

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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DR NICK HAWES

Friday 9th May

This month we welcome Dr Nick Hawes, Senior Lecturer in Intelligent Robotics at the University of Birmingham. His research interests consider the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques to create intelligent, autonomous robots that can work with or for humans.

His talk is entitled **ROBOTS AND HUMANS: WHEN TWO SOCIETIES MEET**. This talk will look at the recent history and potential future of two societies which are destined to become increasingly important in each other's lives: robots and humans. In areas as wide-ranging as care of the elderly to decommissioning

June 13th - SF and fantasy author Stephen Hunt

nuclear power plants, robots may provide solutions. Dr Hawes' research focuses on the problem of integrating multiple different aspects of intelligence in a single artificial system. For example merging computer vision, language understanding and reasoning to create a robot you can talk to.

In his talk he will highlight some of the scientific challenges to be overcome and will illustrate solutions to these problems using live robot and software demonstrations from his own research, videos of other cutting-edge robots from around the world, and even perhaps some audience participation. The talk will conclude by looking to the near future and predictions of where the results presented in the talk will first become visible in our own lives, and how these changes will improve living standards of many in society.

For those of you who are interested, some of the first year level modules he teaches at the University are available online. These are Robot Programming using Lego robots and Introduction to AI, which covers some basic AI topics (see www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~nah/) 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 £3.00 for members and £4 for non-members

AND WHAT DID YOU THINK?

THE LETTER COLUMN OF 'BRUM GROUP NEWS

Anything to say about the Group, meetings or SF in general? Email your opinions or queries to me at goodwincd@yahoo.com

THE 2014 AGM MINUTES – MATTERS ARISING

THE NOVAcon WEEKEND

At this year's AGM a member present asked why Novacon 44 is being held on the third weekend of November, meaning that the BSFG has had to alter its usual second Friday of the month meeting

to the first. Had the con been held on the second weekend as in the past there would have been no clash with the BSFG's meeting.

Because Steve Green, Novacon 44 Chairman, was not present at the AGM the question went unanswered at the time, although he has since emailed her a reply. This article is intended to inform anyone else interested without their having to wait until next year's AGM.

Way back in the late 1960s, when the University of Aston Science Fiction Group was formed there was only one British convention - Eastercon. Having attended, and thoroughly enjoyed, the 1969 "Galactic Fair" and, a little later, a very casually organised one day fantasy con, the ASFG decided to organise a one-off convention at the other end of the year from Eastercon i.e. in November. So the first Novacon was held from noon Saturday 13th to noon Sunday 14th November 1971. Many fans turned up on Friday and left on Monday having voted to make it an annual event so for organisational reasons it was handed over to the newly formed BSFG. With Novacon 3 the con began on the Friday night and has done so ever since. Except for the first one, the first dozen or so Novacons were held over the first weekend of November although later the dates varied.

But as the convention evolved and moved from hotel to hotel and place to place things beyond the convention's control had to be taken into account, one of which is described in the following extract from Steve's reply.

"The major difficulty Novacon currently faces with its timing is its proximity to the various fireworks festivals which employ Martin Hoare and his tech kit. Without him Novacon would face a hefty bill for the hire of replacement equipment, additional insurance costs and possibly the employment of an outside operator. Because the 5th falls on a Wednesday, Martin is going to be otherwise engaged on the 7th and 8th. We therefore chose the following weekend, which was announced at Novacon 43. As I understand it, the BSFG had not booked its 2014 meeting space at this point, nor is this the first time the group has had to shift slightly to accommodate the event. No one raised the matter at the time. In any case we are now contractually committed to these dates."

So while Novacon has always been, within limits, a bit of a moveable feast, nowadays its movements may sometimes be constrained. VB

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

It was suggested at this year's AGM by the membership secretary that she will try emailing renewal notices rather than posting them, as this is quicker, cheaper, and being done more and more by other organisations. There is now also an online option for renewing, rather than sending cheques in the post.

Vicky would like people to note that she is still happy to post letters out to anyone who would prefer to receive their renewals by this method and will also continue to do so for the few members for whom she does not have an email address. This is a pilot change to the system, so please do offer any feedback or comments to Vicky on stock.vicky@yahoo.co.uk. VS

COLOUR PRINTING OF THE NEWSLETTER

Thanks to the excellent efforts of Dave Corby we are now able to have the newsletter printed in colour without any increase in cost. CG

HUGO AWARD NOMINATIONS

The finalists for the Hugo Awards and the John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer were announced on 19th April. The nominees for novel are given below. Full details of all categories are available at the Loncon website <http://loncon3.org/2014hugos.php> Voting for the awards is open to members of Loncon 3.

BEST NOVEL NOMINEES

ANCILLARY JUSTICE by Ann Leckie (Orbit)

NEPTUNE'S BROOD by Charles Stross (Orbit)

PARASITE by Mira Grant (Orbit)

WARBOUND (*Book III of the Grimnoir Chronicles*) by Larry Correia (Baen Books)

The Wheel of Time by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson (Orbit)

1939 RETRO HUGO AWARD NOMINATIONS

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the first Worldcon, this year as part of Loncon3, there will also be a ballot for retrospective Hugo awards for the best work published in 1938 (as there were no Hugo awards at the first Worldcon). The voting rules are the same as for the standard Hugo. The nominees were announced at the same time as this year's Hugo shortlist.

BEST NOVEL NOMINEES

CARSON OF VENUS by Edgar Rice Burroughs (*Argosy*)

GALACTIC PATROL by E E Smith (*Astounding Stories*)

THE LEGION OF TIME by Jack Williamson (*Astounding Science-Fiction*)

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET by C S Lewis (The Bodley Head)

THE SWORD IN THE STONE by T H White (Collins)

BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION AWARDS

The winners of the BSFA Awards were announced at Eastercon in Glasgow.

Best Novel (Tied): ANCILLARY JUSTICE by Ann Leckie (Orbit)

Best Novel (Tied): ACK-ACK MACAQUE by Gareth L Powell (Solaris)

Best Short Fiction: "Spin" by Nina Allan

Best Artwork: Book cover of DREAM LONDON by Joey Hi-fi (Solaris)

Best Non-Fiction: WONDERBOOK by Jeff VanderMeer (Abrams Image)

DAVID GEMMELL AWARD NOMINATIONS - SHORTLIST

The shortlist for the David Gemmell awards for Fantasy were also announced at Eastercon. The awards will be presented at a ceremony on the 13th June at the Magic Circle in London. Voting online closed at the end of April.

THE LEGEND AWARD FOR BEST FANTASY NOVEL

THE DAYLIGHT WAR by Peter V Brett (Harper Collins)

EMPEROR OF THORNS by Mark Lawrence (Harper Collins)

THE REPUBLIC OF THIEVES by Scott Lynch (Gollancz)

A MEMORY OF LIGHT by Robert Jordan & Brandon Sanderson
(Tor)

WAR MASTER'S GATE by Adrian Tchaikovsky (Tor)

THE MORNINGSTAR AWARD FOR BEST FANTASY NEWCOMER

THE GARDEN OF STONES by Mark T Barnes (47 North)

HEADTAKER by David Guymer (Black Library)

PROMISE OF BLOOD by Brian McClellan (Orbit)

THE PATH OF ANGER by Antoine Rouaud (Gollancz)

THE GRIM COMPANY by Luke Scull (Head of Zeus)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Colombian writer **Gabriel Garcia Marquez** has died aged 87. He had been suffering from Alzheimer's. Writing in his native Spanish language, he wrote fantasy characterised as magic realism by the literary world. In 1982 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. His book **ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE** sold over 25 million copies. His other novels included **LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA**, **CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD** and **THE GENERAL IN HIS LABYRINTH**

Editor **Andy Robertson**, who was born in 1955 has died. He was assistant editor at *Interzone* as well as writing reviews and interviews for the magazine. He also published his own stories and edited two anthologies Author **William H Patterson** died on April 21st. He was nominated for a Hugo for his biography **ROBERT HEINLEIN: IN DIALOGUE WITH HIS CENTURY** Vol. 1 (2010). The second volume had been finished and will be published in June

The winner of the Eastbound **TAFF** race is Curt Phillips who will now be attending Loncon 3 Pan Macmillan and the estate of horror writer, James Herbert is to fund an annual prize for horror writing, **The James Herbert Award**. The winning author will receive a cheque for £2000. The award will be open to horror novels written in English and published in the UK in 2014. Further details are available at www.panmacmillan.com/Featured-Pages/Offers/James-Herbert-Award.aspx BSGF member **Janet Edwards** has had her novel **EARTH GIRL** nominated in the USA for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Teens' Top Ten There is

an excellent article by **Juliet McKenna** in the Guardian on the 18th April on the merits of sf and fantasy literature (www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/18/genre-debate-science-fiction-speculative-literary)

CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

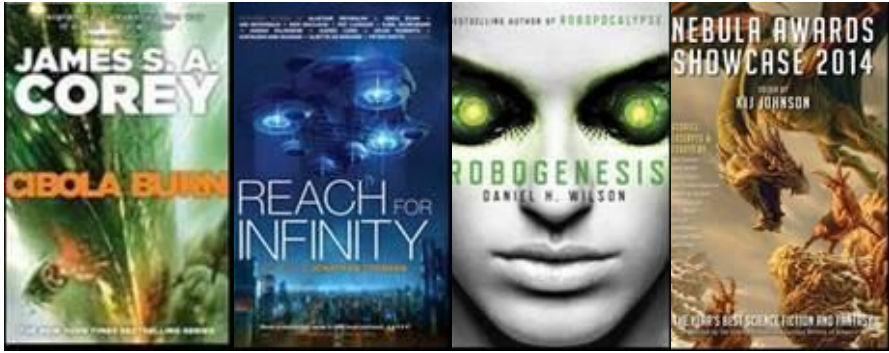


A CASE OF CONSCIENCE (SF Masterworks) by James Blish / Gollancz / 208 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473205437 / May 15th. Hugo award-winning novel in which a priest struggles to reconcile his faith with the alien society he is sent to study.

THIEF'S MAGIC by Trudi Canavan / Orbit / 560 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-0356501109 / May 15th. Fantasy. An archaeology student discovers a sentient book

THE SEVERED STREETS (James Quill 2) by Paul Cornell / Tor / 400 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1447262060 / May 22nd. DI James Quill uses both his detective and psychic skills in pursuit of a serial killer.

SKIN GAME (Dresden Files 15) by Jim Butcher / Orbit / 464 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0356500904 / May 27th. Wizard Harry Dresden must work with his enemy, Nicodemus to steal the Holy Grail.



CIBOLA BURN (Expanses 4) by James S A Corey / Orbit / 592 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0356504162 / June 5th. SF. Using alien interstellar gates, humanity has spread through the galaxy. A dispute between war refugees and corporate business awakens the force which destroyed the original gate builders.

REACH FOR INFINITY edited by Jonathan Strahan / Solaris / 384 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781082027 / June 5th. SF anthology. What happens when humanity explores space?

ROBOGENESIS (Robo 2) by Daniel H Wilson / Doubleday / 384 pgs / £16.28 hardback / ISBN 978-0385537094 / June 10th. SF. Humans try to rebuild after the war with intelligent robots

NEBULA AWARDS SHOWCASE 2014 edited by Kij Johnson / Prometheus Books / 320 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1616149017 / June 13th. SF. Nominated and winning stories from the Nebula Awards.

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

GODZILLA (3D) - Release date May 15th. The giant lizard fights monsters who threaten the existence of humanity.

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST - Release date May 22nd. Wolverine is sent to the past to change history and save humans and mutants.

LEGENDS OF OZ: DOROTHY'S RETURN - Release date May 23rd. Animation. Dorothy returns to OZ to face the villain, the Jester.

MALEFICENT - Release date May 28th. Angelina Jolie stars as the evil fairy, Maleficent from the “Sleeping Beauty” fairy tale.

EDGE OF TOMORROW - Release date May 30th. Tom Cruise stars as a soldier fighting against aliens who becomes trapped in a time loop.

📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

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

PLANESRUNNER (*Everness Book 1*) by Ian McDonald

Jo Fletcher Books / 365 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-1780876672

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.



Deciding whether a book belongs in the Young Adult category isn't as straight forward as it sounds. Despite what parents, publishers and teachers think, youngsters tend to read in a category higher than their targeted age. Just having a protagonist in their late teens doesn't make a book YA. The main difference between YA and adult novels is hormones. Often the main character is just becoming aware of the opposite sex (or occasionally same sex though this is rarer) and this tends to colour their judgment in ways that the romance between adults who have

been through that doesn't. Also most YA novels stick to the point of

view of the protagonist whereas adult novels may have multiple viewpoints.

PLANESRUNNER definitely fulfils the criteria of YA. Up to the point that the novel starts, fourteen year-old Everett Singh's main focus has been physics. He is on his way to meet his father, Tejendra, to attend a lecture together when he sees him snatched from the street. Unfortunately, no-one believes him. Everett, though, is determined to find him.

One of the theories Tejendra has been working with is the idea of multiple universes splitting off from each other every time a choice is made. Some of these will be so similar that differences will be unnoticeable, others will have diverged long enough ago to appear alien. Everett discovers that it is the operatives of one of these other worlds that have kidnapped his father. As an impetuous youth, he determines to rescue his father. To that end, he crosses into this other world. This is a place where everything is run by electricity and that never had a steam age and where oil-based products, including petrol and plastic do not exist. London is ringed by coal-fired power stations generating the necessary power. It is a place where air transport is by airship. Here he meets Sen Sixsmyth, adopted daughter of the owner of the Airship *Everness*. Sen is Everett's age and knows her way around and she is as impulsive as him. She persuades her mother to take Everett on as crew while they try to work out a plan to rescue Tejendra.

For a YA novel to work it has to provide equal enjoyment for adults and teenagers. **PLANESRUNNER** does that. It has the high quality of writing that engages the reader and carries the plot forward at a furious pace. It makes no concession to the age of the reader; after all, the YA target audience is sixteen to eighteen and should be capable of understanding any decent literature. This just happens to have adventure and hormones. Ian McDonald is one of those writers who is capable of charming any reader with his story-telling abilities. This does not disappoint. Only one problem - you have to buy the next volume to find out what happens next. *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 goodwinced@yahoo.com

WOMEN IN SCI FI PANEL, 8th May, London. Featuring six authors discussing the representation of female authors in genre fiction. Participants include Stephanie Saulter, Karen Lord, Naomi Foyle, Jaine Fenn and BSFG member **Janet Edwards**. At Blackwells Bookshop, Charing Cross Road. Time 6: 30 to 7:30 pm. Free entry but booking required. Tel: 0207 2925100. Or <http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk/stores/london-charingcrossroad/events/>

CONVENTIONS

EDGE-LIT 3, 19th July, Derby One day event at the Quad. Guests of Honour Joe Abercrombie and Charles Stross. Other speakers include Jaine Fenn, Janet Edwards and Freda Warrington. £25 from www.derbyquad.co.uk/special-event/edge-lit-3

LONCON 3 (WORLDCON 72), 14th – 18th August, London. Held at ExCel exhibition centre. Guests of Honour include Chris Foss, and Robin Hobb. £125 Adult membership. See www.loncon3.org

SHAMROKCON (EUROCON), 22nd – 24th August, Dublin. Guests include Hugo Award nominated Seanan McGuire, Andrzej Sapkowski (THE WITCHER also now a TV series and game) etc. Price is £35) at www.shamrokon.ie

FANTASYCON, 5th – 7th September, York. Guests of Honour are Kate Elliott, Toby Whithouse and Larry Rostant. Master of Ceremonies is Graham Joyce. Tickets £50 (£35 for British Fantasy Society members). Tickets and details at www.fantasycon2014.org

NOVACON 44, 14th - 16th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour: Kari Sperring and Science Guest: John Gribbin. Cost £45 (subject to review after Easter). Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

June 13th- SF and fantasy author **Stephen Hunt**

July 11th - Urban fantasy author **Sam Stone** and publisher **David Howe**.

August 8th - **Speaker tba**

September 12th - **Chris Morgan**

October 10th - Dr Who fan and lookalike **Richard Ashton**

November 7th - SF and fantasy author **Storm Constantine**

December 5th - **Christmas Social**

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