

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 2015

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Edward James 11th September

We welcome back to Birmingham our guest this month, Edward James. He will be talking to us about “Science Fiction and Fantasy writers and the First World War”. His work on this topic won this year’s BSFA Award for non-fiction.



Edward James joined the first Brum SF Group as a schoolboy, in 1963, and went to his first sf convention in 1964. It was the 15th Eastercon: in 2013 he went to the 64th Eastercon as a Guest of Honour. Inspired by

October 9th - SF author, **Justina Robson.**

Tolkien he became a medieval historian, teaching in York, Reading and Dublin; he retired from his last full time post in 2011, and is now Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at University College Dublin. He has written numerous books on early medieval history and archaeology, and in his spare time he has done a few other things, like write **SCIENCE FICTION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** for Oxford University Press (1994), and serve as editor of *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* (1986 to 2001). He has co-edited books on *Babylon 5* and Terry Pratchett. In 2005 he won a Hugo for **THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO SCIENCE FICTION** (coedited with Farah Mendlesohn), and he has also co-edited **THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO FANTASY LITERATURE**. His most recent book, for Illinois University Press, is **LOIS MCMASTER BUJOLD** (July 2015). He is currently Chair of the Science Fiction Foundation. Further information can be found on his website <http://edwardfjames.com/>. His research on SF & Fantasy writers in the Great War can be accessed at his website <http://fantastic-writers-and-the-great-war.com/>. 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

The Birmingham SF Group sent our President, **Brian Aldiss** a Birthday card for his 90th Birthday, signed by members with a cover commissioned from BSFG member and professional artist, **David A Hardy**. A coaster with a copy of the artwork was also sent. The picture included many references to Brian's life and works. It



featured a bookshop (W H Smythe) in honour of his early work as a bookseller and one of his autobiographies (BURY MY HEART AT W H SMITH'S), posters of his books and his image in the shop window, two suns (like the binary star system in the *Helliconia* trilogy) and even the number 90 (for this significant birthday) on the door. The clock tower is based on the one at Birmingham University and by extension represents the Brum Group. Thanks to Dave

Hardy for producing an excellent painting.

David A Hardy is also to be congratulated as he has been selected as the recipient (Artist category) of the American Astronautical Society's "Ordway Award for sustained excellence in Spaceflight History". This new award is in honour of Fred Ordway (who died last year) and was a strong advocate and chronicler of human spaceflight. The award will be on an occasional basis and recognises exceptional and sustained effort.

HUGO AWARDS 2015

The 2015 Hugo Award winners were announced on August 22nd. The ceremony was held in Spokane, Washington at Sasquan (Worldcon 73). It was hosted by David Gerrold and Tananarive

Due. The number of 5950 valid ballots was the highest for any Hugo to date. There were also a record number of “No Awards” presumably as voters preferred this option over voting for a nominee from the “slate” selections organised by the right-wing “Sad Puppies/Rabid Puppies” protest groups.

Best Novel: THE THREE BODY PROBLEM by Cixin Liu, translated by Ken Liu (Tor US)

Best Novella: No Award

Best Novelette: "The Day the World Turned Upside Down" by Thomas Olde Heuvelt, translated by Lia Belt (*Lightspeed* April 2014)

Best Short Story: No Award

Best Related Work: No Award

Best Graphic Story: Ms Marvel Vol 1: No Normal written by G Willow Wilson, illustrated by Adrian Alphona & Jake Wyatt (Marvel Comics)

Best Dramatic Presentation (Long Form): GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY written by James Gunn & Nicole Perlman (Marvel Studios & Moving Picture Company)

Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form): "By Means Which Have Never Yet Been Tried" from *Orphan Black*. Written by Graham Manson Directed by John Fawcett (Temple Street Productions, Space/BBC America)

Best Editor - Short Form: No Award

Best Editor - Long Form: No Award

Best Professional Artist: Julie Dillon

Best Semiprozine: *Lightspeed Magazine* edited by John Joseph Adams, Stefan Rudnicki, Rich Horton, Wendy N Wagner and Christie Yant

Best Fanzine: *Journey Planet* edited by James Bacon, Christopher J Garcia, Colin Harris, Alissa McKersie and Helen J Montgomery

Best Fancast: *Galactic Suburbia Podcast* by Alisa Krasnostein, Alexandra Pierce, Tansy Rayner Roberts (Presenters) and Andrew Finch (Producer)

Best Fan Writer: Laura J Mixon

Best Fan Artist: Elizabeth Leggett

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (not a Hugo):
Wesley Chu

DAVID GEMMELL AWARDS

The 2015 David Gemmell Awards for Fantasy were presented during a ceremony at Nine Worlds Geekfest on the 8th August.

Ravenheart Award (for best cover art): Sam Green for WORDS OF RADIANCE by Brandon Sanderson (Gollancz)

Morningstar Award (for best debut novel): THE EMPEROR'S BLADES by Brian Staveley (Pan Macmillan/Tor)

Legend Award (for best fantasy novel): WORDS OF RADIANCE by Brandon Sanderson (Gollancz)

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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

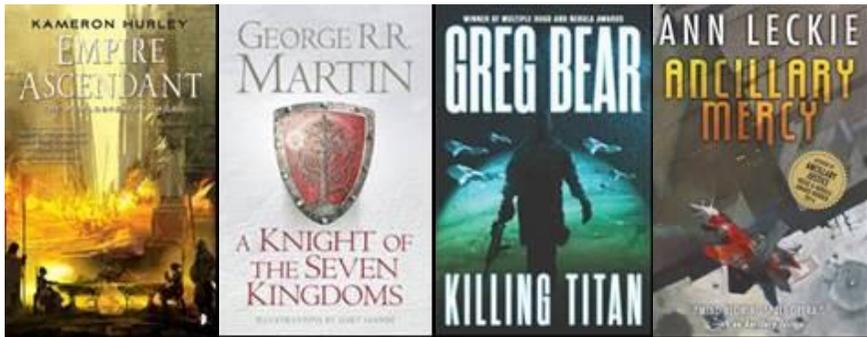


XEELEE: ENDURANCE by Stephen Baxter / Gollancz / 448 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-1473212707 / September 17th. SF. Collection of Xeelee stories including a new novella.

LUNA: NEW MOON by Ian McDonald / Gollancz / 416 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473202238 / September 17th. SF. Five corporate families battle for supremacy in the harsh lunar environment.

THE TRAITOR by Seth Dickinson / Tor / 400 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1447281139 / September 24th. Fantasy. A young woman from a conquered people tries to transform an empire.

THE AERONAUT'S WINDLASS (Cinder Spires 1) by Jim Butcher / Orbit / 640 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0356503653 / September 29th. Steampunk. Humanity shelters in the massive towers of the Spires, connected only by airships.



EMPIRE ASCENDANT (Worldbreaker 2) by Kameron Hurley / Angry Robot / ? pgs / £9.90 paperback / ISBN 978-0857665591 / October 6th. Fantasy. The nation of Dhai is threatened by invaders from another world who share the faces of those they try to destroy.

A KNIGHT OF THE SEVEN KINGDOMS (Song of Ice & Fire Prequel) by George RR Martin / Harper Voyager / 368 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-0007507672 / October 6th. Collection of three novellas set in an earlier time, when the Targaryens still ruled Westeros.

KILLING TITAN (War Dogs 2) by Greg Bear / Gollancz / 304 pgs / £18.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0575133921 / October 8th. Military SF. The moon Titan hides information about the alien “Drifters” and the supposedly benevolent alien “Gurus”.

ANCILLARY MERCY (Imperial Radch 3) by **Ann Leckie** / Orbit / 368 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356502427 / October 8th. SF. Breq tries to protect Athoek's people from the alien Presger and the avatars of the possibly insane ruler of the Radch, Anaander Mianaai.

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

THE VISIT - Release date September 11th. Horror. Strange things happen when two young children visit their grandparents.

THE MARTIAN - Release date September 30th. SF. An astronaut struggles to survive on Mars after being left behind as his crewmates think him dead. *CG*

NEWS IN BRIEF



Comet **67 P** reached perihelion and the Rosetta spacecraft survived and is continuing to send back spectacular images Historian, poet and SF author **Robert Conquest OBE** has died. As an historian he was renowned for his exposes of the horrors of Stalinism. He also published a SF novel, **A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE**

and was a lifelong member (later Fellow) of the British Interplanetary Society, having been recruited by a young Arthur C Clarke Actress **Yvonne Craig** has passed away. She played the role of Barbara Gordon/Batgirl in the 1960's TV *Batman* series and the green Orion slave girl in the original *Star Trek* series. She also appeared in the TV series *My Favorite Martian*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *Land of the Giants* Helsinki has

been announced as the winning host for **Worldcon 75** in 2017. Guests of Honour include John Henri Holmberg, Nalo Hopkinson, Johanna Sinisalo, Claire Wendling and Walter John Williams The Sasquan Committee (Worldcon 2015) have announced special committee awards to **Jay Lake** (the well-respected SF and Fantasy author who died recently after a long battle with cancer) and **Julian May** (author of *The Many Coloured Land* series and many other novels) After the controversy over the organized nominations for this year's Hugo Awards, two new proposed methods of judging nominations have passed the initial stage and will need to pass the final stage at next year's worldcon. Both proposed systems attempt to limit the efficacy of "slate" votes on future Hugo awards The Telluride Institute (in the USA) has announced they are establishing the John Clute Science Fiction Library. The renowned SF critic **John Clute** will give an inaugural address at the Institute in June next year The campaign for reform of the **EU VATMOSS regulations** on digital sales (which has badly affected ebook sales by individual authors and small presses) and spearheaded by **Juliet McKenna**, has set up a Just Giving Page to send a representative to the EU Finance Ministers Meeting in Dublin on the 7th - 9th September. **Rebellion** (parent company of Solaris and Abaddon Books) have generously stepped up and fully funded the goal of £3000. Contributions are still needed towards support costs. (See <https://crowdfunding.justgiving.com/euvataction>) The **Sidewise Awards** for Alternate History have been awarded to Kristine Kathryn Rusch (*THE ENEMY WITHIN*) and Ken Liu ("The Long Haul" in *Clarkesworld* 11/2014) The **Science Fiction Poetry Association** has named two new Poetry Grand Masters, **Marge Ballif** and **Steve Sneyd** The SF novel **LUNA: NEW MOON** (release date September 17th) by Ian McDonald has been optioned by CBS TV studios BBC Two is making a new SF thriller based on **China Mieville's** novel *THE CITY AND THE CITY* A list of the informal names for features discovered on the moon **Charon** by the New Horizons spacecraft include many derived from SF/Fantasy including Skywalker,

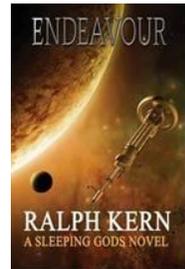
Vader and Ripley Craters, Tardis and Serenity Chasms, Vulcan Planum and Clarke Mons (full map can be seen at <http://pluto.jhuapl.edu/Multimedia/Science-Photos/pics/Charon-Map-Annotated.jpg> NASA's **New Horizons** spacecraft has a new target to aim for following its historic flyby of Pluto. It is called **2014 MU69**, about 1.5 billion beyond Pluto and is about 45 km in diameter. CG

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

SCIENCE FICTION DOUBLE BOOK LAUNCH, 8th September, Birmingham. SF writers Ralph Kern (ENDEAVOUR) and Alex Davis (THE LAST WAR) will be launching their books at Bleakhouse Library, Sandwell at 7:30pm. Admission free. Book at 0121 422 2798 or email bleakhouse_library@sandwell.gov.uk



BOOK BLOGGER BONANZA, 12th September, Birmingham. If you are interested in book blogs, a chance to meet special guests, get advice and network. Waterstones New Street from 7pm. Tickets £5 Tel: 0121 631 4333

SHERLOCK STREET IRREGULARS, 19th September, Walsall. Not SF but may be of interest. A day of Holmes-themed author readings and fun. Southcart Books, 20 Lower Hall Lane, Walsall. WS1 1RL

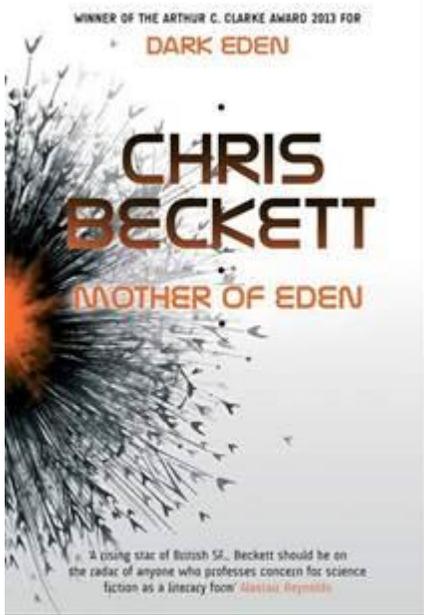
WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE, 22nd September, Birmingham. Stories from the strange desert town of Night Vale. New Alexandra Theatre, £26.40 www.atgtickets.com/venues/new-alexandra-theatre-birmingham/

AN EVENING WITH DAVID MOODY AND WAYNE SIMMONS, 30th October, Birmingham. Horror authors will be answering questions and signing books including Wayne Simmons' new book **VOODOO CHILD** at Waterstones New Street from 7pm. Tel: 0121 631 4333

📖📖📖📖 **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)

MOTHER OF EDEN (Dark Eden 2) by Chris Beckett
Corvus / 400 pgs / £17.99 Hardback / ISBN 978-1782392354
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin



In the first novel in this series, **DARK EDEN** (winner of the 2013 Arthur C Clarke Award (review in #506 November 2013) the author introduced us to the planet of Eden. Eden is a dark planet where life exists in oases of light and warmth fuelled by geothermal energy. The first book told the story of a small human group descended from two marooned astronauts and the schism over remaining at the landing site versus attempting to explore the dark. **MOTHER OF EDEN** is set a substantial number of

years after the events of DARK EDEN and the marooned humans have multiplied and spread into new areas. They have split into various factions (based on the original dispute in DARK EDEN) of which the two largest are known as Davidfolk and Johnfolk.

Starlight Brooking is a young girl from a small group who live traditionally. Seeking excitement, she persuades the group to organise a trading expedition to a distant settlement. Here she meets Greenstone Johnson, the guileless heir to the rich New Earth group. Smitten with each other, they agree to marry and she accompanies him back to his home with very little idea of the vastly different society she will find. New Earth is a very hierarchical and oppressive society with “Big People” and “Little People”. As the highest status woman, she wears Gela’s Ring (Angela, the original marooned astronaut) which is seen as a holy object by many. As she and Greenstone try to improve society, their naïve efforts are resisted by the vested interests of the powerful “Big” families and the “Teachers” (who control literacy and access to written knowledge). Matters come to a climax when Greenstone’s father dies and there is a resulting power struggle.

Chris Beckett is an excellent and intelligent writer who clearly understands the importance of “show not tell”. The strange, beautiful world of Eden is enchantingly portrayed and contrasts well with the ugliness of humanity’s behaviour. His characterisation is superb and I particularly liked that we see the flaws in the ostensible heroes of Starlight and Greenstone. However it is in the story-telling that this novel really excels. This multi-layered novel skilfully incorporates many issues into the narrative without heavy info-dumping or preaching. Whilst it looks carefully at discrimination in many forms, it is in its subtle consideration on how access to and interpretation of history shapes people and society that it is at its most masterful. I also loved that scattered throughout we see how small actions have the potential for large consequences over a long time scale. This is well-paced and eminently readable SF and heartily recommended.

(Review copy kindly donated by Corvus)

CG

TELL NO LIES by John Grant

Alchemy Press / £10.99 paperback / 346 pgs / ISBN: 978-092980931

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan (Abridged)

Story-tellers are good at lies. It is their stock in trade. A good story-teller is able to be convincing while being a master of misdirection. The reader is sucked in to the power of the tale before realising that everything is not how they expected it to be. In some cases this leads to a “groan effect” as a twist is revealed that, although unexpected is provided without the clues that on looking back were present. A subtle bard leaves the reader with a feeling of satisfaction. John Grant belongs to the latter school. Thus it is often difficult to discuss the themes and tropes within his stories without the game away. From this selection of his work it is clear that he is a clever writer. These twelve stories, from a period of ten years from 2004, provide a good showcase for his skill.

A common factor with many of these stories is the first person narrator. In “Q” the narrator is Cello, the Deputy Director of the CIA. She is in post because the president and her boss have been killed in a “terrorist”

attack. That background is just there to put her in the right place for the rest of the story. Part of that is to examine a project her predecessor was involved with; the other part is philosophical concerning the nature of God. It is a lot to unpick in a short story and a reader might well be frustrated by all the things left unsaid.



There is scope here to build the background and make a longer story with more pace. As it stands, it is in stasis.

“Baited Breath” is a total contrast and full of humour. Again there is a first person narrator but the voice is very different. He and his wife, Natalie, discover that they have an infestation of dragons. These are small, mouse-sized dragons but they do breathe fire and they leave fluorescent droppings about the place. They have exactly the same problem as if they were mice - how to get rid of them.

Artists and poets use “found” objects in their work. A glimpse of the unusual can spark off ideas in a story-teller’s mind. “Two-Stroke Toilets” is an example that has generated a science fiction, time-slip story. When the narrator and his wife come to live in a small English village they discover that it has a gateway to the past. Although the narration is straightforward it generates⁹ other issues, suggesting that the nature of time is more complex than most think.

Even Grant’s seemingly frivolous stories have a serious vein running through them which is not always apparent until the end is reached. Children have wild imaginations and the ability to invent imaginary situations which they enter in a way that becomes alien to most adults. “Commander Ginfalcio Beeswax And The Menace From Deneb” is one of these scenarios in which young Harold believes implicitly and the adults humour him - up to a point. A well-crafted story has a turning point at which all our preconceptions change. It may come at any point in the story and in the best ones, it sneaks up on us without us realising it. Grant does it here, and in many of the others included in this volume.

This volume ends with tongue-in-cheek humour. All the title character of “Benjy’s Birthday” birthday wants for his thirteenth, is a universe - the latest must-have for all the kids on the block.

Summing up, Grant likes to use the first person as he can play with the idea of the unreliable witness. It is easier to surprise the reader if the narrator is discovering things at the same time giving the stories a subtlety that using third person might not have.

Many contain an element of the supernatural but the concepts are not too wild for the non-genre reader to appreciate. Not all the stories here will suit all tastes as in some Grant has a tendency to philosophise slowing down the pace with exposition. A volume worth dipping into. PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Alchemy Press)

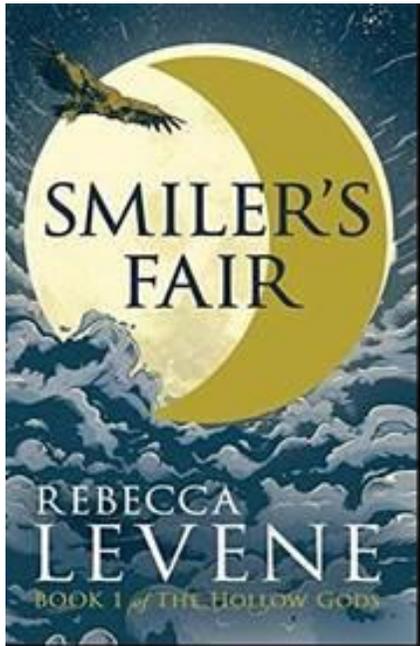
***SMILER'S FAIR* (Hollow Gods 1) by Rebecca Levene**
Hodder / £ 8.99 paperback / 416 pgs / ISBN 978-1444753714
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

Many years ago, the Sun Goddess defeated the Moon God who died. The Moon God's remaining followers were driven mad and exist now as the homicidal and dreaded Worm Men. Destroyed by sunlight, they were forced underground. Permanent

structures or large groups of people attract their attention and they will emerge to create havoc. Adapting to this has meant that most large settlements are now mobile, with large floating towns towed slowly around lakes or travelling groups who settle for

days and then move on at the first death. The eponymous **SMILER'S FAIR** is a large peripatetic carnival that sells all varieties of goods and entertainments. In the story it serves various roles; a home, a meeting place and the location of major events.

At the start of the story, a new-born prince is smuggled away from the father who would kill him to prevent a prophecy. It soon becomes clear that this child will become the re-born Moon god. The main action then takes place some years later as the



child is maturing into manhood. The story is multi-stranded as we get to know various characters including: Krish, (the maltreated goatherd and unknowing prince), Nethmi (married unhappily to seal an alliance), Dae Hyo (a drunken warrior of a decimated tribe), Eric (a young male prostitute) and Rii (a giant sentient bat enslaved by the Sun goddess' acolytes). Their lives and actions gradually move them towards Smiler's Fair, where a hunted Krish will start to come into his powers and moon magic begins to return to the world.

This book is a bit of a "Marmite" book. I am sure that there are many fans of traditional fantasy who will enjoy this. However I struggled with this book. It is easy enough to read and the story flows along at a reasonable pace. I think my difficulties are with the characters, who I found lacked depth. Many of them do bad things, which is not necessarily a problem even for "heroes", but these actions seem to have little emotional effect on them. They felt a little too much like archetypes rather than fully fleshed-out characters. Also, if we are supposed to feel that the Sun Goddess is bad and the Moon God good, then not enough is done to establish where our sympathies should lie. If you want a straightforward unchallenging fantasy then this may suit but I prefer authors who add far more complexity to their characters such as Robin Hobb and her excellent *Farseer* series. *CG*
(Review copy kindly donated by Hodder)

CONVENTIONS

BRISTOLCON, 26th September, Bristol. Guests of Honour Jasper Fforde, Jaine Fenn and Chris Moore. Doubletree Hotel. £25. Details at www.bristolcon.org

FANTASYCON, 23rd - 25th October, Nottingham. Guests of Honour are John Connolly, Jo Fletcher and Brandon Sanderson with Master of Ceremonies Juliet E McKenna. East Midlands Conference Centre & Orchard Hotel. Tickets £75 (non-members of BFS) from <http://fantasycon2015.org/>.

NOVACON 45, 13th - 15th November, Nottingham. Guests of Honour are Anne and Stan Nicholls. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £45. Details at www.novacon.org.uk



SLEDGE-LIT, 21st November, Derby. Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guests of Honour Adam Roberts, Robert Shearman & Alison Moore. Tickets £25 from 01332 290606 or www.derbyquad.co.uk/special-event/sledge-lit

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

October 9th - author **Justina Robson**
November 6th - author **Emma Newman**
December 4th - **Christmas Social**
January 8th - **AGM and Book Auction**
February 12th - **Annual 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