

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MARCH 2017

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GERRY WEBB

March 10th

This month we welcome Gerry Webb. He is a member of the British Interplanetary Society, a working space technology expert, a long-time SF fan and a regular attendee and contributor at SF conventions, including Novacon and Worldcon.

Gerry has spent all of his working life in the space field, beginning with the radio tracking of Sputnik 3 and other early Soviet satellites. He worked for the British Government space research programme, including using rockets to investigate the Earth's

April 7th - Clarke-nominated SF writer Dave Hutchinson.

NB Note the date change - first Friday due to Easter/Eastercon.

geomagnetic field. He has been a member of the British Interplanetary Society (BIS) since 1958 and was elected as a Fellow in 1969. He founded Commercial Space Technologies Ltd in 1983 and has been its General Director since inception. This consultancy (with offices in London and Moscow) has so far arranged 17 launches, with 33 satellites successfully placed into orbit. He has also contributed to Interstellar studies, including the BIS Project Daedalus, a study on designing a plausible unmanned interstellar spacecraft. (*Information obtained from the British Interplanetary Society website*). 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 £4 for non-members.

RIP DAVE HOLMES

Dave Holmes, of *Andromeda* Bookshop and latterly *Magic Labyrinth* in Leicester, who was well-known to many members of the Birmingham SF Group, passed away on 13th February after a short battle with cancer. His funeral will be on the **9th March** in Leicester. Cars will leave from his house in Westcotes Drive at 12:30, getting to Gilroes Crematorium (Grobby Road, Leicester, LE3 9QG) for 1pm. There will be a service there followed by a wake at the Western Pub (70 Western Road, Leicester, LE3 0GA) commencing around 1:45pm. Anyone who wishes to pay their respects will be more than welcome. Any donations are to be to cancer research. There is no dress code except for smart dress although if wished accents of yellow, blue or anything to do with Batman. (*Information received from Dave Holmes children*).

NEBULA AWARD NOMINATIONS - Novels

The nominees for the Nebula Award have been announced. Other categories can be found at www.sfwa.org

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY by Charlie Jane Anders (Titan)
BORDERLINE by Mishell Baker (Saga)
THE OBELISK GATE by N K Jemisin (Orbit)
NINEFOX GAMBIT by Yoon Ha Lee (Solaris)
EVERFAIR by Nisi Shawl (Tor US)

BSFA AWARD NOMINATIONS – Novels

The shortlist for the British Science Fiction Association Awards have been announced. The winners will be announced at Innominate (Eastercon 2017) on Saturday 15th April. This year's Convention will be in Birmingham, at the Hilton Metropole at the NEC. Voting is open to BSFA members and anyone attending the convention. Details for other categories can be found at www.bsfa.co.uk

EUROPE IN WINTER by Dave Hutchinson (Solaris)

DAUGHTER OF EDEN by Chris Beckett (Corvus)
(Gollancz)

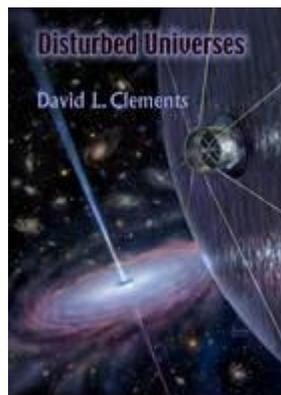
A CLOSED AND COMMON ORBIT by Becky Chambers
(Hodder & Stoughton)

OCCUPY ME by Tricia Sullivan (Gollancz)

AZANIAN BRIDGES by Nick Wood (NewCon Press).

Congratulations also to **David A Hardy** nominated in the Best Artwork category for the cover of **DISTURBED UNIVERSES** by David L Clements (NewCon Press).

Another nomination that may be of interest is in the Non-Fiction category - Rob Hansen's **THEN: SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM IN THE UK 1930-1980** (Ansible Editions).



NEWS IN BRIEF ...

SF and Horror author **Edward Bryant** died on February 10th. He was a prolific author for three decades, producing mainly short stories. He was nominated for many Nebula Awards and won two for “Stone” (1979) and “giANTS” (1980). He was also a World Fantasy

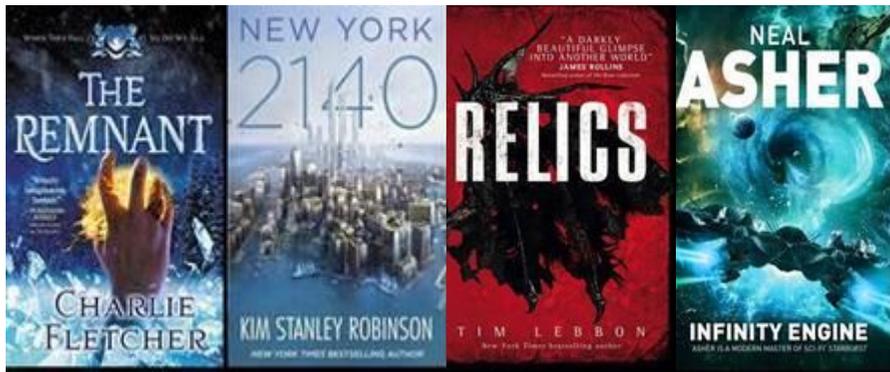


and Stoker Awards finalist. He also collaborated with Harlan Ellison on the novel **PHOENIX WITHOUT ASHES**, a tie-in to TV series, *The Starlost*. In later years, he wrote reviews and convention reports for *Locus* magazine Actor **Bill Paxton** has died at the age of 61, from complications following surgery. He had many appearances in SFF films and TV including **ALIENS** (where he played Hudson), **TERMINATOR**, **NEAR DARK**, **EDGE OF TOMMORROW**, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and *The Colony*. He also played astronaut Fred Haise in **APOLLO 13** Voting on the longlists for the **2017 David Gemmell Awards** for Fantasy is open and will be available until 31st March. Voting is open to anyone at www.gemmellawards.com The government is to extend the Public Lending Right (**PLR**) to include **e-books** meaning authors will be eligible for payment when their books are borrowed from public libraries, in the same way as printed books. The change will start in 2018 Blackwells is to be the new sponsor for the **Kitschies Awards** for speculative or fantastic fiction. They will work together to also hold events in Blackwells' bookshops across the country Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge has opened a **Centre for Science Fiction and Fantasy**. This will bring together academics, authors, editors and publishers and will host events such as readings, discussions etc. This year they are holding a competition based around the submissions list for the Arthur C Clarke Award. People are invited to post their guess as to which six novels will be shortlisted, together with their reasons. The winner will be the one who correctly guesses the most nominees, and will win copies of all six books. Entry at <http://csff-anglia.co.uk/news/the-arthur-c-clarke-award-submissions-list-and-contest/> The **2016 Locus Recommended Reading List** has been published in the February 2017 issue. Details at www.locusmag.com/News/page/2 A museum in Salisbury, Wiltshire is to hold an exhibition, "**Terry Pratchett: His World**" with the help of Terry Pratchett's estate and artist, Paul Kidby. The exhibition will feature artwork by Kidby and Pratchett as well as personal items which have not previously been on public display. The exhibition will be from 16th September to

13th January. Information at www.salisburymuseum.org.uk Astronomers have discovered seven Earth-size worlds orbiting a single sun, TRAPPIST-1 which is 39 light years from Earth. Three of them are at the right distance to allow liquid surface water, increasing the possibility that they could support life. CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



THE REMNANT (Oversight 3) by Charlie Fletcher / Orbit / 400 pgs / £13.83 paperback / ISBN 978-0316279567 / March 14th. Fantasy. The Oversight organisation, which keeps the peace between natural and supernatural, battles for survival against its harshest foe.

NEW YORK 2140 by Kim Stanley Robinson / Orbit / 624 pgs / £13.83 hardback / ISBN 978-0356508757 / March 14th. SF. How a flooded New York adapts and survives as sea levels rise.

RELICS by Tim Lebbon / Titan / 384 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1785650307 / March 21st. Fantasy. Beneath the Earth's surface, mythological creatures still exist and there is a thriving black market for their body parts.

INFINITY ENGINE (Transformation 3) by Neal Asher / Tor / 576 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0230750753 / March 23rd. SF. A civilisation hangs in the balance as two AI's vie for supremacy.



LUNA: WOLF MOON (Luna 2) by Ian McDonald / Gollancz / 400 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473202269 / March 23rd. SF. Lucas, heir to the once powerful Corta family corporation seeks allies to restore his family's fortunes.

THE COLLAPSING EMPIRE by John Scalzi / Tor / 336 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1509835072 / March 23rd. SF. Three people battle to save an interstellar network of worlds from disaster.

THE HOUSE OF BINDING THORNS (Dominion of the Fallen) by Alette de Bodard / Gollancz / 320 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473212602 / April 6th. Fantasy. In a ruined Paris ruled by Houses of fallen angels, the houses must forge a peace or fall prey to a deadly magic.

RED SISTER (Book of the Ancestor) by Mark Lawrence / Harper Voyager / 512 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0008152291 / April 6th. Fantasy. Nona, trained from the age of eight as an assassin, must use her skills to survive powerful enemies from her childhood. CG

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST - Release date March 17th. Live-action version of Disney film about a young woman and a "beast".

WOLVES AT THE DOOR - Release date March 17th. Horror. Four friends are stalked and tormented by intruders.

LIFE - Release date March 24th. SF. An international space crew discovers life on Mars.

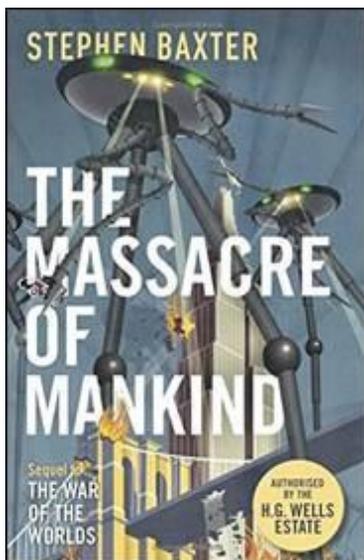
GHOST IN THE SHELL - Release date March 31st. Adaptation of Japanese anime film about a cyborg policewoman hunting a hacker.

📖📖📖📖 **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)

THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND by Stephen Baxter
Gollancz / 464 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 1473205093
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.

This novel is a sequel to H G Wells' **THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**, and the new story revolves around the Martians return to Earth in the 1920's. Whilst other authors have previously written sequels, this version is listed as "authorised by the H G Wells Estate" and I presume was timed to coincide with 2016 being the 150th anniversary of Wells' birth. The author, Stephen Baxter has previously written another authorised H G Wells' sequel, **THE TIME SHIPS** which was a follow-up to **THE TIME MACHINE** and marked the centenary of that book's publication.



It is fourteen years since the Martians invaded England, and the world has changed considerably. Examination of wrecked and abandoned Martian machinery has led to significant advances in technology. History as we know it has changed as a consequence of

the original invasion; most significantly, a recovering UK formed an alliance with Germany, and a “Schlieffen War” between Russia and Germany is still ongoing. The governments of Earth scan the skies, but as another close approach between Earth and Mars nears, they are confident that their progress and prior knowledge means that this time they are prepared for the Martians. But when another Martian fleet begins to land, it becomes obvious that the Martians have also learned lessons and adapted so that yet again mankind is in deadly peril.

Writing in another author’s world, especially one so well-known and iconic as this one, is always going to be a difficult task. What is done very well is the attention to the details of 1920’s geography, vocabulary and appropriate technology. It is clear that a considerable amount of research has gone into writing this novel, and I also enjoyed the little nods to other people or works connected to Mars, ranging from Schiaparelli through to Grover’s Mill.

The worldbuilding is excellent and like the original, there are some suitably gruesome accounts of the Martians’ treatment of captured humans. However, I found myself a little frustrated with the pacing. The first section of the book, which deals with the initial landing, consolidation and the flight of refugees is the most successful in my opinion. After that however, there is an interlude of a couple of years where the Martians in England spend a long time just consolidating this bridgehead, without any attempt to spread further, and I found the urgency and menace of the story evaporating in this section. Towards the later part of the book there are further landings around the world, and the pace picks up but it felt to me like there was then too little space left to give these invasions sufficient details and thus engage the reader.

Fans of Wells’ will appreciate that the narrative does link back and reference the original story. It also includes many of the characters from the Wells’ story, including the original narrator, Walter Jenkins and the artilleryman, although much of the tale is now told by Julie, the sister-in-law of Walter Jenkins. However, I felt that the major focus was on the plot and that thus the characters often seemed to lack depth and I often found it hard to care much about their struggles.

Finally, it was always going to be difficult to find an ending with equivalent impact to the original. Without giving away the conclusion, this story finishes with a resolution that feels a little too “easy” and hence unsatisfying, although there is a “epilogue” which leaves scope for future developments. To summarise, this is a “curate’s egg” of a book – there are some very good bits but other bits that didn’t work for me.

CG

(ARC kindly donated at Gollancz SF Gateway anniversary party)

INFECTION by Kyle Turton

Quantum Corsets / 154 pgs £5.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1540628220

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



In the days before DVDs were common and eBooks were yet to be a figment of the imagination the only way to recapture the film you’d just seen and enjoyed was to hope that someone produced a book of the film. Many of these were written by contracted writers who were given the script and a deadline. The manuscript had to be finished for when the film came out and the author had to guess about the visuals that would eventually be seen. The deadline didn’t allow for deep character development. The rationale of these slim volumes was to remind the reader of what they had

seen and act as an *aide memoire* to a pleasurable evening out. This book, *INFECTION*, reminds me of these books. Unfortunately, these days, readers want much more from their reading matter and in order to compete with the likes of Netflix and Kindle a richness and authenticity of setting, plot and characterisation is needed.

INFECTION is basically a zombie movie script. Four newly qualified medics go on an archaeological dig and one of them, Chris, discovers a box in a cave. As in all the best horror films, he opens the box and takes out the stone inside. Back home, while the four are

preparing to head off to their new jobs, Chris becomes ill. The others leave him at home while go out to celebrate their futures. By the time they return, he has bitten the landlord, attacked a cop and been shot. The landlord is taken to hospital and begins the chain of infection that turns the population of New York into ravenous zombies and sets the others on path to put an end to the situation. As this is a horror novel, more casualties amongst the group of 'heroes' can be expected.

If *Infection* was a 90-minute film, the issues I have with it as a book would fade in to the background. With print, there needs to be far more substance. Much of the time I was wondering who the actual view-point character was, and whether the story was being told from the correct perspective. Although it is not called that, the initial prologue says too much about the mechanism that the plot revolves around. Exactly half-way through the book, two new characters turn up who not only know the history of the artefact causing the problem, but how to resolve the situation. Not only is it too late to bring in these crucial characters but they are the ones that need to impart the knowledge so that the reader keeps pace with the remaining medics rather than knowing the rationale from the start. This removes the mystery that should have been at the heart of the story. I would also have liked to see the artefacts that the newcomers, David and Charlie, need to collect for the final solution, and more of the issues acquiring them threw up.

The kick-off point of the novel is when the four (Chris, Hannah, Kayleigh and Johnny) all go on an archaeological dig. I found myself with a huge credibility gap at this point; not about the finding of the artefact but the dig itself. It was a plot convenience rather than a researched reality. This is where more description would have been welcomed. Everything before this point was slow, domestic background which would have been better served interspersed within the rest of the text. There is, at the beginning in particular, too much of the author telling us the situation rather than showing it. Having said that, much of the banter between characters is enjoyable, even if it was insufficient to differentiate between them.

An irritating aspect of this book was the lack of proof-reading as punctuation, in particular, was not up to the standard I would

expect from the literate. As a personal thing, I dislike books that leave a line between paragraphs. It is clumsy and looks unprofessional, though this might be due to an inexperienced typesetter rather than the intention of either author or editor. And a question for the author - why are the surnames of the characters so rarely given?

I wanted to like this book, as I believe that independent publishers need to be encouraged. If it had been twice the length, the author would have had the space to develop his characters and settings to a greater depth.

PM

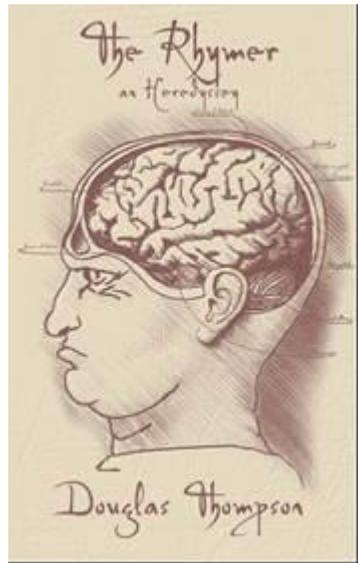
(Review copy kindly donated by Quantum Corsets small press)

THE RHYMER: AN HEREDYSSEY by Douglas Thompson.
Elsewhen Press / 196 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1908168412

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

I am in favour of writers taking risks and trying experiments with their writing. One of the best is Stephen Hall's **THE RAW SHARK TEXTS** in which he plays with words and concepts as well as presentation. It is a delightful book. It is also good that there are publishers that are willing to take the risk and publish experimental work. Douglas Thompson's **THE RHYMER** is an experimental work.

There is a folk tale of a Thomas Learmont in the thirteenth century who was taken away by the Queen of the Fairies. Though he stayed in her realm for seven years, no time has passed in the real world. When he returns, he is given the gift of prophecy but can only deliver his predictions in rhyme. This is the story that forms the basis of this novel and many of the elements that are featured in ballads written about Thomas's adventures are woven into this text. The cover, and the incidental images at the start



of each section make it clear that the narrator's journey is a mental one with the trappings of reality.

The novel opens with the narrator, having travelled on foot for some time, finding a deer on the road that has been recently killed by a car. He carries into the centre of the next town along the road and lays it at the foot of a war memorial. In a nearby pub he meets Weasel, the first of characters that recur in various sections. Weasel calls the narrator Nadith and says he has a brother, Zenir, a successful artist who passed through the town a few weeks ago. Thus, begins the narrator's journey as he attempts to catch up with his brother, only to find him moving ahead of him each time he thinks they are about to meet. In each place, their names, appearances and histories are slightly different. Nadith claims to wear a different face in each place he passes through. Only slowly are the clues given as to the true nature of the whole situation, some of which relates to the device he has taped to his chest.

The novel itself has a surreal quality to it and will not be to everyone's taste. My issues are more with the style rather than the concept woven within the text. Dialogue is produced only as italics and without the accepted punctuation. The result is long paragraphs and pages exhibiting the denseness of a text book. It is an uninviting format. In keeping with the theme of Thomas the Rhymer, there are a lot of rhymes within the text. This is not poetry – far from it – but at times the technique becomes overwhelming and annoying. I would have preferred it if the style had been kept for the narrator's speech and that of other characters to have been contrastingly normal. The plethora of, often nonsensical, rhymes gets in the way of the story and inhibits character development.

The structure of the novel itself is problematical. While some of the effects, and the understanding the reader ultimately has of the shape and reason for the pattern of Thompson's story, there are opportunities missed. The illustrations indicate a journey through the various cognitive and reflexive parts of the brain, something that would be difficult to put in the narrative as Nadith is unaware of the structure. He visits regions known as Suburbia, Industria, Oceania, Sylvia, and Urbis in turn though the diagrams don't have the regions next to each other as he passes across the borders. The parts of the

brain have different functions and although there are differences in the landscapes, it would have been nice to have these correlating with those of the brain. If the author intended there to be a relationship, it is not obvious to the reader.

While there will be readers who appreciate this book more than I do, I still applaud Thompson for trying something new, and the publisher for taking a chance with it. PM

(Review copy kindly donated at Novacon 2016)

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 goodwindcd@yahoo.com

NOTE: Waterstones Birmingham have kindly agreed to a 50% discount on any of their events for Brum Group members. Just tell them you are a member when booking your place.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: AN EVENING OF SF, 10th March, Birmingham. Three local authors discuss SF with **James Brogden, Ren Warom** and **Stephen Aryan**. Waterstones 6:30 pm. Free but booking required at 0121 631 4353, or call instore.

SUPERHEROES AT THE SYMPHONY, 12th March, Birmingham. A selection of superhero-themed movie music. Symphony Hall. 3 pm. £18 - £45 plus transaction fee. Book at Town Hall/Symphony Hall Box Office (0121 780 4949) or www.thsh.co.uk

ARTS & SCIENCE FESTIVAL, 13th - 19th March, Birmingham. Birmingham University - Week of concerts, lectures, exhibitions. Details at www.birmingham.ac.uk/events/arts-and-science/

AN EVENING WITH ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI, 17th March, Birmingham. Gemmell Award winner and author of *The Witcher* series will be discussing his new novel, **LADY OF THE LAKE**. Waterstones 6 pm. Free but booking required at 0121 631 4353, or call instore. Very few tickets left.

JULES VERNE season, 18th – 26th March, Birmingham. Season of films based on Jules Verne stories including 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (18th), JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH (19th), MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (25th) and AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS (26th). Price £8. www.macbirmingham.co.uk or 0121 446 3232.

DON THOMAS astronaut visit, 25th March, Leicester. At Leicester Space Centre with NASA astronaut Don Thomas. Prices from £10 (space centre admission extra) to £56 with dinner. Details at www.spacecentre.co.uk/

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON, 3rd April, London. Kim Stanley Robinson in conversation with Francis Spufford and Adam Roberts. 7pm. Waterstones Piccadilly (203/206 Piccadilly, W1J 9HD) £8 redeemable against author titles. Book at www.waterstones.com/ or 0207 851 2400.

DAVID BRIN signing, 11th April, London. David Brin will be signing CHASING SHADOWS: VISIONS OF OUR TRANSPARENT WORLD. 6 to 7pm. Forbidden Planet, London Megastore, 179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR

CONVENTIONS and EXHIBITIONS

(Thanks to Dave Lally for information on 2017 London exhibits)

ROBOTS: 500 years of Humanoid Robots, 8th February – 3rd September. Major exhibition at the Science Museum, London. £15 at www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/

SCI-FI WEEKENDER, 30th March – 2nd April, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales. Commercial multi-media convention. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See www.scifiweekender.com

INNOMINATE (EASTERCON), 14th – 17th April, Birmingham. Guests of Honour are Pat Cadigan, Judith Clute and Colin Harris.

At the Hilton Metropole, NEC, Birmingham. Membership £70 at www.eastercon2017.uk/home

INTO THE UNKNOWN: A JOURNEY THROUGH SCIENCE FICTION, 2nd June - 1st September, London. Major exhibition at the Barbican Centre. Includes original manuscripts by Jules Verne and others, music, film and art. Details at www.barbican.org.uk/

VISIONS OF SPACE 2, 10th -24th June, Wells. Exhibition of SF art by British Artists including **David A Hardy**, our September guest **Jackie E Burns** and Mat Irvine (BBC Special effects) etc including illustrated talks at Wells & Mendip Museum, 8 Cathedral Green, Wells, Somerset, BA5 2UE. 10am - 5pm. Free entrance (closed Sundays). Info: www.wellsastronomers.org.uk

EDGE-LIT 6, 15th July, Derby. Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guests of Honour Joanne Harris, Stephen Baxter, Peter Newman and Jeff Noon. Tickets £30 at www.derbyquad.co.uk/film/edge-lit-6.aspx

NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 4th - 6th August, London. Multi-media con with strong literature strand. Tickets £99 at <https://nineworlds.co.uk/>

SFW IN THE CITY, 7th - 8th October, Sheffield. Sci-Fi Weekender spin-off multi-media convention. O2 Academy. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. www.sfwinthecity.com/

BRISTOLCON, 28th October, Bristol. Guests of Honour Jonathan Howard and Jen Williams. Doubletree Hotel. £20. Details at www.bristolcon.org

NOVACON 47, 10th - 12th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour is Adrian Tchaikovsky. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £48. Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

April 7th - SF writer **Dave Hutchinson**
May 12th - SF/Fantasy writer **Adrian Tchaikovsky**
June 9th - SF/Fantasy writer **Aliette de Bodard**
July 14th - literary agent **John Jarrold**
August 11th - **Summer Social**
September 8th - astronomical artist **Jackie Burns**
October 13th - **Andy Sawyer**, from the SF Foundation
November 3rd - SF author **Peter F Hamilton**
December 1st - Christmas social (date subject to change)

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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. Details of how to join/pay can be obtained at a meeting or by email to bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk