

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

AUGUST 2014

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## **SUMMER SOCIAL MEAL 8TH AUGUST**

August is the Summer Social meal and there is no meeting at the Briar Rose. This year the venue is 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.

September 12th - BSFG member Chris Morgan on the US paperback including the art of Richard Powers

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

### **WORLD FANTASY AWARD SHORTLIST**

The shortlists for the World Fantasy awards have been announced. The nominees for Best Novel are given below. Nominees in other categories are available at [www.worldfantasy.org/awards/](http://www.worldfantasy.org/awards/). The winners will be announced at World Fantasy Con on November 6th to 9th:

**DUST DEVIL ON A QUIET STREET** by Richard Bowes (Lethe Press)

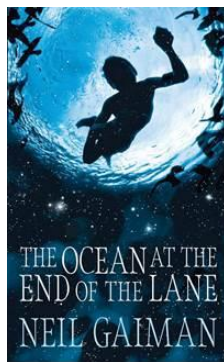
**A NATURAL HISTORY OF DRAGONS: A MEMOIR BY LADY TRENT** by Marie Brennan (Tor)

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

**A STRANGER IN OLONDRIA** by Sofia Samatar (Small Beer Press)

**THE GOLEM AND THE JINNI** by Helene Wecker (Harper)

**THE LAND ACROSS** by Gene Wolfe (Tor)



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



Author and Editor **Frank M Robinson** has died at the age of 87. He worked on various magazines starting as a copy boy at *Amazing*. He also wrote SF stories and novels. His first sale was the short story "The Maze" (*Astounding* 1951) and he then wrote a number of successful SF thrillers of which the most well-known is probably **THE GLASS INFERNO** which was filmed as **THE TOWERING INFERNO**. He was also a collector and expert on pulp magazines and won a Hugo for **SCIENCE FICTION OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:**

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY (1999) and was a British Fantasy Award finalist for ART OF THE IMAGINATION in 2002. He was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame in 2001 and was a recipient of the Special Honoree Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) in 2014. Outside of his SF work he was also a speechwriter for the San Francisco campaigner and politician Harvey Milk .... The winners of the **World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Awards** are **Chelsea Quinn Yarbro** and **Ellen Datlow** .... **Robert Jackson Bennett** has won the Best Novel category with **AMERICAN ELSEWHERE** in the **Shirley Jackson Awards** for psychological horror suspense .... The hosts for the **Hugo Awards** ceremony at Loncon 3 will be **Justin Robson** and **Geoff Ryman**. The **Retro Hugo Awards** (for works from 1939) will be **Mary Robinette Kowal** and **Robert Shearman** .... The winners of the **Prometheus Awards** for libertarian SF have been announced and will be presented at Loncon 3. The best novel was tied between **HOMELAND** by **Cory Doctorow** and **NEXUS** by **Ramez Naam**. A Special Lifetime Achievement Award will be given to **Vernor Vinge**. Winners in other categories are available at <http://lfs.org/releases.shtml> .... **Sir Terry Pratchett** has announced that he will be unable to appear at the Discworld Convention in Manchester due to his Alzheimer's Disease or "The Embuggerance" as he calls it. He will still answer some fan questions via video link and his assistant will be bringing his **Black Hat** to represent him. He has also announced that his next novel will be the fifth to feature young witch, **Tiffany Aching** .... The **BSFA Lecture** at Loncon 3 will be entitled "Pygmalion's Statue and her Synthetic Sisters: The Perfect Woman on Screen" and will be given by **Dr Paula James** of the Open University .... It has just been announced that in 2012 the Earth was missed by a "**Carrington Event**" where an extreme solar storm caused an extremely fast plasma wave that would have caused major disruption to satellite communications and potentially disabled "anything that plugs into a wall socket". Interestingly, **Janet Edwards'** novel, **EARTH GIRL**) featured a Carrington event and its consequences.

*CG*

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

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

***THE CONGRESS*** - Release date August 15th. Weird film where human actors are being replaced by computer simulations.

***THE ROVER*** - Release date August 15th. In a post-apocalyptic Australia, a man pursues a gang who have stolen his car.

***DELIVER US FROM EVIL*** - Release date August 22nd. A policeman and a priest fight demonic possessions.

***LUCY*** - Release date August 22nd. SF. A female drug mule gets superpowers when a drug she is smuggling leaks into her body.

***AS ABOVE, SO BELOW*** - Release date August 29th. Horror. Explorers in French catacombs are haunted by visions of their past.

## ***FORTHCOMING BOOKS***



***FOOL'S ASSASSIN (Fitz and the Fool 1)*** by Robin Hobb / Harper Voyager / 640 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 9780007444175 / August 12th. New series. Royal bastard and reluctant assassin, Fitz finds his violent old life affects his peaceful new life.

***EARTH FLIGHT (Earth Girl 3)*** by Janet Edwards / Harper Voyager / 400 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007443512 / August 14th. Conclusion of SF series. Can Jarra finally find a way to leave Earth without it killing her?

***LOCK IN*** by John Scalzi / Gollancz / 336 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575134348 / August 28th. SF. A virus leaves 1% of humanity trapped in unresponsive bodies until virtual reality offers them a way to communicate and sometimes control the unaffected.

***HIDDEN (Alex Verus 5)*** by Benedict Jacka / Orbit / 352 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356502311 / September 2nd. Fantasy. Magician Alex Verus is in serious trouble and his evil ex-master may have resurfaced.



***THE MIRROR EMPIRE*** by Kameron Hurley / Angry Robot / 544 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857665553/ September 4th. Fantasy. A general must choose between her people or loyalty to her alien Empress.

***RED BLOODED (Jessica McClain 4)*** by Amanda Carlson / Orbit / 368 pgs / £8.85 paperback / ISBN 978-0316404334/ September 9th. Fantasy. Werewolf Jessica must battle to escape the Underworld without her usual friends.

***THE FALCON THRONE*** by Karen Miller / Orbit / 688 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1841499598 / September 9th. Fantasy. Ambitious rivals fight for the right to sit the Falcon Throne.

***EXTINCTION GAME*** by Gary Gibson / Tor / 400 pgs / £13.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0230772724 / September 11th. Rescued from a desolate Earth, Jerry Beche is trained to visit alternative Earths and rescue data and weapons – but who is controlling them?



## BOOK REVIEWS



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

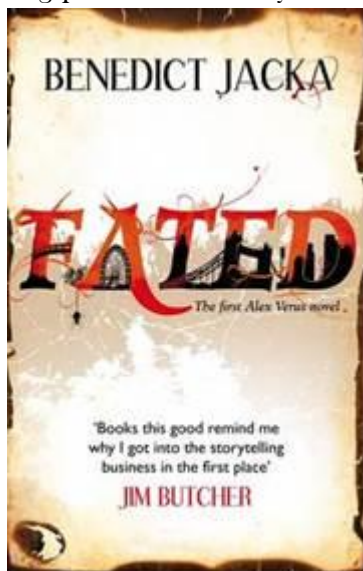
**FATED** by Alex Jacka

Orbit / 322 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356500249

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

For well over a century many British authors from both the SF/Fantasy field and mainstream literature have found the setting of London provides lots of thought-provoking places and history to use as a backdrop. Although I personally would like to see the mythology of other cities explored more, Benedict Jacka's *FATED* (the first in his *Alex Verus* series) proves to me that there is still plenty of scope for excellent storytelling based in London.

*FATED* is what is described as an urban fantasy (ie where fantasy elements co-exist in our modern world). Like many urban fantasy stories, it is told in the first person viewpoint; in this case that of the probability mage, Alex Verus. A probability mage (or a seer) can see a short distance into the future, or rather the many possible futures. The exponential cascade of possibilities as he looks further ahead limit the usefulness of the information to hours rather than days. His abilities are rare and exceedingly useful to both Dark and Light mages which has had some nasty consequences for Alex in the past. He now owns a magic shop in Camden and tries to stay unnoticed and away from other magicians. However when an ancient statue stored at the British Museum is found to hide a powerful magic artefact, only Alex' abilities can divine the correct and safe way to unlock it. Suddenly wanted by various factions, many of whom will use violence and



coercion to get what they want, Alex must use his wits to protect his friends and himself and to prevent the artefact falling into the wrong hands.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book which shows a great deal of imagination. It avoids neatly the problem I have with many fantasy books that magic can be waved to solve any problem. The fact that Alex has no high-powered defensive/offensive magic of his own and must rely on preparation and his wits to survive against opponents who could easily kill or maim him makes it stimulating as you are kept guessing how he is going to escape from a bad situation. The characterisation is excellent. I like very much that Alex is a quieter more reflective character than the prototypical spell-slinging magician of much fantasy. His back story and its effect on him and some of the other characters is interesting and I look forward to further revelations in the subsequent books. The supporting characters are also good and fit well into the plot. I particularly liked his friend, Luna who is cursed to bring bad luck to anyone who gets emotionally close to her and the sometimes unexpected ways that affects the plot.

The book is well written and easy to read and has good pace with well-interspersed action and quieter scenes. In my opinion the author has succeeded in writing a book which has a unique voice and is clearly differentiated from others in a sometimes over-populated genre. I look forward to reading the following novels in the series. *CG (Review copy kindly donated by Orbit)*

***THE DARKNESS WITHIN* by Sam Stone**

**Telos Publishing / 180 pgs / £10.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1845838744**

**Reviewed by Carol Goodwin**

It was with some trepidation that I started to read this book. As some of you know I am not the greatest fan of horror and the cover picture did not fill me with confidence. However I have read and enjoyed some of Sam Stone's other books so was willing to give this a try.

**THE DARKNESS WITHIN** is a short novel billed as a science fiction/horror mixture. Earth is dying and can only sustain human life for about 30 more years. A small fraction of the population are lucky enough to have been chosen to board the

Colony ships which are being despatched to a new habitable planet, New Earth. The action takes place on the second of these ships to depart. Although all the inhabitants have been selected for intelligence, skills and fertility they are divided socially into passengers and crew. The privileged passengers, mainly from rich families, enjoy every luxury whilst the crew (who are generally from a lower social class) do all the work and lead a more Spartan existence.

One year into the voyage one of the crew is contaminated by an alien organism on salvaged space debris. Initially the infected appear normal which allows them to spread the disease to others. With time most of the victims are consumed from within and appear rotten and decaying. As more people become infected it becomes



obvious something terrible is wrong. Desperately trying to identify who is still uninfected, the remaining passengers and crew must overcome their previous antipathies and work together to save themselves.

Despite my misgivings I actually found this novel relatively easy to read. It rattles along fairly easily and builds up tension well. The horror elements were not too disturbing for me and I did feel they fitted within the plot and were not just gratuitous. Perhaps it is that I am not a horror fan and so do not understand the genre but I actually enjoyed the first half of the novel

(where the danger is insidious and unrecognised) far more than the latter half (where the crisis is obvious and more visually horrific). This novel was initially written as an audio play which was later expanded into a short novel and I think the book would have benefited from more expansion. I liked the set up and there are lots of ideas in here that the length of the book does not allow to be fully explored. The author established some good characters and tensions that got me interested. In particular there were a couple of female



characters that I particularly appreciated. However I wanted to know more about the various individuals and how the crew/passenger tensions had changed from departure until the start of the crisis. This would have helped me feel more empathy for their plight. If you like horror then you will probably enjoy this book as it feels that this rather than the sf element is its main focus. CG

*(Review copy kindly donated by Sam Stone)*

### **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)*

**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](mailto:info@macarts.co.uk)



**AN EVENING WITH ROBIN HOBB, 9th August, Birmingham.** Robin Hobb will be signing copies of her new novel, FOOL'S ASSASSIN. Waterstones New Street at 7pm. Tickets £3 in store/Tel: 0121 631 4333



**TALK AND SIGNING BY CHARLAINE HARRIS, 1st September, Birmingham.** The author will be discussing and signing her latest novel, MIDNIGHT CROSSROAD at Waterstones High Street, Birmingham at 7pm. Tickets £3 in store/Tel: 0121 633 4353

## ***LONCON 3 – PRE- AND POST-EVENT SIGNINGS ETC***

**FORBIDDEN PLANET SIGNINGS, 12th to 21st August, London.** Signings include Lauren Beukes (12th at 1pm), Robin Hobb (12th at 6 pm), Peter Brett (14th at 1pm), Jeff VanderMeer (14th at 4pm), Charles Gannon and Jody Lynn Nye (15th at 6pm), Scott Lynch (18th at 6pm), Kelley Armstrong (20th at 6pm) and Jo Walton and Mary Robinette Kowal (21st at 6pm). Forbidden Planet Megastore, 179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR. Tel: 0207 420 3666 or <https://forbiddenplanet.com/events/> for further details.

**FANTASY IN THE COURT, 12th August, London.** Goldsboro Books (in association with Harper Voyager and Tor UK featuring Fantasy and SF writers (details not available at present). Address: 23-25 Cecil Court, London, WC2N 4EZ. Tel: 0207 497 9230 Tickets £5 from [www.goldsborobooks.com/books/fantasy-in-the-court---ticket-3272.html](http://www.goldsborobooks.com/books/fantasy-in-the-court---ticket-3272.html).

**GOLLAN CZ MULTI-MEDIA SF/FANTASY FESTIVAL, 13th August, Online and London.** Gollancz and Waterstones present genre fiction festival combining daytime digital author events and evening panels, signings, readings etc at Waterstones Piccadilly (from 6 to 9 pm) featuring various SF and Fantasy authors. Evening attendance cost £6 (£4 for Waterstones Card holders). Further details and booking at [www.waterstones.com/events](http://www.waterstones.com/events) Tel: 0207 8512400. Digital events see [www.gollancz.co.uk/gollanczfestival2014](http://www.gollancz.co.uk/gollanczfestival2014)

**ANGRY ROBOT SUMMER INVASION, 13th August, London.** SF/Fantasy publishers Angry Robot present readings and signings from their authors including Anne Lyle, Mike Shevdon, Adam Christopher, Wesley Chu, Madeline Ashby and Ramez Naam. Venue: Forbidden Planet Megastore, 179 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8JR. See [www.facebook.com/events/603633976401801/](http://www.facebook.com/events/603633976401801/) for tickets.

**GEORGE RR MARTIN & ROBIN HOBB, 19th August, London.** Sponsored by Harper Voyager and Blinkbox. The two authors will; be discussing their novels, experiences etc. Tickets £45 including a hardback copy of new Robin Hobb novel, FOOL'S ASSASSIN. London (Venue details to be confirmed). For tickets sign up at <http://bit.ly/GeorgeAndRobin>. The event will also be streamed live online at Blinkbox's Facebook page.

## ***CONVENTIONS***

**NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 8th - 10th August, London.** Multi-media, multi-genre convention. Extensive guest list including Adrian Tchaikovsky, Aliette de Bodard, Benedict Jacka, Elizabeth Bear and Geoff Ryman. Tickets £90 at <https://nineworlds.co.uk/> Held at Radisson Hotel, Heathrow.

**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](http://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](http://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](http://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 at [www.bristolcon.org](http://www.bristolcon.org)

**NOVACON 44, 14th - 16th November, Nottingham.** Guest of Honour: Kari Sperring and Science Guest: John Gribbin. Cost £45. Details at [www.novacon.org.uk](http://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](http://www.dysprosium.org.uk)

***FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG***

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**

January 9th - **Annual General Meeting**

February 13th - Quiz

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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