

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JULY 2019

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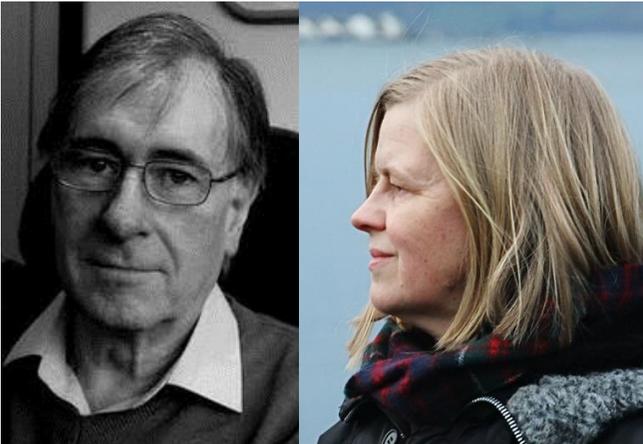
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Christopher Priest & Nina Allan July 12th



This month we are pleased to welcome two acclaimed authors as our guests.

Our Honorary President, **Christopher Priest** is well-known to many in the group, both for his visits to the

August 9th - Summer social meal at The Bull.

BSFG but also for his sterling body of work as an author. As well as being a regular guest of the Group, he has been Guest of Honour twice at Novacon (1979 and 2000). As many of you know far better than me, he always gives us a quality, first-rate talk.

From his start writing for fanzines, he has published fifteen novels, four short story collections and other works including biographies, novelisations and children's non-fiction.

He has won the BSFA Award four times for his novels; **INVERTED WORLD** (1974), **THE EXTREMES** (1998), **THE SEPARATION** (2002) and **THE ISLANDERS** (2011) and once for a short story ("Palely Loitering"). **THE SEPARATION** also won the Arthur C Clarke Award. He has also won many international awards for excellent writing including the Campbell Memorial, Eurocon, Ditmar, Kurd Lasswitz and Le Grand Prix de L'Imaginaire. In 2001 he was awarded the Prix Utopia (France) for lifetime achievement and has been nominated four times for the Hugo Award. His novel, **THE PRESTIGE** won two major literary awards; the World Fantasy Award and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize.

Furthermore, he has written drama for film, radio and television and his features and reviews have appeared in *The Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *New Statesman* etc. In 2006, the film version of his novel, **THE PRESTIGE** received two Academy Award nominations.

His latest collection of short works, **EPISODES** will be published by Gollancz on the 11th July. Further details can be found at his website, www.christopher-priest.co.uk

This visit we will have the added bonus of author Nina Allan. Nina writes speculative and crime fiction. Her first published work was a short story in *Dark Horizons* in 2002. Her short stories have since featured in numerous magazines including *The Year's Best Science Fiction*, *Best Horror of the Year* and *The Mammoth Book of Best British Crime*. Her longer works include **THE SILVER WIND**, **STARDUST**, **THE HARLEQUIN** and her SF novels, **THE RACE** and **THE RIFT**. Her latest novel, **THE DOLLMAKER** was published this year in April (by *riverrun*) and has been described as "wholly original - worthy of a modern

Grimm”. Her work has been nominated for many awards. She has won the BSFA Award twice (once for her short story, “Spin” (2013) and once for her novel, *THE RIFT* (2017)), the Novella Award (for *THE HARLEQUIN* in 2015), the Kitschies Red Tentacle for Best Novel (*THE RACE* in 2017) and France’s Grand Prix de L’Imaginaire (for *THE SILVER WIND* in 2014). In May 2018, she was named as one of the *Guardian’s* Fresh Voices: 50 Writers You Should Read Now. More information can be found at www.ninaallan.co.uk/ CG

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, off New Street.

The doors open at 7.30pm and the meeting will normally commence at 8.00pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar on the ground floor, and be seated in plenty of time. The entrance fee for our January AGM is free and the August and December socials are ticket only events. All other meetings the entrance fee is £3 for members and £6 for non-members.

SUMMER SOCIAL MEAL - 9th August

Unfortunately, due to urgent family matters, I have not been able to arrange the social meal as far in advance as I would have wished. Pat has kindly stepped into the breach and booked a table at The Bull in Price Street,



Birmingham, just around the corner from Aston University, and about a 5 to 10-minute walk from the Briar Rose.

For those who haven’t been before, it’s a small old traditional pub with a separate dining area, good beer and good food. Reservations can be made at this month’s (July) meeting with Pat. A £5 deposit will be required (redeemed against your meal on the

night). If you cannot attend the meeting please email Pat via the Group email address (bhamsfgroup@vyahoo.co.uk) which is also on the front cover of this newsletter. In either case please reserve your seat(s) as soon as possible – there’s only a month to go. Final numbers are needed by **29th July**. CG

LOCUS AWARDS 2019

The winners of the Locus Awards were announced at the Locus Awards Weekend in Seattle from 28th to 30th June.

Science Fiction Novel: THE CALCULATING STARS by Mary Robinette Kowal (Solaris)

Fantasy Novel: SPINNING SILVER by Naomi Novik (Macmillan)

Horror Novel: THE CABIN AT THE END OF THE WORLD by Paul Tremblay (Titan)

First Novel: TRAIL OF LIGHTNING by Rebecca Roanhorse (Saga)

Young Adult Book: DREAD NATION by Justina Ireland (Titan)

Novella: ARTIFICIAL CONDITION by Martha Wells (Tor.com Publishing)

Novelette: “The Only Harmless Great Thing” by Brooke Bolander (Tor.com Publishing)

Short Story: “The Secret Lives of the Nine Negro Teeth of George Washington” by Phenderson Djeli Clark (*Fireside* 2/18)

Anthology: THE BOOK OF MAGIC edited by Gardner Dozois (Harper Voyager)

Collection: HOW LONG ‘TIL BLACK FUTURE MONTH by N K Jemisin (Orbit)

Non-Fiction: URSULA K LE GUIN: CONVERSATIONS ON WRITING by Ursula K Le Guin & David Naimon (Tin House)

Art Book: Charles Vess for THE BOOKS OF EARTHSEA: THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED EDITION by Charles Vess & Ursula K Le Guin (Saga)

Artist: Charles Vess

Editor: Gardner Dozois

Magazine: *Tor.com*

Publisher: Tor

Special Award for Community Outreach & Development: Mary Anne Mohanraj

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



THE HOUSE OF SUNDERING FLAMES (*Dominion of the Fallen 3*) by Aliette de Bodard / Gollancz / 560 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473223400 / July 25th. When one of the faction Houses of Paris is destroyed, old enemies must unite against the threat.

SHADOWS OF THE SHORT DAYS by Alexander Dan Vilhjálmsson / Gollancz / 528 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473224100 / July 25th. Urban fantasy set in an alternative Reykjavik.

THE LAST ASTRONAUT by David Wellington / Orbit / 384 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356512297 / July 25th. The last living astronaut leads raw recruits to make first contact with an alien object orbiting Earth.

JADE WAR (Green Bone 2) by Fonda Lee / Orbit / 624 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356510538 / August 6th. The Kaul family battle to keep control of magical jade which empowers their warriors.



TO BE TAUGHT, IF FORTUNATE by Becky Chambers / Hodder & Stoughton / 160 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473697164 / August 8th. SF. In the future, scientists adapt humans to explore dangerous planets.

LORD OF SECRETS by Breanna Teintze / Jo Fletcher Books / 336 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-178746240 / August 8th. An outlaw wizard realises a runaway slave holds the key to rescuing his imprisoned grandfather.

THE DRAGON REPUBLIC (The Poppy War 2) by R F Kuang / HarperVoyager / 672 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0008239855 / August 8th. Haunted by an atrocity she committed to save her people, Rin seeks revenge on the traitorous Empress who sold out Rin's homeland.

SANCTUARY by V V James / Gollancz / 464 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473220457 / August 8th. When a star quarterback dies, suspicion falls on his ex-girlfriend, the daughter of a witch. CG

📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

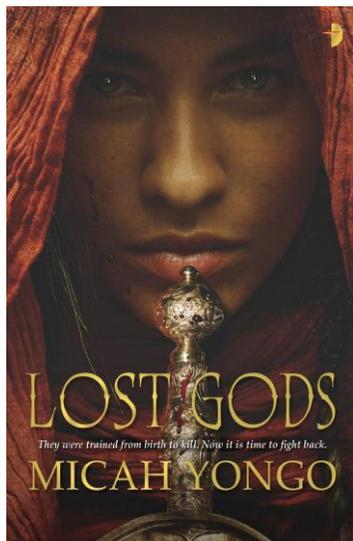
(**REVIEWERS** please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwincd@yahoo.com **Deadline** for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting)

LOST GODS by Micah Yongo

Angry Robot / 432 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857667373

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

This is an ambitious and detailed debut novel which works well, apart from a few minor caveats. Unlike many traditional epic fantasies which use a Western setting, this novel is set in an Arabic/African influenced secondary world that works well. Neythan has been raised since childhood to be an assassin by the mysterious Shedaim group. When he and his fellow trainees and friends are sent out on their first mission, something goes drastically wrong and he wakes to find his friend Yannick dead and his other friend, Arianna fled (and presumably guilty of the murder). Blamed for the killing, he pursues her, motivated by both vengeance and a need to understand her betrayal. As he travels, he discovers the world is far more complex than his sheltered upbringing has shown him. The Shedaim are shown to be state assassins who help maintain the rule of the Sharif over the conquered lands of the empire. The new Sharif however is only a boy and various factions, both political and magical, are manoeuvring to take advantage of his inexperience. As the story builds to a climax, the hidden and suppressed history of both the empire and Neythan personally prove critical to revealing and countering the threats to the lands and people who live there.



The author packs a lot into this book of 432 pages. There are politics, ancient magics, pursuits and threats, loyalties that are challenged and tested, and the growth of the younger characters especially as they react in different ways to the drastic changes from their expected lives. The book is well-paced with lots of action and the story moves along with an energetic plot that keeps the reader engaged and interested. The prose in particular stands out for me; it is economical yet precise and evocative, which really adds depth and a highly visual realism to the world. If the book has a fault, it felt that at times there was so much going on that it would have benefitted from being longer to allow more exploration of some plot strands or minor characters. Another minor niggle, and I know there are divided opinions on the subject, but I felt the book would have benefitted from a map as the plot covers a lot of terrain.

Altogether, this is a promising first novel. It reaches a satisfying climax whilst still leaving many unresolved mysteries. I look forward to seeing how the author ties together these ongoing plot strands and character dilemmas in the next book (PALE KINGS).

(Review copy kindly donated by Angry Robot).

CG

ANCESTRAL NIGHT by Elizabeth Bear

Gollancz / 499 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-147320842

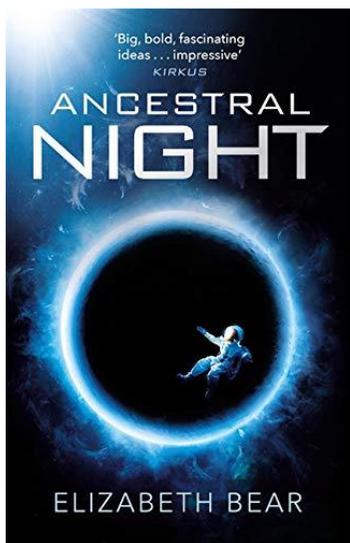
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

There have been many approaches to science fiction over the past decades. In the early years there was faith that scientists would discover ways of cheating the laws of physics and allow ships to travel swiftly between stars. Later, a reality set in and stories were set closer to home, yet authors continue to seek ways of imagining what is out there and inventive ways of getting there, though with the restrictions of not travelling faster than light, SF often explored concepts closer to home, including extrapolating the future on Earth.

One of the features of classic space operas was the presence of alien life forms, either living or having left traces of their civilisations. In the early days of SF there were many that proved hostile giving rise to a whole raft of novels which are basically wars in space. They are still

popular. Rarer are the benign aliens which see humans as the fledglings who have to earn their place in the greater whole.

ANCESTRAL NIGHT is space opera set in a universe populated by a very diverse set of aliens. Humans are relative newcomers to the Synarche of Worlds even though their membership occurred centuries ago. Haimey Dz, the first-person narrator, and Connla are salvagers. Their ship is run by a sentient AI they call Singer. Their crewmates are two cats. They have picked up a tip about a possible derelict on the edges of the galaxy. When they



find it, they decide that they can retrieve it but there is something odd about it. Haimey goes across to investigate, and finds the ship has gravity. Anywhere else, for gravity there has to be spin or be on a planet. This is technology from before the Synarche existed and is referred to as Korgoi. This ship has been retrofitted, but the crew, Jothari, are missing. Not that Haimey is concerned as an empty ship is salvage and she discovers that the crew had been killing and cutting up members of a very ancient star-faring species for their body parts. When she gets infected by a serum made from

them, Haimey's troubles really take off. They are attacked by pirates. She finds the serum has made her sensitive to gravitational anomalies and as the crew flee the pirates into the centre of the galaxy, they are led to the discovery of a Korgoi ship that has remained hidden inside the event horizon of the central black hole for millennia. This is the prize that everyone wants.

To try and give a brief description of the complexity of this novel is almost impossible. It has everything that a space opera fan could want while avoiding the all-out battles of military SF. There are aliens with complex needs who are mostly just trying to do their job. Haimey now has talents that the Synarche would find useful and

enemies that want her dead. She finds out things about her childhood that the authorities had buried in the depths of her mind - to reduce trauma. Where she discovers that she has been manipulated, she finds that she is able to turn her new knowledge to advantage.

This a book that has everything a true SF reader wants - space ships, adventure, alien life-forms, danger, humour and great characters. And, there are cats. *PM*

(Review copy kindly donated by Gollancz)

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

APOLLO 11 screening, 5th - 25th July. At Showcase cinemas (Dudley/Coventry) from 5th - 11th July. Also, at The Electric Cinema (from 19th - 25th July).

ARMSTRONG film screening, 9th July. One day only screening. Documentary about Neil Armstrong with NASA footage, home movies etc. Limited screenings. Empire Cinema, Great Park, Rubery. Book at www.empirecinemas.co.uk

SHOCK AND GORE 2019, 12th - 17th July. Horror Film season. The Electric Cinema (www.theelectric.co.uk or 0121 643 7879)

SMALL PRESS DAY, 13th July. Celebrating creators and small presses with special guests. At Worlds Apart (Nostalgia & Comics), Smallbrook Queensway, B5 4EN

MOON FEST, 16th - 24th July. Nine-day programme of events to celebrate 50 years since Apollo 11. Includes exhibitions, talks and films (THE DISH, APOLLO 11, THE RIGHT STUFF & STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE). Various prices. The Mac Centre. Details at www.macbirmingham.co.uk or 0121 446 3232

FRANKENSTEIN play, 17th – 20th July. At the Blue Orange Theatre, Great Hampton Street, Jewellery Quarter. 3pm & 7pm. Tickets £9. Call 0121 212 2643 or www.blueorangetheatre.co.uk

CAFÉ SCIENTIFIQUE, 6th August. Lecture on Sound as a Weapon for Change by Dr Mark Richards. Free. 7 – 9pm. At Purecraft Bar, Think Tank (B2 5TJ)

IN CONVERSATION WITH MARGARET ATWOOD, 28th October. Symphony Hall. £20.50 – £38. Box Office (0121 780 3333 or www.thsh.co.uk CG

CONVENTIONS and EXHIBITIONS

NEW 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.

EDGE-LIT 8, 13th July, Derby. Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guests of Honour Alette de Bodard, Christopher Golden, Anne Charnock, Neil Spring, Tim Lebbon & Sarah Lotz. Tickets £30 at www.derbyquad.co.uk/whats-on/events/edge-lit-8

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

WORLDCON 2019, 15th – 19th August, Dublin. Guests of Honour Ian McDonald, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Steve Jackson, Diane Duane, Ginjer Buchanan and Bill & Mary Burns. Convention Centre. 235 Euros. <https://dublin2019.com/>

FANTASYCON, 18th -20th October, Glasgow. Guest of Honour Jen Williams. Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow. £65. www.fantasycon.org

BRISTOLCON, 26th October, Bristol. Guests of Honour Diane Duane, Gareth Powell & Andy Bigwood. Doubletree Hotel. £20. Details at www.bristolcon.org

NOVACON 49, 8th – 10th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour is Mike Carey. Nottingham Sherwood Hotel (same venue – name has changed), Nottingham. Tickets £49 till end of Eastercon. Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

August 9th – Summer Social

September 13th – Science Fiction and Fantasy author, **Claire North**

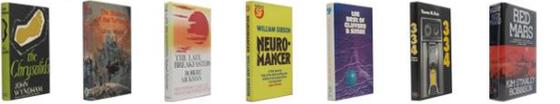
October 11th – Space scientist, **Dr Amaury Triaud**

November 1st – tbc (NB early in month due to Novacon)

December 6th – Christmas Social

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Science Fiction
Fantasy
Modern Firsts
Comics

ABOUT US... The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the second Friday of each month. Membership is £25 per year per person (or £35 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