

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JANUARY 2012

ISSUE 484

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

COMMITTEE: **VERNON BROWN (CHAIRMAN); PAT BROWN (TREASURER);**  
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## ANNE McCAFFREY 1926-2011

The news of the sad death of Anne McCaffrey came on the same day as the printed December newsletter was returned from the printer. I managed to get a slip of paper inserted in the newsletter informing you – unfortunately there was not time to prepare and write a full obituary. Obituaries have now appeared elsewhere, of course, and no doubt you will have seen several.

Anne was a good friend of the Brum Group having spoken to us on several occasions over the years. I first met Anne when she was Guest of Honour at Eastercon 22 in 1971, the Eastercon organised by Peter Weston, Vernon Brown, Bob Rickard and myself. We got on well right from the start. She came to Andromeda many times for signing sessions and as was usual at those events, I took the author out for lunch following the signing session so I was fortunate to meet and talk to her at length. She was always full of energy and was always cheerful. I will miss her. *RGP*

## **ANNE McCaffrey R.I.P.** **by John Meaney**

Anne McCaffrey was the finest, most accomplished and brightest human being I ever met, or could meet in any universe. She had the biggest heart of all, touching and helping so many people.

My first memory of Anne: in the elegant bar-with-indoor-swimming-pool of the Novacon hotel in '78, a charismatic, silver-haired vision in a deep-turquoise gown strode into sight; and I asked the nearest person: "Is that Anne McCaffrey?"

After hearing yes, I said: "I have to meet her."

By two o'clock in the morning, it was just the two of us in the bar, and I was captivated by her warmth and intellect; and my life was altered forever. Her final gift to me came floating across the decades, when I was guest of honour at Novacon ten days before her death. Our mutual friend Rog Peyton related something Anne told him that weekend in 1978: a message I will carry always.

To visit Dragonhold (both the second and third incarnations) was to experience a near-mystical air of peacefulness permeating a busy hold filled with people, horses, cats and love.

And books, of course.

My debt to Anne is surpassed only by my love and admiration. She touched so many hearts because she employed emotion in her stories; and she accomplished that because she felt for other people: sympathy and empathy beyond imagining.

Her story "The Ship Who Sang" was a eulogy to her father. She could never read it without crying.

Neither, now, can I.

Bless you and thank you, Anne.

\* \* \* \*

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and BOOK AUCTION

A Happy New Year to all our members from the committee. We hope that you enjoyed your Christmas and that the New Year will be a good one. The Christmas Social returned to its success of previous years after the 2010 disaster caused by the bad weather.

January is traditionally the time for the Annual General Meeting usually followed by the Book Auction.

Our Annual General Meeting is a legal necessity. It is the time for a new committee to be elected and is also the time for you to voice your views on the Group. Full details of committee member requirements were included in the December newsletter so we trust you've all had time to peruse at length and decide which of the committee posts you'd love to stand for.

All the current committee are standing for re-election with the exception of Theresa who has decided to stand down. So the post of Secretary needs to be filled. You *\*must\** be a member of the Group and ideally should have been a member for at least 12 months. And, of course, you can stand against any of the current committee should you so wish. We *\*need\** to get some kind of changeover in the committee each year, otherwise the Group could suffer. This year we will have at least one change in the committee which is always a good thing - it prevents ideas stagnating. **SO VOLUNTEER NOW!**

The Agenda for the AGM together with the Constitution is included in this mailing. **PLEASE BRING IT WITH YOU TO THE MEETING.**

The AGM is usually completed very quickly and we can get on with the main event of the evening – **the Auction**. Once again, I will try to empty your wallets/purses with as little pain as possible. But we do need items to sell so please donate. Other members *\*need\** the items you've finished with. They are not aware of that yet but it will be my job to 'persuade' them.

All the proceeds go to help the running of the Brum Group – without the money raised from auctions we'd most likely have to increase the membership fees. So please bring a few items with you – books, magazines, fanzines, artwork, posters, videos, DVDs, CDs, etc. *RGP*

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

**February 10th - the QUIZ with the Birmingham University SF Society. A pub-style quiz with prizes for the winners.**

*The doors open at 7.30pm and the meeting will 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 this meeting is free. Non-members are not eligible to vote on any motions in the AGM.*

## **RECOMMENDED SF BOOKS – Rog Peyton**

Thanks to William for spotting the error (not deliberate!) in my Top 100 SF Books. There were only 99! Yes, I listed one book twice – Frank Herbert’s DRAGON IN THE SEA. What got missed? David Gerrold’s WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE which puts it back to the correct 100. And then I remembered Wilson Tucker’s wonderful YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN. How could I have forgotten that? Way up there in the top half of the 100. So now it’s 101. Sorry! Recommended fantasy will appear next month as I have no room in this newsletter.

## **...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 to me at rog.peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com

**An apology from Dave Hardy** for an error in a review last time: “The name of the detective in THE MECHANICAL MESSIAH etc. is not, as I wrote in my review, Cameron Brown but Cameron Bell. An easy mistake for me, as the only Cameron I’ve ever known is Cameron Brown of AAPPL, who published my books HARDYWARE and FUTURES. . . Sorry! (But Cam would be amused!)”

## **NEWS IN BRIEF . . .**

.... Author **Thomas J Bassler** (b.1932), who wrote science fiction as **T J Bass** died on December 13. Bass’s two novels, HALF PAST HUMAN and THE GODWHALE were both nominated for the Nebula Award. In addition, Bass published a handful of short stories .... Author **Russell Hoban** (b.1925) died on December 13. Hoban’s novel RIDDLEY WALKER won the John W. Campbell Jr. Award and the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Award, it was also nominated for the Nebula Award. His novels covered a range of genres, including SF, historical fiction, magic realism, and fantasy .... Artist **Darrell K. Sweet** (1934) died on December 5. Sweet was scheduled to be the artist guest of honour at LoneStarCon 3, the 2013 Worldcon and had been honoured as the artist guest of honour at Tuckercon, the 2007 NASFiC, in St. Louis and at the 2010 World Fantasy Con. Sweet’s art appeared on numerous book covers over the years and was known for having an extremely high sell through rate .... Comic author **Joe Simon** (b.1913) died on December 14. Simon co-created Captain America along with **Jack Kirby**. The two men created numerous characters in the 1940s and helped pioneer both the romance and horror comics fields. Simon was inducted into the Will Eisner Comic Book Hall of Fame in 1999 .... Comic artist **Jerry Robinson** (b.1922) died on December 7. Robinson is best known for co-creating

*Batman* characters Robin, the boy wonder, and the Joker. Robinson also worked on the creation of Alfred and Two-Face .... Director **Ken Russell** (b.1927) died on November 27. Russell directed the films *ALTERED STATES*, *THE LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM*, *GOTHIC* and the *TOMMY* .... Irish fan **John Berry** died on November 25, eighteen months after undergoing treatment for cancer. Berry entered organized fandom in 1954 and over the years, he was involved in British club fandom and published several different fanzines. In 1959 he was the fan Guest of Honour at Detention, the Worldcon in Detroit. The following year, Berry was voted best fan writer in a poll conducted in the fanzine *Skyrack* .... In the summer of 2012 the Center for the Study of Science Fiction (CSSF), in association with the University of Kansas, will launch **James Gunn's** *Ad Astra*, an online resource for authors, scholars and all those who are interested in speculative fiction. The magazine will feature short fiction, poetry, reviews, and scholarly articles. Details from <http://adastra.ku.edu/> .... The Gaylactic Spectrum Award for Best novel, recognizing excellence in speculative fiction with GLBT themes, has been presented. The winner of the Best Novel award is *UNDER THE POPPY* by **Kathe Koja** .... **Christopher J Garcia** and **Steven H Silver** have announced a new fanzine, *Paint, Pen, and Pixel* to showcase the excellent artwork done by fan artists. They are asking for fan artists to send a piece of original, unpublished artwork to be included, along with contact information. The fanzine will be in an electronic format and either horizontal or vertical artwork is welcome. The submission deadline is February 15 with the goal of publishing the fanzine on March 1. For more information, e-mail [paintpenpixel@gmail.com](mailto:paintpenpixel@gmail.com) .... The December 2011 issue of **LOCUS** lists 16 pages(!!!) of forthcoming SF, fantasy & horror books to be published through September 2012. (I have spare copies for sale) .... **Harlan Ellison** has dropped his lawsuit against **Andrew Niccol's** film *IN TIME*. Ellison had previously alleged that *IN TIME* was based on his short story "Repent Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman," and there was an erroneous report that the suit was settled. Ellison has now seen the film and decided to voluntarily dismiss the action. Despite earlier reports, at no time was Ellison promised payment or screen credit on the film .... Two missing episodes of *Doctor Who* have been discovered. The third episode of the **William Hartnell** serial "Galaxy 4" has been found, making it the only known episode of that serial's four episodes to be known to exist. In addition, the second episode of the **Patrick Troughton** serial "The Underwater Menace" has been discovered, meaning that now two of that serial's four episodes are known to exist (the third episode appears on the "Lost in Time" DVD set) .... The website for Christians for a Moral America is calling for people to ban the forthcoming film of *THE HOBBIT*. "Invading your local cinema next winter is a new work of evil *THE HOBBIT*. *THE HOBBIT* follows on from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and seemingly has brought everyone back to 'Middle Earth' from the dead. Peter Jackson has once again stepped up as Satan's Little Helper to direct the two-part film and is once again using witchcraft and wizardry to peddle the film, even though the books had strong Christian undertones (good

vs evil; Christians vs Atheists) but Jackson being the self-proclaimed Atheist he is obviously doesn't want to present this movie in the way it was meant by Tolkien. Let's vote with our wallets and send a big message to Hollywood and Jackson; Christians will NOT tolerate this blatant Anti-Christian bigotry and Atheist propaganda. Our children's minds are filled with enough poison these days from the media without us as parents actively doing the same while filling liberal fat cats' coffers." So do you want to help them? They're so intelligent they're the only ones on the planet that don't know that THE HOBBIT is the prequel to THE LORD OF THE RINGS and not a sequel!

RGP

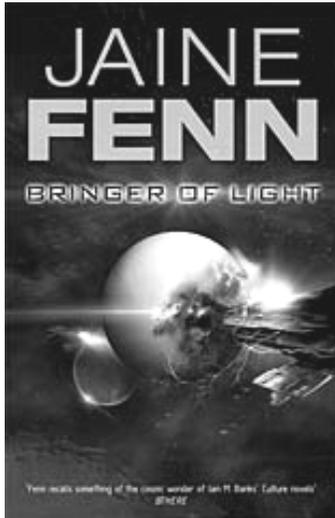
## 📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

(**REVIEWERS** please note:- all reviews should be emailed direct to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com) **Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting.**

### ***BRINGER OF LIGHT* by Jaine Fenn**

**Gollancz / 402pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0575096943 / £12.99 trade paperback / ISBN: 978-0575096950**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**



In this, the fourth book in *The Hidden Empire* sequence, Jaine Fenn begins to bring together strands that she has been developing over the first three volumes. In the first, *PRINCIPLES OF ANGELS*, we were introduced to Taro, a boy existing on the underside of the flying city of Khesh, and Nual, an assassin employed by the same city. Nual is a female Sidhe, a dangerous race that was supposedly destroyed millennia ago. Khesh is operated by a male Sidhe and the sexes are deadly enemies.

Jarek, the third member of the team, spent volume two, *CONSORTS OF HEAVEN*, on the planet of Serenein, a world kept hidden from the rest of the inhabited universe. He has discovered that the female Sidhe are using it to breed boys whose brains are used to power the FTL ships. Jarek, Taro and Nual connect in *GUARDIANS OF PARADISE* and flee in Jarek's ship when the Sidhe send a hit squad to kill her. This novel is pure space opera with plenty of tension and action. *BRINGER OF LIGHT* belongs to the same stable.

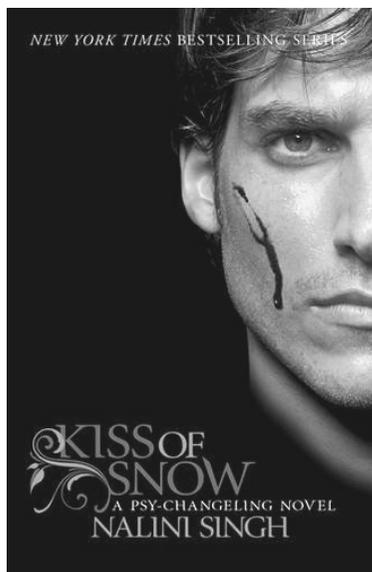
The plan is to persuade the male Sidhe to give them a beacon which they can set up near Serenein. This should connect the planet to the rest of civilisation and effectively bring a halt to the trade in psychically talented boys. Naturally, it isn't as easy as they anticipate especially as Khesh insists on sending an avatar with them to protect the location of the male Sidhe's domain. In the meantime, the people Jarek left running things on Serenein are having their own problems trying to keep the status quo long enough for Jarek to return.

Fenn is very good at action and plotting but she does not spend the time developing the emotional side to her characters. Taro and Nual are lovers and have a mental link but the passion between them is subdued. Readers who have enjoyed the previous novels will like the way the plot is pushed along here. New readers will need to begin with volume one. PM

### ***KISS OF SNOW* by Nalini Singh**

**Gollancz / 415pgs / £12.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0575105676 /  
£7.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-0575100138**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**



KISS OF SNOW and the previous nine books in the *Psy-Changeling* series are set about fifty years in an alternative future. As psi powers developed in the population, it was realised that those with them were likely to go insane or otherwise self-destruct. A condition known as Silence was imposed. No Psi was allowed to have or show any kind of emotion. Intellect was all. Another segment of the population is the Changelings. The wolves and the leopards hold territory in the environs of Los Angeles. Their outlook is extremely sensual, the complete opposite to the Psi. From the start of this series there has been tension between the Psi and the Changelings especially as a handful of Psi have broken Silence and joined the Changelings, rediscovering ways of interacting with others that they had never

experienced before. All these books are romances with a high sexual content, each focusing on different members of the groups.

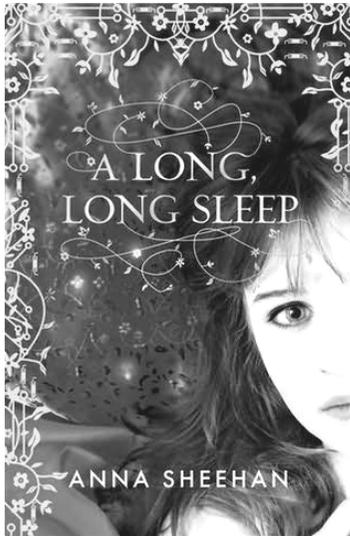
In KISS OF SNOW Hawke, the wolf alpha, is strongly attracted to Sienna, a cardinal X-Psi. This means that she has a very high level of psi powers but that her talent is to channel energy in the form of fire. The problem is that no X-Psi has survived beyond young adulthood as they have immolated themselves,

and anyone in the vicinity. Thus, if Hawke takes Sienna as his mate, he is likely to lose her soon afterwards. The other romantically entwined couple are Lara, the Changeling wolf healer, and Walker, a Psi empath who is also Sienna's uncle. Although most of the novel focuses on the way these two couples sort out their relationships, there is also a bigger picture to consider – an ongoing war between the Psi and the Changelings in which the Psi are the aggressors. More attention needs to be paid to the Psi-Changeling politics if further books in this series are not to become predictable and merely vehicles to describe explicit sex. *PM*

### ***A LONG, LONG SLEEP* by Anna Sheehan**

**Gollancz / 342pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0575104716 /  
£9.99 trade paperback / ISBN: 978-0575104723**

**Reviewed by Dave Corby**



A LONG, LONG SLEEP by Anna Sheehan is, as far as I can tell, the first book by a new author. Based on the evident skill in writing displayed in this novel Sheehan might be worth watching to see what her future output could be like. The books by-line describes an enduring fairytale (Sleeping Beauty) given a new SF twist. This reader remains, perhaps, unconvinced of the SF value in the novel (more on that later), and I expected to point the finger of literary criticism within this review, but did find the story a rather riveting yarn, nonetheless.

Firstly, the writing is extremely approachable, as befits a book aimed at the Young Adult category. Naturally, by ensuring a lightness of touch Sheehan does lose something in terms of depth, but that tends to come with the territory. I found this book an excellent way to refresh my pallet of imagination between other tomes - a sort of literary cheese between the full-bodied reds, as it were.

The basic premise of a young and naive female character thrust by improbable circumstance into a position of power and celebrity, and to whom only the most strangely obscure can threaten, is not new in fantastic writing. The reader is tempted to recall Anne McCaffrey's Lessa, of DRAGONFLIGHT. Usually the basic premise is more Cinderella than Sleeping Beauty though, so this novel feels slightly fresher for that. The problem with this kind of story is that the protagonist is then isolated from common threat, and any antagonism must come from oddly esoteric sources. The book is told in first person, but the reader can

find it hard to identify with a narrator who lives under privilege that most will never experience.

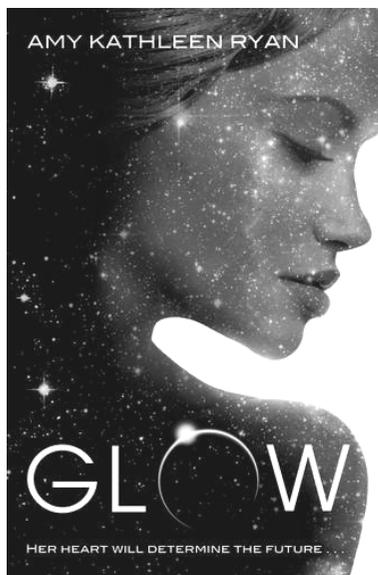
However, the SF approach is relatively unusual; mostly this sort of story is told as straight fantasy. And therein lie the book's strengths – older ideas presented in a more contemporary fashion.

At times the science fiction is distinctly hokey (the apocalypse of humankind brought on by a combination of Bubonic Plague and GM foods, anyone?) but Sheehan's usage of the clichés of near-future SF (for example, net communication) are utilised in an appropriate and thoughtful way, not heavy handed, but with clear application to the story (although her references to nanotechnology are frustratingly ill-explored). Alas, the lack of scientific verisimilitude makes the book feel more like the fairytale than the SF twist.

The book varies by over-usage of character sole-searching between principles in a teenage-angst mode and quite riveting exposition in action sequences, and especially the climax. I suppose that the former is to be expected in a YA book, and some exposition is always necessary to develop the characters, but this reader laments that the balance was not more even.

Overall, this novel feels like a first book; rough in a number of areas, but showing a respectable degree of promise. Despite my numerous criticisms, I find myself having rather enjoyed the book; as if it were more than the sum of its parts. If the writing skill can be applied to more solidly SF ideas then I would be quite interested to read more. But I can, alas, more easily see a (more lucrative?) route for the author in production of angst-ridden fairytale for 'young adults'. I hope for the former.

DC



## ***GLOW* by Amy Kathleen Ryan**

**Macmillan / 385pgs / £7.99  
paperback / ISBN: 978-0330535588  
Reviewed by Theresa Derwin**

Part one in a planned *Sky Chasers* trilogy, *GLOW* is a young adult SF thriller that follows two spaceships, the *Empyrean* and the *New Horizon*, as they travel the stars to New Earth, which they plan to terraform. Waverly and Kieran are two 15-year-old inhabitants of the *Empyrean*, one of the ships on its mission to find New Earth, and are the first children born in space. Now, as fledgling adults, they have found each other and intend to marry. The morning Kieran proposes to Waverly, their 'allies' from the *New Horizon* attack the *Empyrean*,

kidnapping all of the female children. As the adults fight to repair the dying engine, it is only Kieran leading the male children left on board who can save their ship and hunt for the missing girls.

The narrative is split between the two ships as Waverly and the girls of the *Empyrean* are forced into a puritanical life onboard the *New Horizon*. Waverly makes for a strong female character and at least half the novel is written from her point of view as she fights against the new way of life she has been thrown into.

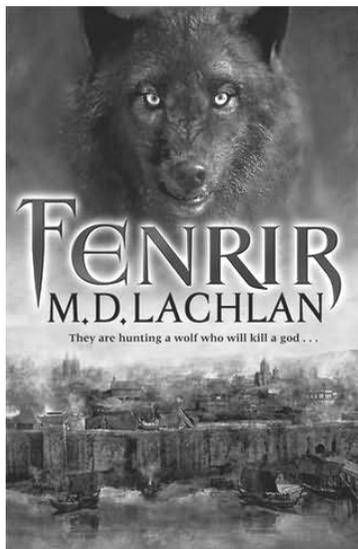
Written in a distinctively YA style, there are adult themes incorporated into the novel such as sexuality, rape and the right to choose. The religious society on *New Horizon* is reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* but some of the religious elements are too overt and a little heavy handed, though this is tempered somewhat by Waverly's point of view.

Overall, this is a decent YA novel despite the blurb and cover coming across as *TWILIGHT* in space. Be assured, it isn't that soppy! TD

### ***FENRIR* by M D Lachlan**

**Gollancz / 523pgs / £18.99 hardcover / ISBN: 978-0575089631 / £12.99 trade paperback / ISBN: 978-0575089648**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan**



The second in a fantasy series (the first was *WOLFSANGEL*), *FENRIR*, takes us into a barbaric period of European history. The clash is between religion and politics. The followers of the Norse pantheon regularly forage southwards in search of the glory of battle and any spoils they can win on the way. Their targets are the Christian communities and the fabled wealth of churches and monasteries.

At the start of *FENRIR*, Paris (then only an island in the river settled by Franks) is under siege. Aelis, sister of the defending lord, has taken refuge in the main church. The blind crippled monk, Jehan, is taken to persuade her to come out as her brother feels her presence would strengthen the resolve of his troops. The siege is not accidental in that the sorcerers, who call themselves *Munin* and *Hugin*, have directed the Northmen to capture or kill her. Also wanting Aelis is *Helgi*, the ruler in *Novgorod*. He has sent a shapechanger to fetch her and paid a merchant to guide him. The question is who will get to Aelis first.

The plot revolves around the replaying of a myth cycle. Aelis, Jehan and Hugin all have to reprise the roles thrust on them in previous lives. Norse gods walk this earth leaving havoc in their wake with deaths that are brutal and callous as well as necessary. Parallels are drawn between Christianity and Norse mythology that might sit uncomfortably with some readers.

Lachlan is the pseudonym of a successful mainstream writer and his plot complexities certainly bear this out. It is a shame that the point of view is sometimes unnecessarily changeable. It would have been useful to have had a greater clue as to when the action actually takes place and this is novel for which a map of Europe of the period would have made the wanderings of the characters easier to follow.

PM

## ***FORTHCOMING EVENTS***

*All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organisers before travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the contact addresses.*

*Any information about forthcoming SF / Fantasy / Horror events are always welcome - please send to me at rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com*

**The Central Library SF and Fantasy Reading Group** meets on Thursdays at 5.45pm to 7pm monthly, in GP5 on the 5th Floor at the Central Library, Chamberlain Square, B3 3HQ. It's a small friendly group meeting to discuss SF & fantasy books. Contact person is Pam Gaffney on (0121) 303 3398. Future books to be discussed to be announced

**OLYMPUS 2012 - The 2012 Eastercon**, 6th - 9th April at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, UK. Guests of Honour: Paul Cornell, George R.R. Martin & Tricia Sullivan. Fan Guests of Honour: Margaret Austin, Martin Easterbrook. Registration is £65. Website is [www.olympus2012.org](http://www.olympus2012.org)

**DISCOVER: A WEEKEND OF SF, FANTASY & HORROR** - 18-20 May at Snibston Discovery Museum, Coalville, Leicestershire. Workshops, panels, talks, etc from many authors. Peter F Hamilton and Graham Masterton are the Guests of Honour. Attendance is £45 plus £2 booking fee. Website is <http://www.discoverfestival.co.uk/>

**TOLKIEN WEEKEND** at Sarehole Mill - May 19-20. Details at <http://middleearthweekend.org.uk/>

**THE EIGHNNNNNNN DISCWORLD CONVENTION** - 24-27 August at the Metropole Hotel, Birmingham. Guest of Honour: Sir Terry Pratchett. Website: <http://www.dwcon.org/>

# NOVA CON 42

## 9-11 TH NOVEMBER 2012

### GUEST OF HONOUR

# JAINE FENN

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

**Feb 10th – the Annual Quiz**

**Mar 9th – Christopher Priest**

**Apr 13th - tba**

**BRUM GROUP NEWS #484** (January 2012) copyright 2012 for Birmingham SF Group. Designed by Rog Peyton (19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL – phone 0121 477 6901 or email rog [dot] peyton [at] btinternet [dot] com). Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the committee or the general membership or, for that matter, the person giving the ‘opinion’. Thanks to all the named contributors in this issue and to William McCabe who sends me reams of news items every month which I sift through for the best/most entertaining items.

**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