

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

AUGUST 2013

ISSUE 503

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## **SUMMER SOCIAL MEAL 9TH AUGUST**

August is the Summer Social meal and there is no meeting at the Briar Rose. This year there is a change of venue to The Bull in Price Street, a few minutes' walk from the City centre, a small old traditional pub with a separate dining area with good beer as well as good food. The address is 1

Price Street, Birmingham B4 6JU and the time is 7:30 for 8:00 pm. It is only a short walk from the City Centre.

NB This month's newsletter was printed a week earlier due to holiday commitments.

September 13th - there will be a talk and video presentation about WORLDCON 2014 by ALICE LAWSON (Chair) and JAMES BACON (Head of Programme).

## MEMBERS' NEWS

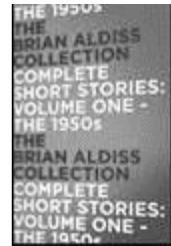
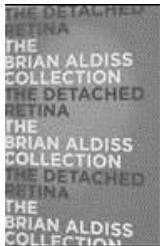


**Stan Nicholls** is to publish a new collection of short stories **WAKE ME TO SHAKE ME**. The publisher is Newcon Press. The book will be launched at World Fantasy Con in Brighton in late October.

**Stan Nicholls** and **Anne Gay** will also be Guests of Honour at Andromeda One (the one day SF convention at the Custard Factory on 21st September).

The Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists (ASFA) has announced this year's nominees for the Chesley Awards. The awards will be presented at LoneStarCon 3, the 71st Worldcon, in San Antonio, Texas the weekend of August 29th - September 2nd. **Dave Hardy** has been nominated for Lifetime Artistic Achievement.

The Friday Project continue to publish the back catalogue of our President, **Brian Aldiss OBE**. In the next month there will be five paperbacks published.



**CRETAN TEAT** Friday Project / 400 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482214. Release date August 22nd

**THE DETACHED RETINA** Friday Project / 350 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482306 Release date August 29th

**THIS WORLD AND NEARER ONES** Friday Project / 200 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482344 Release date August 29th

**PALE SHADOW OF SCIENCE** Friday Project / 200 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482320 Release date August 29th

**THE COMPLETE SHORT STORIES VOL.1 - THE 1950'S** Friday Project / 200 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007482085 Release date September 12th

## NEWS IN BRIEF ....

.... **Mel Smith** died on July 19th after a heart attack. He was most known for his work on *Alas Smith and Jones* and *Not the Nine O'Clock News*. His genre appearances include **THE WOLVES OF WILLOUGHBY CHASE** and the albino in **THE PRINCESS BRIDE** .... Art director **Leonard P. Leone, Sr.** has died. He was art director for Bantam Books from 1955 through 1984 .... **THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY**

**OF THE YEAR** series of anthologies edited by Jonathan Strahan will now be published by **Solaris** .... The **David Gemmell Awards** for Fantasy will be presented at the World Fantasy Convention in October (rather than the usual June). The Longlist is now available at the David Gemmell Awards website (<http://gemmellaward.ning.com>) and voting for the Shortlist is now open until the end of September .... An asteroid has been named after **Iain Banks**. Asteroid Iainbanks resides in the Main Asteroid Belt of the Sol system; with a size of 6.1 km (3.8 miles), it takes 3.94 years to complete a revolution around the Sun .... There has been a lot of controversy in the USA regarding sexism in the SF genre. The **Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA)** were criticized over the cover of its *Bulletin* magazine which featured a woman in a chainmail bikini and claims that Barbie is a good role model as “she maintained her quiet dignity the way a woman should”. There was a storm of protest online and some authors withdrew their membership. The *Bulletin's* editor, Jean Rabe has resigned and John Scalzi (SFWA president) has apologized to members. In a related development, **James Frenkel** has resigned as an editor at Tor Books USA amidst claims of alleged sexual harassment of women at conventions .... Harper Voyager are to publish a new children's trilogy by **Joe Abercrombie** (author of graphic and often violent fantasy) .... The city of Providence has renamed the intersection of Prospect and Angell Streets “**H. P. Lovecraft Square**” in honor of the local author who created the *Cthulhu* mythos. Lovecraft lived on Angell Street, as well as on Prospect Street, for a time. The square is located one block away from his home on Prospect .... Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon has confirmed that the engines his team discovered on the ocean floor in March are those which launched **Apollo 11** to the Moon in 1969. Serial numbers have been found which clearly establish the identity of the engines .... Astronomer Mark Showalter has discovered a fourteenth **moon of Neptune** while examining old imagery from the Hubble Space Telescope. The new moon (S/2004 N 1) is believed to be twelve miles in diameter and orbiting Neptune at a distance of 65,400 miles. This is the sixth moon Showalter has been involved in discovering, including two recently named Plutonian moons, Styx and Kerberos .... British astronomers have formed **The UK SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Research Network** to establish a coordinated search for alien life. One of the new approaches is to use the same method (transit across a star) successfully used to detect large exo-planets to look for large orbiting structures built by advanced civilizations .... Two US congresswomen have called for a **National Historic Park on the Moon** to protect the moon landing sites from future space tourists or lunar developers.

## ***NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES***

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

***PERCY JACKSON: SEA OF MONSTERS*** - Release date August 7th. Fantasy. Modern day young son of Poseidon searches for the Golden Fleece

***THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS: CITY OF BONES*** - Release date August 21st. Young Adult Fantasy. Girl discovers her half-angel, demon-hunting heritage.

***JURASSIC PARK 3D*** - Release date August 23rd. Original film now re-formatted as 3D for 20th anniversary re-issue.

***ABOUT TIME*** - Release date September 6th. Fantasy romantic comedy by Richard Curtis. Tim uses his time-travelling ability to try for a girlfriend but things do not go smoothly.

***RIDDICK*** - Release date September 6th. SF. Ex-convict, Riddick battles to save his home planet from destruction.

## FORTHCOMING BOOKS

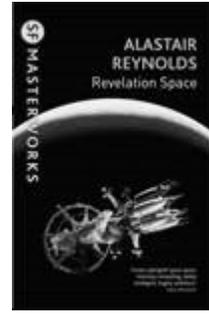
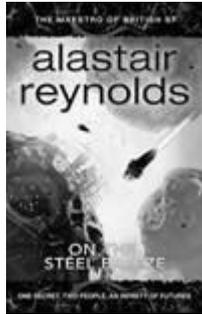
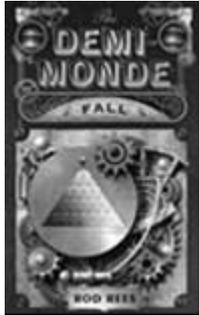


**WAR MASTER'S GATE** (*Shadows of the Apt 9*) by **Adrian Tchaikovsky** / Tor / 736 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0230757011 / August 1st Fantasy. The War Master defends Collegium City from the invading Wasp Empire.

**EARTH STAR** (*Earth Girl sequel*) by **Janet Edwards** / Harper Voyager / 400 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007443505 / August 15th SF. Earth is threatened by alien contact and Earth girl Jarra's specialist knowledge is crucial to the conflict.

**HEAVEN'S FALL** (*Book 3 in Trilogy*) by **David S Goyer & Michael Cassutt** / Tor / 448 pgs / £17.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0230757042 / August 15th SF. Alien Reivers control Earth and salvation depends on human rebels infiltrating a Reiver fortress.

**DRAGONWRITER** by **Todd McCaffrey** / Smart Pop / 288 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1937856830 / August 22nd Tribute to Anne McCaffrey by various authors including Elizabeth Moon, David Brin and Hugo award-winning artist, Michael Whelan



**THE DEMI-MONDE: FALL** (*Book 4*) by **Rod Rees** / Jo Fletcher Books / 560 pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1849165082 / August 29th The warlike Grigori are close to escaping their virtual reality prison into the real world.

**ON THE STEEL BREEZE** (*Poseidon's Children 2*) by **Alastair Reynolds** / Gollancz / 488 pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0575090453 / September 12th SF. One thousand years in the future, mankind explores beyond the Solar System using huge generation ships.

**MARAUDER** (*Shoal 4*) by **Gary Gibson** / Tor / 384 pgs / £17.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0230748903 / September 12th SF. The "Wanderer" entity holds knowledge to save human worlds but it is far from benign.

**REVELATION SPACE** (*SF Masterworks*) by **Alastair Reynolds** / Gollancz / 608 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575129061 / September 12th SF. Something wiped out the Amarantin civilisation 900 thousand years ago and the danger now threatens the human colonies.



# BOOK REVIEWS

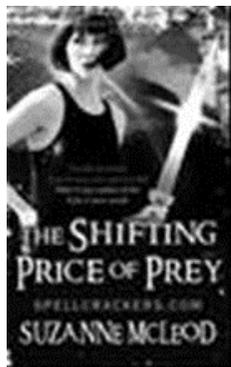


(REVIEWERS please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at [goodwincd@yahoo.com](mailto:goodwincd@yahoo.com) Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting).

***THE SHIFTING PRICE OF PREY* by Suzanne McLeod**

**Gollancz / 544 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575098404**

**Reviewer: Theresa Derwin**



The latest *Spellcrackers.com* novel, **THE SHIFTING PRICE OF PREY** finds half vamp half fae Gen Taylor dealing with all sorts of supernatural mayhem in London as she tries to manage the company Spellcrackers. And you can't argue with a start like this; "The garden fairy was as desiccated as a dead frog . . ." From here you know what you're getting; funny, engaging Urban Fantasy that plays with the tropes.

At this point SF fans may turn away, because our main protagonist Gen, whose maternal grandmother is the Sidhe Queen, 'sees' magic in the ether/air and can 'crack' or absorb spells to counteract the intention. Gen is investigating the murder of grade fairies, as their parts are the equivalent of magical Viagra. Gen soon becomes involved in a case looking for the wife and child of a visiting diplomat whilst also trying to find a way of ending an infertility curse affecting all of the fae. All through this she is trying to earn a living, not worry about her ex Finn who disappeared and keep the business running.

There are a whole host of interesting characters including the kelpie Tavish and Mr Lampy, the gnome who is Gen's new client, and a thoroughly dislikeable character. It is fairly easy to pick up on any action from the preceding books without worrying or reading the first few books. Ripe with Greek mythology and fantasy lore, this is, pardon the pun, a cracker of a fantasy novel with a strong female 'lead'. Although she does miss her ex and also has feelings for her vamp blood master Malik, she is not defined by romantic relationships. And the cases she gets involved in are hugely entertaining; from the Magic Mirror in Harrod's dressing rooms convincing punters to get plastic surgery to the prankster in Leicester Square doing a 'Harry Potter' and bringing film posters to life, it's all very lively. McLeod also presents a realistic multi-cultural London.

This novel is very reminiscent of the work of Kim Harrison or early Laurell K Hamilton before sex became the dominant feature. This is a great book and I look forward to the promise of the next instalment. TD

***THEATRE OF THE GODS* by M. Suddain**

**Random House / 622 pgs / £14.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-0224097062**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

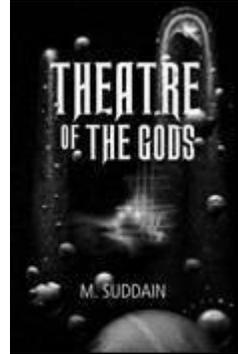
This strange volume purports to come from Blacklist Publishing, an organisation dedicated to "the printing of lost or banished books: the Forbidden, the Forgotten, the Condemned": an organisation moreover which has nothing at all to do with Random House whatsoever. Blacklist Publishing has its own website which seems an impressively professional affair giving information as to this and other, forthcoming, publications together with brief details of their writers. The site has, in fact, been created by M. Suddain, the present author, and is presumably aimed at lending an illusion of substance to this product of his imagination. One

can only guess that whether any of these further books ever appear is dependent on whether this one is a success and whether he is willing and able to write them.

**THEATRE OF THE GODS** is obviously set in the unimaginably far future, or maybe in a different reality altogether. It begins with a confusing collection of seemingly disparate and disconnected descriptions, but gradually a narrative emerges. Rambling, disjointed and at times verging on the incoherent, it is supposedly the story of M. Francisco Fabrigas, philosopher, heretical physicist and perhaps the greatest human explorer of all ages. He claims to have visited a different universe and returned and, having escaped execution for his heretical claims, he embarks on a further voyage of inter-dimensional exploration. He is accompanied by a teenage captain, a brave deaf boy, a cunning blind girl and a sultry botanist. Together they undergo a series of adventures, each more unbelievable than the last, all the while pursued by a mysterious telepathic assassin and the homicidal Pope of the Universe. Having somehow survived all dangers, he eventually returns home to a welcome exile while the others go their separate ways.

In fact, there is more here than the story of Fabrigas alone, as what happens to some of the other characters is almost as important. Some of them find their problems resolved and it becomes apparent that the whole story might have been about something else entirely. Or perhaps not.

On the whole **THEATRE OF THE GODS** can best be described as a phantasmagoria. Matching its curious and imaginary origin, its complex and fantastical contents transcend belief and are at times barely comprehensible. It can only be thought of as having a limited audience - a reader who likes it will like it very much but those of a more practical or down-to-earth mindset may well find little to admire.



*MJ*

**THRONE OF THE CRESCENT MOON** by Saladin Ahmed  
Gollancz / 274 pgs / £12.99 enlarged paperback / ISBN: 978-0575132924  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



This book has been nominated for a Hugo award, so there must be a lot of people out there who like it. It is an enjoyable romp and for a debut novel it is competently written. It has some idiosyncrasies that give it a different twist on the average fantasy format. Three of the main characters are elderly, reaching the ends of their adventuring lives. Adoulla Makhslood is the last of the ghul-hunters. Ghuls are magical constructs similar to golems conjured out of inanimate material for nefarious reasons. His friends are Litaz and Dawoud. Litaz is an alchemist, Dawoud, her husband, is a scholar and a mage. They have worked together in the past. To add youth to the mix, there is Raseed, a warrior-trained dervish and Zamia a shape-changing girl from the desert tribes.

When the niece of the woman Adoulla has loved for twenty years is killed by water ghuls, he promises to investigate. From the opponents he encounters, he deduces that there is a very powerful but evil sorcerer determined to destroy his city and take over the known world. With an unlikely ally in the person of a revolutionary aiming to lead a people's uprising against the despotic Khalif, Adoulla and his friends have to find a way to thwart the evil.

Most of the characters and the social structure of the part of this fantasy world that we have been introduced to have a recognisably Arabic flavour. This is refreshing since most fantasies have an Anglo-centric slant but if this aspect was stripped away, the result would be that of a largely traditional format. This is a world where magic works and monsters lurk in the shadows. There are the heroes who have to solve the riddles and overcome the obstacles to save the day. The villain is totally evil with no redeeming features and seems to have no motive other than total destruction. It is not a narrative where subtlety reigns. These though are all symptoms of the inexperienced writer as is the lack of depth in both the descriptions and the action sequences. Everything happens a little too fast and although Ahmed tries to give depth to his main characters, and to differentiate them by their attitudes and philosophies it doesn't go far enough.

On the whole this is a good effort but I would hope that the next novel will push the quality of style, plot and characterisation to a higher level. PM

## **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](mailto:goodwincd@yahoo.com)*

**Magical Books - From the Middle Ages to Middle-earth, 23rd May - 27th October, Oxford** Exhibition at the Bodleian Library (Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BG) featuring original artwork and manuscripts from JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis, Alan Garner, Susan Cooper and Philip Pullman. Admission Free [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/whats-on/](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/whats-on/) (Tel: 01865 287400)

**Writing Fantasy Fiction, 17th August, Sarehole Mill** From 12.30 - 4pm "In a setting which inspired Tolkien, we will look at the importance of world building, the fine line between genre expectation and cliché, and how fantasy fiction relates to and comments on the real world. With guest speaker Stan Nicholls, award winning, million-selling author of the *Orcs* series." Cost £25 plus booking fee. [www.eventbrite.com/event/5617786952](http://www.eventbrite.com/event/5617786952)

**Neil Gaiman signing, 22nd August, Birmingham** Neil Gaiman will be signing copies of his new novel THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE at Waterstones New Street from 11 - 1pm. No booking possible - time limited so arrive early to avoid disappointment. If you are unable to attend there will be a very limited availability to reserve a signed copy. Phone 0121 631 4333

## **CONVENTIONS**

**NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 9th - 11th August, Heathrow.** New fan run "multi-themed mega convention". Guests include Jaime Fenn, Ben Aaronovitch, Charles Stross, Stan Nicholls and Anne Gay. Tickets £85 <http://nineworlds.co.uk/>

**ANDROMEDA ONE, 21st September, Birmingham.** One day SF, Fantasy and Horror convention at the Custard Factory, 11am-10pm. Guests of Honour included Paul Cornell, Jaime Fenn, Stan Nicholls and Anne Gay. Tickets £25 until 9th August. BSFG members can get £5 discount Tickets are £25 each with a £5 discount for BSFG members who email Theresa Derwin at the address below (use the "contact me page and tab" to send email) Details at <http://terror-tree.co.uk/andromeda-one/> Payment by cheque or paypal.

**FESTIVAL OF FANTASTIC FILMS, 20th - 22nd September, Manchester.** Held at the Manchester Conference Centre, a long-running SF, Fantasy and Horror film convention. Guests include Michael Armstrong (writer/director), Madeleine Smith (actress) and Shane Rimmer (actor). £70 for full weekend. Day memberships available. Registration form and details at <http://fantastic-films.com/festival/>

**WORLD FANTASY CON, 31st October - 3rd November, Brighton.** Guests of Honour include Alan Lee, Brian Aldiss and Tessa Farmer with China Mieville as Master of Ceremonies. Numbers are limited so book early. Attending membership £125 at <http://wfc2013.org/howtojoin01.html>

**NOVACON 43, 8th - 10th November 2013, Nottingham.** Guest Of Honour: Jo Walton. Membership is £45. See [www.novacon.org.uk](http://www.novacon.org.uk) for details

**E-M CON (EAST MIDLANDS CON), 16th March 2014, Nottingham.** First year of one day mixed media convention. Guests to date include Virginia Hey (Farscape), Craig Charles (Red Dwarf) and Sam Stone (horror/fantasy writer). Tickets £8.50/£12 (early bird). Details at [www.em-con.co.uk/](http://www.em-con.co.uk/)

**LONCON 3 (WORLDCON 72), 14th - 18th August 2014, London.** Held at ExCel exhibition centre. Guests of Honour include Chris Foss, and Robin Hobb. £95 Adult membership. See [www.loncon3.org](http://www.loncon3.org)

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

September 13th - Loncon 3 (Worldcon 2014) chair **ALICE LAWSON**

October 11th - BSFG member and author **JANET EDWARDS**

November 1st - TBA

December 6th - **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL** - Skittles and buffet

January 10th - Annual **AGM** and Book Auction

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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