

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JUNE 2014

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STEPHEN HUNT

Friday 13th June

Stephen Hunt is a fantasy, science fiction and thriller/crime author (as Stephen A Hunt). His early short fiction work was mainly cyberpunk SF, of which the best known was "The Hollow Duellists" which tied with Stephen Baxter as winner of the

ProtoStellar magazine prize in 1992.

His first novel **FOR THE CROWN AND THE DRAGON** was published in 1994. His best known novels to date are probably the *Jackelian* series of novels: **THE COURT OF THE AIR**, **THE**

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

KINGDOM BEYOND THE WAVES, THE RISE OF THE IRON MOON, THE SECRETS OF THE FIRE SEA, JACK CLOUDIE and FROM THE DEEP OF THE DARK. These are set in a nation similar to Victorian England called the Kingdom of the Jackals (hence the series title). The *Jackelian* world features a fantastic far-future Earth where the laws of physics have rendered electricity unreliable and society has rebuilt the world with steam, clockwork, genetic engineering and nano-mechanical systems.

He has just published the first novel in a new fantasy series, *The Far-Called*. The first novel, IN DARK SERVICE concerns two families, whose children are kidnapped by slavers and focuses on the adventures of both the rescue expedition and the enslaved children.

He is also the founder and former editor of online magazine SF Crowsnest (<http://sfcrowsnest.org.uk>). For those who are unaware this publishes news and reviews of SF, Fantasy and Horror books, films and TV shows. Further information can be found at his website <http://stephenhunt.net/> 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

AUGUST MEAL – VERNON BROWN



The committee had hoped to arrange a US speaker (from Loncon 3) for our 8th August meeting but as we have been unable to do so we will be having our usual meal instead. (At the time of going to press, there is still a small chance that we may be able to arrange a midweek meeting if there is sufficient interest - CG).

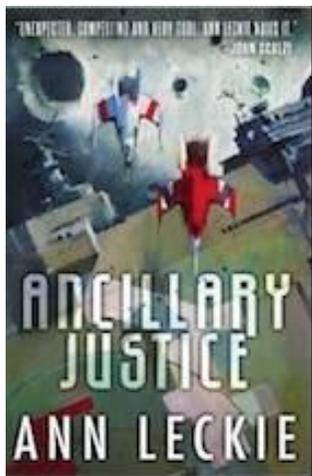
As last year we will be eating at The Bull in Price Street, an excellent venue, 5 or 10 minutes' walk from the Briar Rose. Full details of getting there will be in next month's newsletter but if you intend to come please email me (bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk) as soon as possible with seat numbers required to ensure that you get a place. No deposit required. VB

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 goodwinced@yahoo.com

ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD



ANCILLARY JUSTICE by Ann Leckie (Orbit Books) has won the Arthur C Clarke Award. The result was announced during the Sci-Fi London Film Festival. The award includes a prize of £2014.

The debut novel by the American author has already won the BSFA and Nebula prizes and is nominated for a Hugo in the Best Novel category.

The story is narrated by the former spaceship Justice of Toren. When the spaceship was destroyed, she survives who in the body of the sole surviving crew member, soldier Breq. Used to controlling thousands, the ship now only has one fragile human body available to take revenge against those responsible for her destruction. CG

NEBULA AWARD WINNERS

The Science Fiction Writers of America presented the 50th annual Nebula Awards in San Jose, California on the 18th May. The winners were

Best Novel: ANCILLARY JUSTICE by Ann Leckie

Best Novella: THE WEIGHT OF THE SUNRISE by Vylar Kaftan

Best Novelette: "The Waiting Stars" by Alette de Bodard

Best Short Story: “If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love” by Rachel Swirsky

Andre Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy:
SISTER MINE by Nalo Hopkinson

Ray Bradbury Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation:
GRAVITY written by Alfonso Cuarón and Jonás Cuarón, directed by Alfonso Cuarón

Kevin J. O’Donnell Service to SFWA Award: Michael Armstrong

Damon Knight Grand Master Award: Samuel R. Delany

LOCUS AWARD NOMINATIONS

The Locus Science Fiction Foundation has announced the finalists for the 2014 Locus Awards. The nominees for the SF novel and Fantasy novel categories are given below. Full details of all categories are available at www.locusmag.com/News/2014/05/2014-locus-awards-finalists/

SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

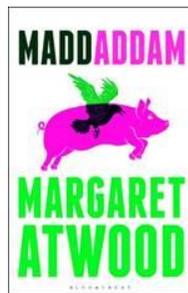
MADDADDAM by Margaret Atwood
(Bloomsbury)

ABADDON’S GATE by James Corey (Orbit)

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS by
Karen Lord (Jo Fletcher Books)

SHAMAN by Kim Stanley Robinson (Orbit)

NEPTUNE’S BROOD by Charles Stross (Orbit)



FANTASY NOVEL

THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE
by Neil Gaiman (Headline Review)

NOS4R2 by Joe Hill (Gollancz)

RIVER OF STARS by Guy Gavriel Kay
(HarperCollins)

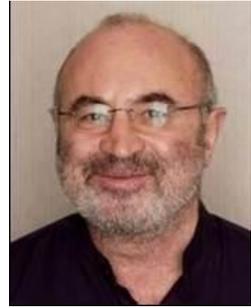
DOCTOR SLEEP by Stephen King (Hodder &
Stoughton)

THE REPUBLIC OF THIEVES by Scott Lynch
(Gollancz)



NEWS IN BRIEF

Actor **Bob Hoskins** died on April 29th from pneumonia aged 71. Some of his most famous mainstream roles were in **THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY** and **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**. In SF/fantasy roles he appeared in **BRAZIL** and as detective Eddie Valiant in **WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?** Other appearances included the films **HOOK**, **SNOW WHITE AND THE HUNTSMAN**,



SUPER MARIO BROS and many more. He retired from acting only in 2012 due to having Parkinson's disease Author **Jay Lake** died on the 1st June at the age of 49, after a battle with cancer since 2008, which he had very openly blogged about online. He had published many collections of short stories, and novels including *The City Imperishable* and *Mainspring Universe* series. He won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in SF in 2004

Author **Mary Stewart** who was born in 1916 has died. She was best known for her Arthurian fantasies, such as **THE CRYSTAL CAVE** and **THE LAST ENCHANTMENT** but also wrote many other novels Swiss artist **H R Giger** who designed the creature in the *Alien* series has died. He also published the books **NECRONOMICON** and **NECRONOMICON II** and his work appeared in magazines such as *Omni*. He was elected to the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame in 2013

Scientist **Colin Pillinger** has died aged 70 after a brain haemorrhage. He was best known for his attempt to land the Beagle 2 on Mars, which was designed to search for life on Mars. Unfortunately it lost contact during the attempted landing

Two new stories by **Octavia Butler** have been discovered among her papers by Marilee Heifetz, Butler's agent. Octavia Butler died unexpectedly in 2006, aged only 58. The works are a novella "A Necessary Being" and a short story "Childminder".

They will be published as **UNEXPECTED STORIES** this summer by digital company, Open Road Integrated Media *Lightspeed* magazine is producing a special June issue titled "**Women Destroy Science Fiction**". It will be available in online, ebook and print formats. See www.lightspeedmagazine.com for further details A

video of **The Women in SF Panel** listed in last month's newsletter, held on the 8th May in Blackwells Bookshop, London is available online at www.jofletcherbooks.com/blog. The event, sponsored by Jo Fletcher Books, featured SF writers **Jaine Fenn, Stephanie Sautler, Karen Lord, Naomi Foyle** and **Janet Edwards** and a large audience. The discussion was wide-ranging and covered issues/barriers encountered by women in SF and some of the possible solutions For those who are attending (or supporting) Loncon3, the **Hugo Awards voter packet** is now available. This is an electronic package of some of the nominated works. The packet is available now at http://loncon3.org/hugo_vote/hugo_voter_packet.php until voting closes on 1st August. A separate voter packet for the **Retro Hugos**, commemorating SF available in 1939 will be available shortly There has been some **controversy about the contents of the main Hugo Voter packet** this year. **Orbit** have three of the five novels on the shortlist and have decided to only include "extended previews". The controversy arose over their statement which quoted "writers and rights holders should be able to make their own choices" followed by the next paragraph which indicated that the decision was "not one requested by any of our authors". There was a separate very carefully worded statement published by the three affected authors Charlie Stross, Ann Leckie and Mira Grant stating that "the decision to give away free copies of our novels is simply not ours to take". By way of contrast, **Tor** has confirmed that the voter packet will include all the novels in the *Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson. The other nominee **WARBOUND** by Larry Correia (Baen Books) will also be available in the voter packet. *CG*

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

OCULUS - Release date June 15th. Horror. A young woman is convinced that an antique mirror is responsible for her family's misfortunes

THE ANOMALY - Release date July 4th. SF. A former soldier has keeps waking in a different place every 10 minutes

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2 - Release date July 4th. Animation. Vikings and Dragons unite against the army of the mysterious Dragon Rider.

TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION - Release date July 10th. SF. More battles between two rival groups of self-aware robots.

FORTHCOMING BOOKS



THE TRUTH IS A CAVE IN THE BLACK MOUNTAINS by Neil Gaiman / Headline / 80 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1472221070 / June 17th. Illustrated novelette of a dwarf searching for gold and his unlikely guide.

THE SPLINTERED GODS (Silver Kings 3) by Stephen Deas / Gollancz / 544 pgs / £18.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575100572 / June 19th. Fantasy. The Dragon Queen is forced to wage war by an unknown rival.

THE LONG MARS (Long Earth 3) by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Baxter / Doubleday / 368 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0857521743 / June 19th. SF. Mankind now attempts to explore the many alternative versions of Mars.

BARRICADE by Jon Wallace / Gollancz / 256 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575117945 / June 19th. SF. In post-apocalyptic UK, superhuman Kenstibec scrapes a living as a taxi-driver, braving the dangerous country between barricaded cities.



HALF A KING by Joe Abercrombie / Harper Voyager / 384 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0007550203 / July 3rd. New fantasy series (YA crossover). Born with a deformed hand, Prince Yarv uses his mind to regain the throne he never wanted.

INTO THE FIRE (Detainee 2) by Peter Liney / Jo Fletcher Books / 368 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1782060369 / July 3rd. SF. Clancy escaped the Island for the expected haven of the mainland but people here are being hunted and decimated

DEADLY CURIOSITIES by Gail Z Martin / Solaris / 384 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781082324 / July 3rd. Antique shop owner acquires and neutralises dangerous supernatural items.

THE SEAL OF THE WORM (Shadows of the Apt 10) by Adrian Tchaikovsky / Tor / 500 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0230770010 / July 3rd. Concluding book in the fantasy series. In winning the world war, the Empress Seda has released a threat which will require appalling measures to defeat.

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BOOK REVIEWS



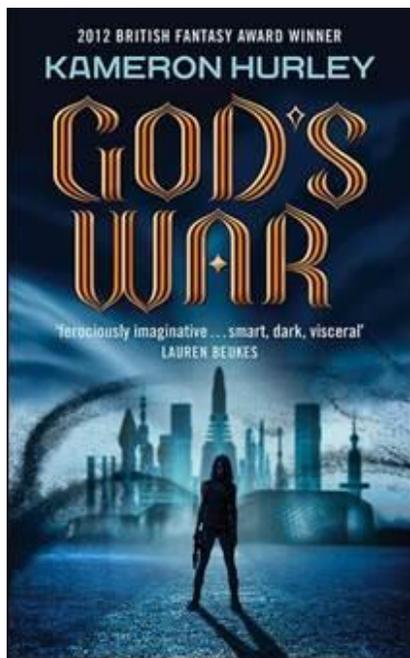
(REVIEWERS please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwincd@yahoo.com Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting).

GOD'S WAR by Kameron Hurley

Del Rey / 309 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0091952778

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

One of the things an SF writer in particular must be good at is building strange but consistent worlds. In **GOD'S WAR**, Kameron Hurley has succeeded admirably in my opinion. The novel is set on a future world populated by successive waves of religious refugees. Similarly to Frank Herbert's *Dune* series, the nations of Chenja and Nasheen are clearly based on Arabic/ Islamic models. However, the alien ecology and the centuries-old war between the two nations have led to profound changes. Tailored viruses and bugs (derived from the native fauna) are used as weapons in the war and to a lesser extent beneficially in the civilian society. Indeed much of the



technology is organically based. The radiation and plagues from the frontline also decimate the home population. These factors mean that vast numbers are constantly killed or maimed in the war and has led to societies where women are in the majority. The two nations have adapted very differently to this.

In addition, a small number of the population appear to have magical abilities (although this may also be due to genetic mutation/manipulation - I was not completely clear on the origins). Depending on the level of their ability they can manipulate organic tissue and detect or heal diseases.

In addition they can control the native insects using them for spying, defence etc. Other people can also shapeshift their form into animals

Nyxnissa, referred to mainly as Nyx, is a disgraced Bel Dame. The Bel Dames are female Nasheenian state-sanctioned assassins sent to kill deserters from the war. After being expelled for doing illegal bounty work, Nyx now survives doing black market smuggling and assassinations with a small team of mercenaries, including a fugitive Chenjan magician, Rhys and a shapeshifter, Khos. When a member of a visiting alien embassy goes missing, the Queen wants her found unofficially so Nyx is given a chance to improve her situation. To do this she must smuggle her team into hostile Chenja. However, there are many factions with reasons to try and stop her.

The novel has received nominations for many awards and there is much I enjoyed. Be warned however, this book is not for the faint-hearted. Nyx's world is harsh, bloody and brutal and Kameron does not shy away from showing us this. The characters themselves are shaped by their environment and this did make it hard sometimes to find their redeeming qualities. In particular although I found Nyx a convincing character she is not one I liked. Personally I will be reading the sequel but this series will not be to everyone's taste.

CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Del Rey)

BE MY ENEMY: Everness Book II by Ian McDonald

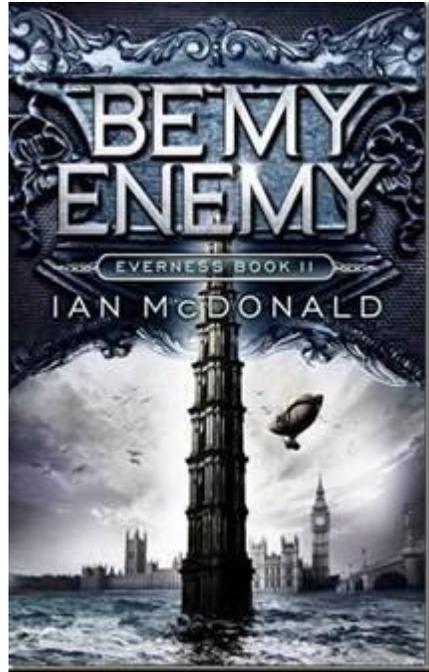
Jo Fletcher Books / 368 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-1780876801

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

There are some people, among them writers, who seem to think that young adult books are a version of the books written for older children in decades gone by. Some of these think that writing such a book is an easy task. A glance at the best of the genre shows clearly that it isn't. While many novels currently marketed for young adults in the fantasy/dark fantasy field, tend to have a strong element of romance and seem to be aimed at the female readership, this doesn't have to be so. Post-pubescent boys are also allowed to have feelings. People of the age for which the YA label is aimed (or should be) are

also very capable of understanding complex narratives and emotionally deep concepts. Very little separates YA from what is regarded as adult fiction.

BE MY ENEMY continues the adventures of Everett Singh, a mathematically precocious fourteen-year-old from London, England. In the first volume in this series, **PLANESRUNNER**, he discovered that alternative worlds branch off from ours exponentially and that scientists had developed a device that allowed passage between them. His father, Tejendra, had developed a multidimensional map of the other planes which he'd sent to Everett before he was kidnapped by people from a parallel world who wanted it. Now Everett is searching for his father. He has the assistance of the crew of the airship *Everness* which includes Sen, a girl his own age.



As this, the second volume in the series, begins, *Everness* is stranded over an icy landscape on a version of the world where civilisation made no appearance – in the London area at least. From the opening pages, the crew is in peril. They don't have the power to go anywhere else and they suddenly discover that they have been followed by a highly armed force. Even when they've solved the immediate problem, there is still the issue of how to find Everett's father. For him, this is the most important objective, ever. Others have different agendas, some of which run parallel with his, at least, for a while.

One of the alternative worlds, E1 which first developed the jump gate, has been cut off from the rest of the planes. Nothing goes in or out. There are rumours, but Everett and the *Everness* crew see

no long term solution to their problems other than going there. To complicate matters, Everett has acquired some deadly enemies, who wish to wrest the technology his father gave him from him, no matter the cost. To help them, they have taken Everett M. Singh from a different alternative and set him to recover the data base they want. To survive, Everett has to battle his alter self.

As this is a YA novel, don't take hormones out of the equation. Throw two adolescents together and there will inevitably be sparks but whether the result will be a comforting fire or an almighty explosion depends on personality and circumstance. This novel is a perfect example of what a YA novel ought to be. It is exciting enough to capture the readership of all ages and deep enough to satisfy the adult reader without losing the younger ones. It has well defined characters and if the positions of them are perhaps a little too black or white, the headlong adventure with problems to solve at every turn sweeps the reader past any objection.

PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS by Karen Lord

Jo Fletcher Books / 325 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-1780871660

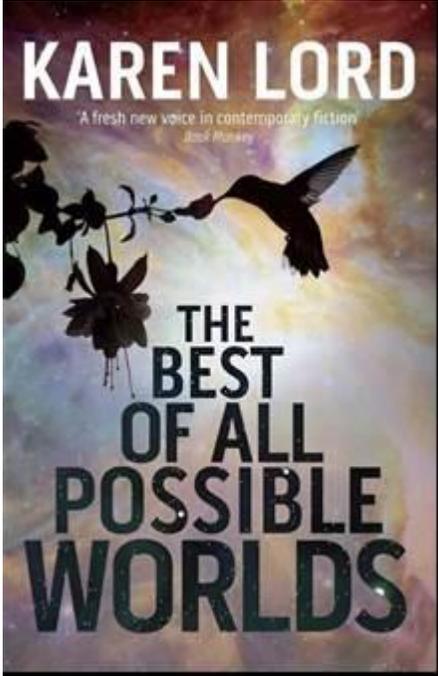
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

In the future humanity has divided into distinctive groups. The Sadiri were the elite amongst the various human races in the galaxy. With their strong intellectual and telepathic gifts they were the backbone of law, diplomacy and scientific discovery. Their strong mental and emotional discipline means that they are perceived as aloof and unfeeling by many. Disaster strikes when their homeworld is poisoned and rendered uninhabitable by an act of terrorism. Only the Sadiri who were offworld at the time of the attack survive and that is mostly the males.

The scattered survivors are given asylum on the world of Cygnus Beta. Wishing to preserve their culture and genetic identity, they agree with the Cygnus Beta government on a joint expedition to search for suitable sub-populations of the planet who may be close enough genetically and culturally to the Sadiri to provide suitable brides. Grace Delarua is the Cygnian linguistic liaison assigned to the group and much of the novel centres around the developing relationship between the emotional, empathic Grace and the Sadiri

councillor, Dllenahkh, as they travel from one different culture to another.

This book has received widespread praise and has been recently nominated for the Locus Award. There are some good ideas in here but they feel under-developed. It is technically well-written but I found it extremely frustrating. The pace is very slow and we seem to move from one episode to the next quite jerkily at times.



Situations are set up and then in the next chapter we learn they have been resolved “off stage” without full details of what has happened. Also apart from the two main protagonists, I found it very hard to differentiate between the other characters who seemed very one-dimensional. These two factors means that despite what should have been intense situations I never felt that the characters were in any real danger.

I also found the relationship between Grace and Dllenahkh unsatisfying and unconvincing. Much of it feels like a developing friendship rather than a romantic relationship. I recognise that we are meant to recognise the reserved nature of the Sadiri makes expression of emotions difficult but for me personally, whilst I can see an emotional bond developing it feels completely platonic. Dllenahkh has some depth as a character but I found Grace annoying and unsympathetic. Indeed yet again the reserved detached style of the narration makes it very hard to feel much empathy with any of the characters.

I went into this book with high expectations but the main experience was puzzlement that I must be missing something that

other readers clearly like. Whilst Karen Lord evidently appeals to a lot of people, on the evidence of this book she does not suit me. *CG* (Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)

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

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER, 20th June, Birmingham. Welsh National Opera present two one-act operas of classic Edgar Allen Poe horror story. Birmingham Hippodrome. Tel: 0844 338 5000 or www.birminghamhippodrome.com Tickets: £10-30.

JOE ABERCROMBIE BOOK SIGNING, 3rd July, Birmingham. Signing of new book **HALF A KING** at Waterstones, Birmingham New Street at 12pm. Tel: 0121 631 4333 (also appearing on 2nd July at Waterstones Nottingham Bridle at 7pm Tel: 0115 947 0069)



CARMILLA, Wolverhampton, 8th - 12th July. Play. Classic Gothic story of female vampire, published by Sheridan Le Fanu (25 years before **DRACULA**). Wolverhampton Grand Theatre. Tel: 01902 429212 or www.grandtheatre.co.uk. Tickets: £17.50 - 21.50.

OUT OF THIS WORLD FILM SEASON, 8th August -18th September, Birmingham. Season of films in the Outdoor arena at the MAC, Cannon Hill Park, B12 9QJ. Featuring **ALIEN**, **BACK TO THE FUTURE**, **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** and **STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE**. Prices £10 per film. Events go ahead regardless of weather. Tel: 0121 446 3232 or email info@macarts.co.uk

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

BRISTOLCON, 25th October, Bristol. Guests of Honour include Jasper Fforde, Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Emma Newman. At the Doubletree Hotel, Bristol. Tickets £20 www.bristolcon.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

DYSPROSIUM (EASTERCON), 3rd - 6th April, London. Guests of Honour are Jim Butcher, Seanan McGuire, Herr Doktor and Caroline Mullan. To be held at the Park Inn, Heathrow, London. Attending £60, Supporting £25. Details at www.dysprosium.org.uk (online registration not yet available).

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

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

August 8th - **Summer Meal at the Bull**

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