saturday 20th December from 3pm to 6pm at the Urban Coffee Company, Church Street, Birmingham.

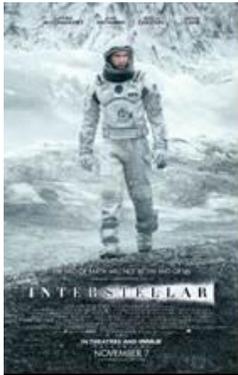
I confess, there will be a teeny book launch at 3:30pm for Kyle Turton's debut werewolf novel CONTROL. However, first twenty arrivals get free mince pie or Red Velvet cake and the first ten arrivals get a free glass of mulled cider. We've got the upstairs

reserved out for us to pull crackers, pull A Cracker! or just drink and be merry. And don't worry, UCC have a great selection of coffee, tea, beer, wine and cider plus snacks, paninis etc.

Everyone who comes will be entered into a free prize draw to win a book, an ebook bundle or one of our custom made t-shirts. You'll also get a link to download my new Christmas ebook SEASONS CREEPINGS for free.

At 6pm we'll be heading to The Old Royal - for more beer! *TD*

SCI-FI SEASON AT GIANT CINEMA, MILLENNIUM POINT



The Giant Cinema (IMAX) at Millennium Point is showing a season of Sci-Fi themed movies in November and December. The Cinema is due to close in January so last chance to see some of these films on the (very) large screen. Millennium Point is just minutes from the city centre and the Bullring. For satnav use B4 7AP. For timing and price details and to book online see www.giantscreencinema.co.uk or Tel: 0121 202 3333. Films include:

INTERSTELLAR - from 7th November to 10th December

GRAVITY - 28th and 29th November

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY - 5th December

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS 3D - 6th December

ALIENS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT - 6th December

THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES - 12th December to 6th January

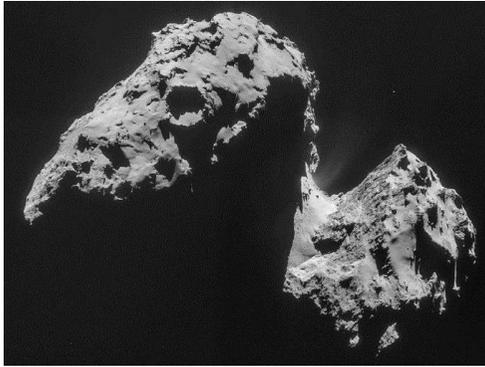
(Thanks to Cathy Easthope for the information).

BBC SCIENCE FICTION SEASON

Starting on November 22nd, the BBC is running a season of SF related programmes. BBC 2 is showing four episodes entitled *Tomorrow's Worlds: The Unearthly History of Science Fiction* on Saturday's at 9:45pm. Each episode has a separate theme including SPACE, INVASION, ROBOTS and TIME. Missed episodes are showing as available via BBC iPlayer for 30 days after transmission

so you can catch up already screened programmes. There are also other programmes available only via iPlayer entitled **STORIES FROM THE STARS** (broadcast 22nd November), **INVASION OF THE FANS** (6th December) and **DAYS OF FEAR AND WONDER** (13th December). More details can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p029snq3 CG

NEWS IN BRIEF



As no doubt everyone is aware, after a 10 year flight the spacecraft **Rosetta** achieved orbit around Comet 67P (see illustration) and landed **Philae** on the surface on November 12th. Despite some hitches due to a harder than expected landing site (causing the lander to bounce three

times and end up in a shaded spot) a lot of data was recovered which is still being analysed. Although now hibernating there is still some hope it may revive with greater sunlight exposure nearer perihelion (closest approach to the Sun). Perihelion is calculated as 13th August 2015. In the meantime **Rosetta** continues in orbit around the comet and will send data and photos back as the comet circles the Sun. Regular updates are on the **ESA Rosetta Blog** (<http://blogs.esa.int/rosetta>) Controversial TV producer **Glen A Larson** has died. He created many popular '70's and '80's shows including the original *Battlestar Galactica*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Knight rider*. He was branded as "Glen Larceny" by Harlan Ellison as many of his shows "borrowed" and capitalised on big screen popular hits Special effects artist **Michael Lennick** died on November 7th. He worked on the famous SF films such as **THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**, **THE FLY** and **THE DEAD ZONE**. He also made documentaries about science and astronautics and considered himself a keen SF fan and reader Co-founder and Curator Emeritus of the important US J Lloyd Eaton Collection of

Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, **George Slusser** has died. As well as his vital work in establishing and maintaining the archive, he wrote non-fiction analyses of the SF field including **ROBERT A. HEINLEIN: STRANGER IN HIS OWN LAND**, **THE FARTHEST SHORES OF URSULA K. LE GUIN** and **NURSERY REALMS: CHILDREN IN THE WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY AND HORROR**. He was awarded the Pilgrim Award from the Science Fiction Research Association *in 1986* **Ursula K LeGuin** accepted the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters where she was introduced by **Neil Gaiman**. Outspoken as ever she used her speech to attack publishers for the "profit motive often is in conflict with the aims of art." And that books are "not just commodities". She also praised fellow science fiction and fantasy authors, as "the writers who were excluded from literature for so long ... who for the last 50 years watched the beautiful rewards go to the so-called realists" and predicted that "hard times are coming when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine some real grounds for hope". The speech is on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et9Nf-rsALk> Publishers **Harper Voyager UK** and the **British Film Institute** held a joint online **Virtual Sci-Fi Festival** on the 15th - 16th November to tie in with the BFI Autumn Film Season "Days of Fear and Wonder". It featured Twitter, Blog, Facebook and Podcasts by many SF authors, publishers and filmmakers and fans. Authors featured included **Margaret Atwood** and **Brian Aldiss** amongst many. Podcasts are available at soundcloud.com/bookdpcast/sets/bfi-voyager-sci-fi-playlist. Many other posts are still available at <http://harpervoyagerbooks.co.uk/2014/11/bfivoyager-weekend-highlights/> Also as part of the BFI Days of Fear and Wonder (www.bfi.org.uk/sci-fi-days-fear-wonder) a collection of **British TV's contributions to SF** is available at **BFI Mediatheques** around the UK. One of these is available at the Library of Birmingham. Viewing stations are open during library open hours and can be booked at the Customer Service Desk on Level 3. You will need to buy a set of

headphones for £1 or bring your own. Library contact is 0121 242 4242 or email: enquiries@libraryofbirmingham.com Online magazine *Strange Horizons* has published previously unseen interviews with **Iain Banks**. These can be found at <http://strangehorizons.com/2014/20141103/1banks-a.shtml> **Hachette** and **Amazon** have reached an agreement after an acrimonious battle which had seen Hachette authors being disadvantaged on Amazon's website. Hachette will have responsibility for setting consumer prices on ebooks but will "benefit from better terms when it delivers lower prices for readers" An online magazine, **Terraform** aiming to promote original SF has launched but has attracted some criticism for apparently being unaware of already existing and respected players such as *Tor.com*, *Clarkesworld* etc Perhaps more worthy of attention and support is the UK based online magazine, **Holdfast** which has now lasted for a year and has recently achieved funding for an anthology. Each issue has a theme and a featured author and has had some excellent contributors to date including **Emma Newman**, **Sarah Pinborough**, **Frances Hardinge** and **Stephanie Sautler**. The website is www.holdfastmagazine.com There has been some controversy over the damage and trolling activities of 2014 John W Campbell nominee **Benjanun Sriduangkaew** who has been revealed as troll and "rage-blogger" *Requires Hate*. A documented report of her activities by Laura J Mixon appears to show that most of her targets to have been women, people of colour and other minority groups despite her allegedly progressive views Arthur C Clarke's 3001: THE FINAL ODYSSEY is to be adapted into a mini-series by the SyFy Channel. CG

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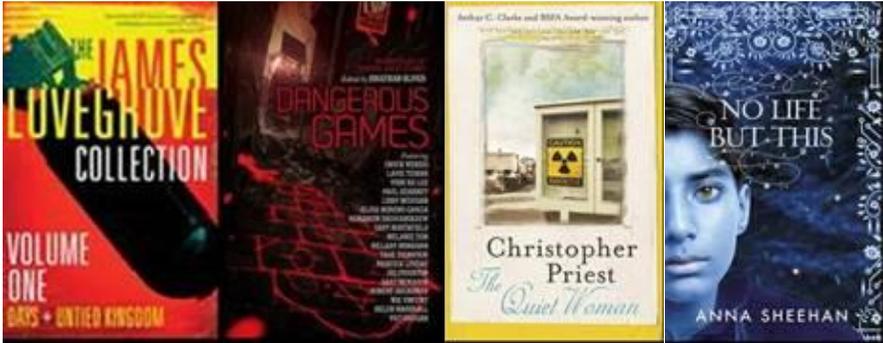
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FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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

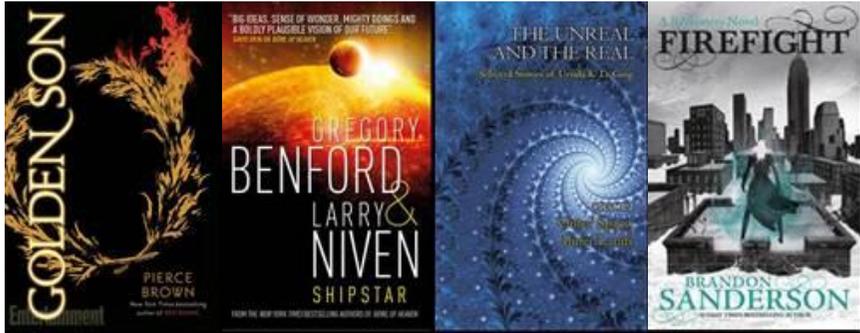


THE JAMES LOVEGROVE COLLECTION: VOL. 1 by James Lovegrove / Solaris / 672 pgs / £10.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781082669 / December 4th. Two dystopian SF novels (**DAY & UNTIED KINGDOM**) by Campbell and Clarke Award nominee.

DANGEROUS GAMES edited by Jonathan Oliver / Solaris / 384 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781082652 / December 4th. Anthology of short stories based on a theme of games & gambling.

THE QUIET WOMAN by Christopher Priest / Gollancz / 240 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575121706 / December 11th. SF. In near future dystopian Britain, Alice struggles with memories of past lives.

NO LIFE BUT THIS by Anna Sheehan / Gollancz / 320 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575104778 / December 18th. SF. Rose awakes after 100 years to find she is sole heir to an interstellar empire.



GOLDEN SON (Red Rising 2) by Pierce Brown / Hodder & Stoughton / 464 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1444759013 / January 1st. SF. Rebel Darrow is embedded as a spy in the elite Gold class on Mars.

SHIPSTAR by Gregory Benford & Larry Niven / Titan Books / 416 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1783294343 / January 2nd. SF. The mysterious Shipstar and its bizarre inhabitants hold secrets vital to humanity.

THE UNREAL AND THE REAL VOL 2: OUTER SPACE & INNER LANDS by Ursula K LeGuin / Gollancz / 352 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473202863 / January 8th. SF. Collection of 20 short stories including Award winners.

FIREFIGHT by Brandon Sanderson / Gollancz / 432 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575104211 / January 9th. Fantasy involving superheroes. David searches for answers in the city of Babylon Restored.

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

THE PYRAMID - Release date December 5th. Horror. Archaeologists exploring lost pyramid are hunted by an unknown creature.



THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES - Release date December 8th. Distrusting elves, men and dwarves must unite in war against Orcs and the dragon, Smaug.

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: SECRET OF THE TOMB - Release date December 19th. Egyptian magic that brings museum exhibits to life at night is running out. Featuring last performances by Robin Williams and Mickey Rooney and shot at British Museum.

EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS - Release date December 26th. Re-telling of Biblical story of Moses and the twelve plagues of Egypt.

THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING - Release date January 1st. Biopic examining the relationship between the famous physicist, Stephen Hawking and his wife.

WOMAN IN BLACK 2: THE ANGEL OF DEATH - Release date January 1st. Horror sequel. 40 years later, a group of evacuated WWII children awaken the dark inhabitant of a haunted house. *CG*

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organizers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the contact addresses. Any information about forthcoming SF/Fantasy/Horror events is always welcome - please send to Carol at goodwincd@yahoo.com

BLADE RUNNER: THE FINAL CUT screening, 14th December, Birmingham. Adaptation of Philip K Dick's DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP. 5:15pm pm Electric Cinema

Birmingham. £10. www.theelectric.co.uk or 0121 643 7879 Price £10-12.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY screening, 22nd - 23rd December, **Birmingham**. Screening of SF classic. Mac Centre Birmingham. Price £7.50. www.macbirmingham.co.uk or 0121 446 3232.

RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET, 26th - 31st January, **Birmingham**. Humorous Rock musical based on the SF film classic. New Alexandra Theatre. Tickets £12.90 - £33.40 + £4 booking fee. Tel: 0844 871 3011 or www.atgtickets.com/shows/return-to-the-forbidden-planet/new-alexandra-theatre-birmingham/



BOOK REVIEWS



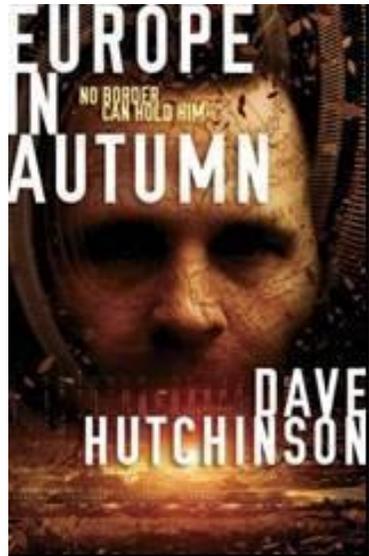
(REVIEWERS please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwincd@yahoo.com Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting).

EUROPE IN AUTUMN by Dave Hutchinson

Solaris / 317 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781081952

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Predicting future political trends is difficult. As Charles Stross has now found not everything turns out the way you want it. Several of his novels will now have to be regarded as alternative histories. Not that Stross will be particularly worried as there is a fine tradition in alternative histories. Extrapolating current trends into a relatively near future is an interesting exercise. Currently, there seems to be a desire for ethnic groupings to desire autonomy. Whether or not



this is economically viable depends on the strengths of the group. Dave Hutchinson has taken this trend to extremes and postulated a Europe divided into ever decreasing blocs which may or may not have free movement across borders.

EUROPE IN AUTUMN is set largely in Central Europe and centres around Rudi, an Estonian cook working in a Polish restaurant. It's not an easy life but he's reasonably content. Max, the owner, pays protection to keep in business. It's an accepted part of the system in a Europe where the authorities think they have better things to do. Rudi is able to move more freely across borders than most Polish nationals and with less suspicion so he is asked to go to the small state of Hindenberg and bring back a message from Max's cousin. This is the start of a new career. While still working at the restaurant he is trained as a Coureur. Using a carefully constructed set of aliases, Coureurs smuggle documents and people across the borders faster than going through diplomatic channels.

This is a novel that starts off well. The seediness of the characters, settings and plot structure is reminiscent of a realistic spy thriller - far more gritty than the Bond novels. These are people that most would not notice as any good spy ought to be. Rudi's frustration at the tedium of his initial training is shot through with reality. The first third is well written, pacy and holds the attention, everything that a good thriller should be. These qualities don't diminish but as Rudi gets deeper into the role that has been elected into, the plot becomes more episodic. The result is something that could easily be turned into a many-part TV series. It has the same quality. There is a cast of regular characters who have developing roles and face changing dilemmas. There is the mysterious Zone. This is an area on either side of a railway line that crosses Europe and which steadily becomes the focus of Rudi's activities. This is the story arc which creeps into the episodes, unnoticed at first but heading towards the big denouement in the final episode. For this reason, it is a shame that Hutchinson has confined himself to a single novel. Some of the episodes feel as if they want to be expanded and made more complex. A trilogy would have been nice. A longer series would have made the readership sit up and take notice.

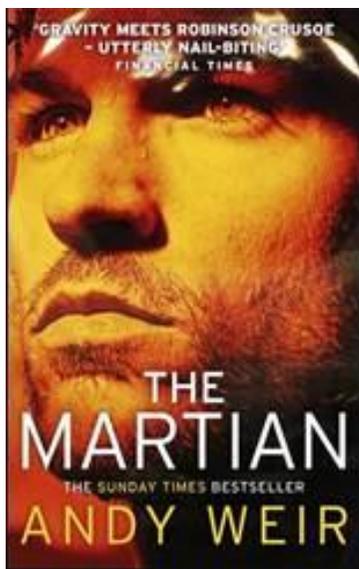
PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Solaris)

***THE MARTIAN* by Andy Weir**

Del Rey / 384 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0091956141

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.



This SF book has been hugely popular both inside and outside the SF field. It has been a *Sunday Times* bestseller, made the *Richard and Judy* list and is readily available on supermarket shelves, not the norm for most straight SF books. With all this attention I was somewhat worried whether the book could live up to all the hype. Well I need not have worried - this is a good old-fashioned SF book which is full of adventure, meticulous science research and a gripping page-turner.

The story is set in the near future. Shortly after landing on Mars, the six person crew of the third manned mission to Mars (*Ares 3*) are forced to evacuate due to a massive storm threatening the living base. In the confusion, astronaut Mark Watney is injured, separated and left for dead when his monitors show no life signs. He awakens to find himself marooned on Mars with no way to communicate and the next mission isn't due for four years. Trapped on a planet where any mistake could kill him, this is a riveting story of his ingenious efforts to survive.

The story alternates between his “first person” log entries and the “third person” viewpoint of the Earth-based scientists and the homebound *Ares 3* crew. Mark Watney as a character is well-drawn and immensely likeable. His log entries feel like a real person's voice and his use of humour to keep himself going works very well. Importantly he is not perfect and he does make mistakes but his determination and perseverance get you involved and willing him to survive.

While the technical detail might put some people off, it does not feel heavy handed. In fact this is one of the major joys of this book to me. I love the puzzle of “How is he going to get out of this?”

and the logical, real solutions he finds. I am not a physics/engineering expert by any stretch of the imagination but the technical accuracy seems right to me. The problems and solutions used feel incredibly well-researched and detailed and the author has clearly spent a lot of time trying to get things correct.

The novel has been described as “Robinson Crusoe in Space” and this is a very good description. It reminds me of some of the early hard SF I read and loved and which first got me into the field, particularly Arthur C Clarke’s *A FALL OF MOONDUST* or astronomer/writer Hugh Walter’s children’s *Chris Godfrey* series. If you like your SF with a good mixture of accurate science and adventure then this book is highly recommended. CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Del Rey)

CONVENTIONS

PICOCON 32, 14th - 15th February 2015, Imperial College, London. Guest of Honour Cory Doctorow. Guests of Honour tba. Cost £10. Info: www.icsf.org.uk/picocon.

REDEMPTION '15, 20th - 22nd February 2015, Coventry. At Britannia Hotel. Guest of Honour: Miltos Yerolemou (others tbc). Tickets £70 at www.smof.com/redemption

SCI-FI WEEKENDER, 19th - 22nd March, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales. Commercial multi-media convention. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See www.scifiweekender.com

DYSPROSIUM (EASTERCON), 3rd - 6th April 2015, London. Guests of Honour are Jim Butcher, Seanan McGuire, Herr Doktor and Caroline Mullan. To be held at the Park Inn, Heathrow, London. Attending £70, Supporting £25. Details at www.dysprosium.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

January 9th - **Annual General Meeting**

February 13th - **Quiz**

March 13th - **tbc**

April 10th - mathematician and writer **Ian Stewart**

May 8th - **tbc**

June 12th - SF author **Stephanie Sauter**

July 10th - **tbc**

August 14th - **Summer Meal**

September 11th - **tbc**

October 9th - **tbc**

November 13th - date subject to change depending upon Novacon

December 4th - **Christmas Social**

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ABOUT US... The **Birmingham Science Fiction Group** meets on the second Friday of each month. Membership is £16 per year per person (or £21 for two members living at the same address). This includes the 12 free issues of the Newsletter plus reduced entrance fee at each meeting. Cheques should be made payable to ‘The Birmingham Science Fiction Group’ and sent to our Membership Secretary, 10 Sylvan Avenue, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2PG