

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

NOVEMBER 2014

ISSUE 518

HONORARY PRESIDENT: BRIAN W ALDISS, O.B.E.

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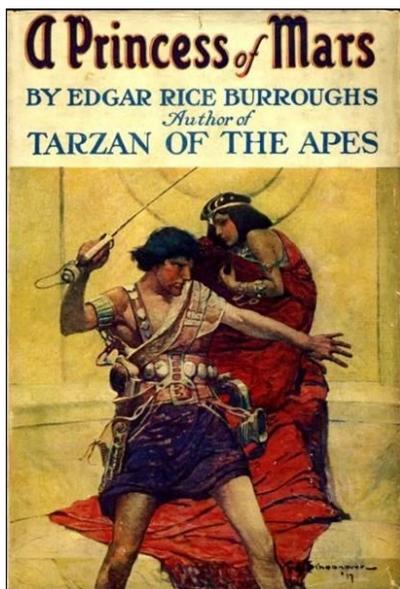
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## **THERESA DERWIN**

**7TH NOVEMBER**

***An Obsession with  
Mars***

Unfortunately our planned guest for November, Storm Constantine has had to cancel at short notice due to a double booking. Luckily Brum Group member **THERESA DERWIN** has kindly offered to step into the breach.

December 5th - Annual Christmas Social (see inside for details)

Using, in her own words “Stunning and fun visual imagery” Theresa will deliver a presentation on the obsession with Mars in the nineteenth century, particularly the fin de siècle (last decade of the 19th century) and beyond. Referencing the obvious texts such as H G Well’s WAR OF THE WORLDS Theresa will also discuss the Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Barsoom* series, the discovery of the Martian “canals” and Percival Lowell, referencing material by Adam Roberts and lesser known texts from the period. In her inimitable style, Theresa hopes to enlighten and entertain on a currently relevant topic.

For those of you unfamiliar with Theresa, she is a Brummie born and bred and has had a varied career; from Warehouse Packer, Student and then the Civil Service from 1999. She is a long-time member of the Brum Group and is on the Committee. She left the Civil Service in 2012 to pursue a career as a writer and publisher. She has short stories published in various anthologies and her own anthology MONSTERS ANONYMOUS. In 2011 she co-founded *Fringeworks*, a small press publisher. They published SF, Fantasy and Horror titles. As part of their activities they inherited the Horror imprint, *KnightWatch Press*. In July 2014, Theresa separated from *Fringeworks* to concentrate on launching *KnightWatch* as an independent horror publisher. More information can be found on her website <http://terror-tree.co.uk> or on Twitter @BarbarellaFem. Information on KnightWatch Press activities and publications can be found at [www.scorchedflower.co.uk/knightwatch/](http://www.scorchedflower.co.uk/knightwatch/) 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 [goodwinced@yahoo.com](mailto:goodwinced@yahoo.com)

### ***AN AGM REMINDER – VERNON BROWN***

Outline details of Officers Duties were given in last month's newsletter ready for the 2015 AGM in January.

If you are considering standing for any of these positions would you please see me at this month's (November) meeting so that I can describe to you in more detail what the post involves? If you cannot be at the meeting please email me via the Group address and I will send you information. *VB*

### ***THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL - FRIDAY 5th DECEMBER***

This year's Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak, where we have once again hired the Skittles Room for our own private use from 7.00pm until 11.00pm on Friday 5th December. To get there take a 45 or 47 bus from outside Boots, opposite New Street Station's old entrance on Smallbrook Queensway, or from near Boots in High Street. Bus stops are changing so check the destination sign carefully. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - it's about 15 minutes ride. Fuller details on how to get there will be given on your ticket.

### **PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE FROM OUR USUAL SECOND FRIDAY**

Tickets are £10 each which includes the buffet etc but not your drinks. As we have the Alley you can play skittles if you wish - there will be prizes for winners and you don't even have to know how to play because we have our own variants of the game, designed to give everyone a chance, none of which would be allowed at competition or any other level. There will be a free half hourly raffle and, to judge from past comments, a good time to be had by all.

The buffet will consist of a selection of sandwiches, sausage rolls, quiche, chicken wings, pizza, salads etc., plus a separate selection for vegetarians, provided that this requirement is clearly stated when you order your ticket.

With this newsletter there should be an application form for one or two tickets. Please complete it as indicated and hand it to Pat, with the necessary money, at the November Group Meeting or send it to the Membership Secretary, together with a cheque/postal order for the appropriate amount, at the address on the back page of the Newsletter. However, as there are sometimes problems with the postal system if you apply by post please send her an email at the same time in case your application is delayed. **THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS MONDAY 24th NOVEMBER** because the Tavern needs food numbers that week. However, by that time NOVACON will have happened and there may not be any tickets left - numbers are restricted for safety reasons and we have reached that number almost every year and had to refuse latecomers.

**REMEMBER THAT TICKETS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE ON THE NIGHT - GET THEM NOW! VB**

### ***NOVA AWARDS 2014 - STEVE GREEN***

This is a reminder that online voting for this year's Nova Awards closes on 31 October. It's open to any fan resident in the UK or Eire who's read at least six eligible fanzines. In addition, all members of Novacon 44 will be able to vote in person at the convention. The full list of eligible fanzines can be seen at [http://novacon.org.uk/documents/Novacon44\\_PR3.pdf](http://novacon.org.uk/documents/Novacon44_PR3.pdf) A ballot form is available at [http://novacon.org.uk/nova\\_ballot.php](http://novacon.org.uk/nova_ballot.php). SG

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

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

***INTERSTELLAR*** - Release date November 7th. SF. Scientists and explorers travel through a wormhole. Director Christopher Nolan (INCEPTION, THE PRESTIGE etc).

***THE IMITATION GAME*** - Release date November 14th. Biopic of mathematical Alan Turing and his contribution to cracking the Enigma code. Not SF but may be of interest.

***THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART ONE*** - Release date November 20th. Third in YA series. Katniss fights to overthrow the cruel government.

***WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS*** - Release date November 21st. Mock documentary on a household of New Zealand vampires.

***MONSTERS: DARK CONTINENT*** - Release date November 21st. Sequel to the excellent 2010 film. “Infected Zones” of large alien creatures have spread to the Middle East.

***2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*** - Release date November 28th. Reissue (by the British Film Institute) of Stanley Kubrick’s film. *CG*

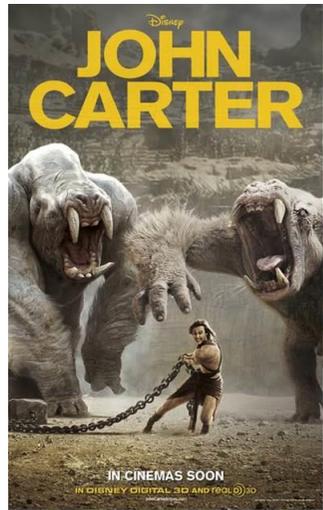
### ***NEWS IN BRIEF ....***



Author **Harlan Ellison** has had a stroke, which has caused some right side paralysis although it is reported that his mind is unaffected and as sharp as normal .... Actress **Lynda Bellingham** died on October 19th from cancer. She was best known to SF fans for her appearances in *Dr Who* (the Inquisitor) and *Blakes 7*.... Author **Larry Niven** has been awarded the Arthur C Clarke Award (NOT the BSFA prize but one awarded by the Arthur C Clarke

Foundation) for “Impact of Imagination on Society”. Started in 2012, previous winners were Ursula K LeGuin and Sir Kenneth Robinson .... An interview with **Dave Langford** (*Ansible* creator, SF author, journalist and fan etc) is on foreign language site, *Nocturnia*. NB Keep scrolling down to reach the English. (<http://www.welcometonocturnia.blogspot.it/2014/10/intervista-con-david-langford.html>). .... A previously unpublished essay (1959) by **Isaac Asimov** has been posted on the MIT Technology review site and discusses creativity. See [www.technologyreview.com/view/531911/isaac-asimov-asks-how-do](http://www.technologyreview.com/view/531911/isaac-asimov-asks-how-do)

people-get-new-ideas/ .... UK imprint *Angry Robot* (Harper Collins SF imprint) has been bought by Osprey. The founder and publisher Marc Gascoigne and editor, Lee Harris will remain in their current roles and the publishing programme has been reported as “basically unaffected” .... **Amazon and Simon & Schuster** have signed a new agreement. The deal will reportedly allow S&S to set retail prices for e-books, with some room allowed for Amazon to discount titles. This increases pressure on Hachette whose dispute with Amazon has involved alleged “bullying” tactics with Amazon preventing Hachette titles from being pre-ordered, subject to delayed shipment and reduced discounts .... Games Designer Brianna Wu was forced to flee her home after death threats and the publication of her home address online. She is the fourth woman (Anita Sarkeesian, Jenn Frank and Zoe Quinn) in the Video Gaming industry swamped with misogynistic threats after commenting about sexism in the industry. A lot of the dispute seems to start from something called **Gamergate** (a web group) which ostensibly formed about protesting journalistic corruption in the industry but was started over now disproved accusations (by her ex-boyfriend) that Zoe Quinn (a games developer) slept with a games journalist in return for positive coverage .... US SF/Fantasy publisher **Baen Books** has announced the 2015 Jim Baen Memorial Writing Contest, looking for stories which feature manned space exploration. Submission closes on February 1st 2015. Submission and prize details are available at [www.baen.com/baenmemorialaward.asp](http://www.baen.com/baenmemorialaward.asp) .... A new radio production of **Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett’s GOOD OMENS** will air on Radio 4 in December .... The Award winning SF novel **ANCILLARY JUSTICE** has been optioned for TV by Fox Television Studios .... **Kim Stanley Robinson’s Mars** Trilogy is being adapted into a TV show by the *Game of Thrones* producer and will have Mr Robinson as a consultant .... **Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc**



(who manage his estate) have regained the rights to the **John Carter** books and are seeking a new partner to produce films. The Disney film **JOHN CARTER** has lost \$200 million to date ... NASA has selected **Boeing/Space X** to transport astronauts and cargo to the International Space Station, which they hope will allow launches from US land by 2017 and eliminating their reliance on Russian services. The contract is said to be worth \$6.8 billion .... A comet flew within 88000 miles of Mars on October 20th. Although they had to shelter on the opposite side of Mars, three NASA spacecraft orbiting Mars were able to gather data as were the surface Rovers .... **Air New Zealand** has produced a new fun Middle Earth themed safety video featuring Director Peter Jackson and various actors from the *Hobbit* films including Sylvester McCoy. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOw44VFNk8Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOw44VFNk8Y) CG

### ***FORTHCOMING BOOKS***

*(NB Prices given are Recommended Retail Price and may be available at cheaper prices)*



***GAMES CREATURES PLAY*** by Charlaïne Harris & Toni LP Kelner / Jo Fletcher Books / 368 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1780872636 / November 6th. Short story anthology on a theme of games and competitions.

***FOXGLOVE SUMMER (Rivers of London 5)*** by Ben Aaronovitch / Gollancz / 384 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575132504 /

November 13th. Fantasy. Policeman Peter Grant tackles local cops and gods in a Herefordshire village.

***EMPIRES: EXTRACTION* and *EMPIRES: INFILTRATION*** by **Gavin Deas** / Gollancz / 336 & 352 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575129009 & 978-0575129283 / November 20th. Two men become aware of alien invasion by two races. Each book follows one of the heroes. Can be read in any order.

***THE DARK DEFILES (A Land Fit For Heroes 3)*** by **Richard Morgan** / Gollancz / 560 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-0575077942 / November 20th. Gritty fantasy. Ringil risks his soul to challenge the Illwrack Changeling.



***SYMBIONT (Parasitology 2)*** by **Mira Grant** / Orbit / 528 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356501932 / November 25th. SF. Sequel to Hugo finalist PARASITE. Health implants have attacked human hosts. Amidst panic and quarantine efforts, Sal tries to find a way to stop the parasites.

***ULTIMA (Proxima 2)*** by **Stephen Baxter** / Gollancz / 560 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575116887 / November 27th. SF. Alien “hatches” allow humanity to travel the universe but now they discover the consequences that involve ancient aliens and multi-verses.

**MESSENGER'S LEGACY (Demon Cycle)** by Peter V Brett / Harper Voyager / 112 pgs / £9.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0008114701 / December 4th. Fantasy. Novella. Ragen Messenger searches for a missing 6 year old boy in demon-infested forest.

**THE ICE DRAGON** by George R R Martin & Luis Royo / Harper Voyager / 128 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0008118853 / December 4th. Fantasy. YA crossover. Adara and her Ice Dragon defend her home from fire dragons.

### **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)*



**TALK AND SIGNING BY BEN AARONOVITCH, 13th November, Birmingham.** The author will be discussing and signing his latest novel, **FOXGLOVE SUMMER** at Waterstones High Street at 7:30pm. Tickets £3 (redeemable against novel) in store/Tel: 0121 633 4353

**BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION, 19th November, London.**

SF author Claire Corbett (**WINGS**) interviewed by Dr Colin Harvey. Location: Upstairs at The Artillery Arms, 102 Bunhill Row, London. EC1Y 8ND. Free entry (non-members welcome). Open from 6pm for 7pm start.

**BFS/BSFA YORK PUBMEET, 22nd November, York.** The BFS and BSFA are teaming up to hold a social gathering in York with author readings, raffle, chat & drinks. Guest authors: Justina Robson & Vincent Holland-Keen. From 4:30 pm at Brigantes Bar & Brasserie, 114 Mickelgate, York, YO1 6JX.

**STEAMPUNK WEEKEND, 28th - 30th November at National Space Centre, Leicester.** Various events including Steampunks 'V' Zombies, Steampunks in Space and Saloon at the End of the Universe. Various prices Tel: 0116 261 0261 or [www.spacecentre.co.uk](http://www.spacecentre.co.uk)



**THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925)** screening, 30th November, Birmingham. Screening of silent classic (starring Lon Chaney) with live score. 3 pm Electric Cinema Birmingham. £10. [www.theelectric.co.uk](http://www.theelectric.co.uk) or 0121 643 7879 Price £10-12.



## **BOOK REVIEWS**



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

***EARTH FLIGHT*** by Janet Edwards

Harper Voyager / 390 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0007443512

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

This is the third and final volume in the *Earth Girl* trilogy. For those of you unfamiliar with the previous books (*EARTH GIRL* and *EARTH STAR*) the series is set on a future Earth, where most of humanity has scattered to many stars via the portals which provide instant transport. The Earth's economy now revolves around three main areas, History, Hospitals and the Handicapped (the triple H). The Handicapped are an unfortunate minority who are unable to exist away from Earth due to a fault in their immune systems. Babies born away from Earth with the problem are immediately "portalled" back to Earth and many parents abandon them to the impersonal

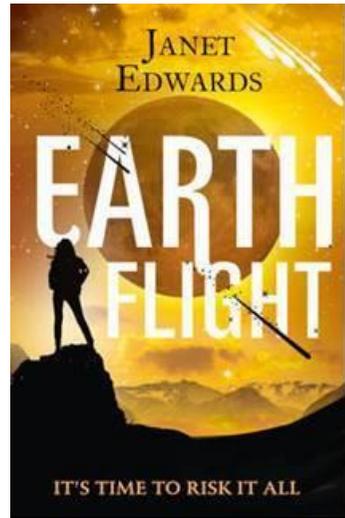
foster centres. These “Handicapped” are often viewed as something shameful and there is a lot of prejudice against them.

In the first book, **EARTH STAR** we are introduced to Jarra, a teenage girl. Abandoned on Earth as a baby she has grown up hearing all the insults about the Handicapped being stupid, ugly throwbacks and is angry and determined to prove she is as good as any “norm”. She enrolls on a University History course but pretends to all the offworld students that she is one of them. Towards the end of the novel, Jarra and her classmates rescue crashed military personnel from an archaeological dig site and in recognition she is given the military Artemis medal and becomes a positive role model for the Handicapped.

In the second book, **EARTH STAR** an alien Sphere approaches Earth and the Military conscript Jarra and her boyfriend into the Alien Contact team, partially for her history knowledge but also due to her celebrity status.

In this third book the plot concentrates on two main strands. Firstly Jarra’s formal adoption by her birth clan and the active prejudice this causes and secondly the quest to translate the alien data and find their home planet. Factions who fear alien contact join forces with those who wish to stop her adoption and Jarra’s life is endangered. Due to events in the previous book only Jarra can unlock access to the alien homeworld and the vital knowledge it contains. However due to her disability Jarra faces a life threatening decision.

I like these books immensely. It is clear that a lot of thought has gone into the plotting. Even when the reader is tempted to start thinking that an event is improbable, this has been recognised and there is a plausible explanation. In this book in particular I liked that Jarra’s character shows growth and maturity and starts to recognise her own prejudices and the chip on her shoulder. The themes of



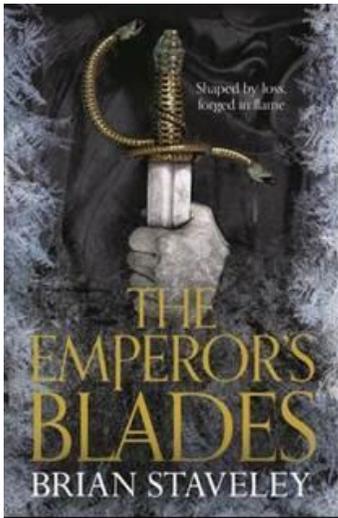
prejudice and difference are well managed and will clearly resonate with many teenagers. I also find it extremely refreshing to read young adult SF which is not a complete dystopia. These books remind me of Anne McCaffrey (especially her non-*Pern* books) in that they appeal to readers across a wide age range. CG

*(Review copy kindly donated by Janet Edwards)*

**THE EMPEROR'S BLADES** by Brian Staveley

Pan Macmillan Tor / 570 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1-4472-3582-8

Reviewed by Jim Pearce



Within Fantasy books there is a strongly recurring, almost ubiquitous, sub-genre which starts with a fallen King/Emperor killed either in battle or by treachery and very rarely by old age. The story that follows depicts the struggle of his heir/s to hold onto or win back their heritage. **THE EMPEROR'S BLADES** is one such book, the blades in the title being his two sons and daughter. In it the Emperor has been murdered, leaving his empire in turmoil. Now his children must fight for their lives. His second son Valyn is training to join the empire's deadliest fighting force. After a dying soldier's warning which is swiftly followed by several accidents he realizes that his life is in danger. Unaware of his father's death, Kaden the heir studies in a remote monastery where the Blank God's disciples teach him their harsh ways. Meanwhile back in the capital, the Emperor's daughter Adare seeks justice.

In **THE EMPEROR'S BLADES** Brian Staveley has created a well-crafted situation populated by realistic characters both 'good' and 'evil'. Progress is a struggle for the siblings there being many twists and turns in their tales. Within this book there are tragic

deaths, including that of some characters that one would have expected to live a lot longer in the chronicle, unexpected treachery and the finding of surprising allies. Overall Brian has created a masterful and rich tapestry blending the action into a compelling story, which is the type I like best. There is also a good ending to this part of the tale with a clear and definite pause and the scene is set for the next volume.

Thank goodness there is nothing ordinary or flash about this story instead it is a profoundly satisfying read. When I finished it I sat back and sighed with pleasure as if I had just completed an excellent meal. I look forward to the two follow-up volumes the first of which, **THE PROVIDENCE OF FIRE** is to be published in January 2015 and expect that they will be equally enjoyable.

In this his first published book Brian Staveley has proved that he is already a master of his craft so much so that this is one of the best books I have read this year. *JTP*

*(Review copy kindly donated by Pan Macmillan Tor)*

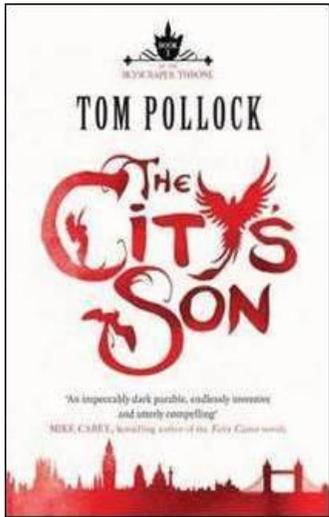
***THE CITY'S SON (The Skyscraper Throne)*** by Tom Pollock  
Jo Fletcher Books / 454 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1780870090

**Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.**

Teenage girls Beth and Pen (Parva) were the best of friends. Despite their very different personalities, the outwardly confident Beth and quiet Pen rely on each other. Both have family problems, from Pen's suffocating parents to Beth's widowed father who is too lost in grief to notice his daughter. Until one day, Pen betrays Beth. With no-one else she feels she can turn to Beth runs away to the streets. Here she encounters the hidden London filled with strange creatures. Threatened by a Ghostwraith, her life is saved by a young boy, Filius Viae. He is the son of the missing ruler of London, Mater Viae. Left alone since early childhood he has been raised by the various strange inhabitants of this other London. With nowhere else to go, Beth attaches herself to Fil. But Fil is in trouble. The Crane King is extending his control over London and destroying many of Mater Viae's subjects. In the absence of his mother, Fil should step up to

confront him but he is only a young boy and has few powers compared to his missing mother. Beth must help him discover his confidence and recruit allies before London is overrun by the Crane King. However Beth has not been forgotten and her father with the help of Pen tries to find his missing daughter. In the search Pen is captured by the Wire Mistress, chief general of the Crane King. The Wire Mistress needs a human host at the centre of her barbed wire body and so Pen and Beth are arrayed on opposite sides of the conflict.

This is an interesting first novel. The world building and imagination are first class. The creatures of this other London are not standard monsters. They are clearly created from the features and atmosphere of London. Fil's nursemaid/tutor is Glas, a creature formed freshly each day from the rubbish on the streets, there are the Lamp People who are made of glass and must shelter from rain in the street lights, the Pavement Priests (humans trapped inside stone as a punishment) and the Chemical Synod who brew magic potions from the oil and chemical wastes of the city. The pace is good and it builds well to an action filled conclusion.



As a first novel it has some minor niggles - in particular I found the occasional shift to a first person narrative to be jarring. Fantasy is a wide field and what type of fantasy interests you will affect whether this novel appeals or not. It does not have the complicated multiple strands of a fantasy by say Robin Hobb or George RR Martin but for a first novel it shows a lot of promise and if you like urban fantasy it is thoroughly recommended. I like the three main characters and will be interested to see what happens to them in the subsequent sequels. I am not sure whether it is intended as a Young Adult novel but it would clearly appeal to that section of the market. *CG*

*(Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)*

## **CONVENTIONS**



**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)

**PICOCON 32**, 14th - 15th February 2015, Imperial College, London. Guest of Honour Cory Doctorow. Guests of Honour tba. Cost £10. Info: [www.icsf.org.uk/picocon](http://www.icsf.org.uk/picocon).

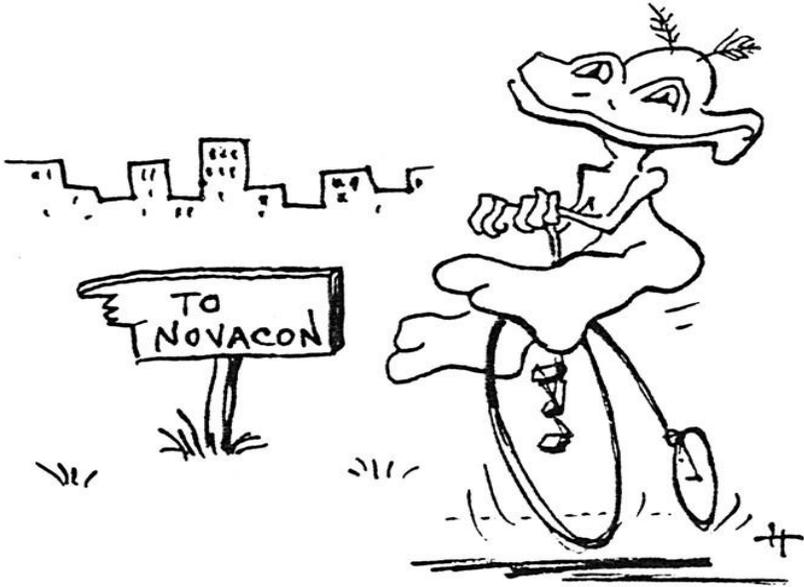
**REDEMPTION '15**, 20th - 22nd February 2015, Coventry. At Britannia Hotel. Guest of Honour: Miltos Yerolemou (others tbc). Tickets £70 at [www.smof.com/redemption](http://www.smof.com/redemption)

**SCI-FI WEEKENDER**, 19th - 22nd March, Hafan Y Mor, North Wales. Commercial multi-media convention. Various prices depending on level of access/accommodation. See [www.scifiweekender.com](http://www.scifiweekender.com)

**DYSPROSIUM (EASTERCON)**, 3rd - 6th April 2015, London. Guests of Honour are Jim Butcher, Seanan McGuire, Herr Doktor and Caroline Mullan. To be held at the Park Inn, Heathrow, London. Attending £70, Supporting £25. Details at [www.dysprosium.org.uk](http://www.dysprosium.org.uk)

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

December 5th - Christmas Social  
January 9th - Annual General Meeting  
February 13th - Quiz



*(Illustration courtesy of Dave Hardy)*

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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