

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

AUGUST 2016

ISSUE 539

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Summer Social Meal 12th August

August is the Summer Social meal and there is no meeting at the Briar Rose. The Black Eagle venue is a change from last year. The Black Eagle has been used in the past for BSFG meals. The meal is booked for 7:45 pm.

As a reminder for those of you attending, the address is The Black Eagle, 16 Factory Road, Hockley, B18 5JU.

If you are travelling by car, the following directions may be helpful. Opposite Villa Road, where it meets the junction of Soho Hill and Soho Road, is St Michaels Road. Go down it then up the other side, now Factory Road. The Black Eagle is a

September 9th - Andromeda 2 has been cancelled. Replacement arrangements for September will be given in the next newsletter.

little way up on the right; it's set back, don't overshoot it.

If travelling by bus, catch the No 74 around the corner from the Square Peg in Old Square, Birmingham and ask for the stop before Villa Road, just before the Sikh Temple. About five minutes out of town the road goes downhill then past a flyover It then goes up the other side of the valley - at the top is a bus stop - you want the stop after this. When you alight walk a little further on to St Michaels Road, turn left then as by car above.

The venue can also be reached by Metro. Catch the Metro in Upper Bull Street, Birmingham. Pay on the Metro itself and ask for Benson Road, Soho. There's also a stop notification board in the carriage. At the exit turn right down Benson Road to the Black Eagle.

SPACE CENTRE VISIT- 20th August - Carol Goodwin

This event will definitely be happening. At the time of going to press, there was only one unsold seat. All of those attending should have received details of the meeting place and times. As a reminder, the coach pickup is from **Colmore Row (OPPOSITE side of the street from the St Philip's Cathedral Park, at the intersection with Church Street)**. This is a short walk from Birmingham Snow Hill railway station. The transport is a Johnsons minibus (driven by a professional driver) whose usual livery is Yellow/Blue and White. The minibus will depart **promptly** at 9:30 am so you need to be there from around 9:15 to 9:20 am. The **return coach** will leave the Space Centre at **4pm** and is estimated to arrive back at Birmingham City Centre around 5:30pm. Lunch is not included although there is a café at the Space Centre. Anyone who has any queries can email me at goodwincd@yahoo.com. Look forward to seeing everyone. *CG*

SEPTEMBER MEETING AT ANDROMEDA 2 - cancelled.

Unfortunately, the planned joint meeting between the Andromeda 2 convention and the Birmingham SF Group will no longer be happening. The Andromeda 2 convention has been cancelled due to low advance ticket sales.

Replacement arrangements for September are still being explored. The Briar Rose has been booked for the usual September

date (September 9th) and further details will be announced in the September newsletter.

NOVEMBER MEETING – FILM NIGHT **Dave Corby**

Thanks to everyone who has replied to my request for nominations for films for our November film night! I have had too many suggestions, so I have narrowed it down to ten, plus one I couldn't resist. Here is the short list:

THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY (2005)

JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH (2008)

SILENT RUNNING (1972)

THE TIME MACHINE (1960)

MINORITY REPORT (2002)

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (2008)

SOLARIS (2002)

THE 5TH ELEMENT (1997)

ATTACK THE BLOCK (2011)

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (1972)

...OR INCEPTION (2010), as I really enjoy it!

If you like to vote for one of these please send me an email at David.Corby@nationalgrid.com or contact another member of the committee - I'll take votes at meetings as well!

Here's looking forward to a fun evening!

DC

WORLD FANTASY AWARD SHORTLIST

The shortlists for the World Fantasy awards have been published. The nominees for Best Novel are given below. Nominees in other categories are listed at www.worldfantasy.org/awards/. The winners will be announced at World Fantasy Con on October 27th - 30th:

THE BURIED GIANT by Kazuo Ishiguro (Faber & Faber)

THE FIFTH SEASON by N K Jemisin (Orbit)

UPROOTED by Naomi Novik (Macmillan)

SAVAGES by K J Parker (Subterranean)

THE CHIMES by Anna Smaill (Sceptre)

A HEAD FULL OF GHOSTS by Paul Tremblay

NEWS IN BRIEF



Jerry Doyle, the actor who was most well-known for his role as Garibaldi in *Babylon 5* has died unexpectedly at the age of 60 Director **Robin Hardy** has died at the age of 86. He was the director of the cult film **THE WICKER MAN** and the lesser known follow-up, **THE WICKER TREE** released in 2011 The recipients of the 2016 **World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Awards** have been announced as **David G Hartwell** (posthumously) an editor and publisher and **Andrzej Sapkowski**, a fantasy author (most famous for *The Witcher* series) The shortlist of nominees for the **David Gemmell Awards** has been announced. Voting is open to anyone and votes can be cast at www.gemmellawards.com until midnight on 19th August. Results will be announced at this year's Fantasycon on 24th September Birmingham SF Group member **Janet Edwards** has a short story published in the new SF anthology **CRISES AND CONFLICTS** (Newcon Press) edited by Ian Whates The Jim Henson (Muppets) Company are to make a film based on **Terry Pratchett's** **THE WEE FREE MEN**. The script will be written by Rhianna Pratchett. Rob Wilkins (Terry's assistant) and Rhianna Pratchett will be executive producers on the project The **Juno spacecraft** successfully achieved orbit around Jupiter on July 4th. It is now in a polar orbit and data are expected to arrive back to earth around mid-August A 1991 US **postage stamp** has been entered into the Guinness Book of Records as the stamp which has travelled furthest. The stamp (which has a picture of Pluto with the captions "Unexplored" was placed on the **New Horizons** spacecraft mission to Pluto and is estimated to have flown more than 5 billion kilometres to date

CG

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

PETE'S DRAGON - Release date August 12th. Remake about an orphaned boy and his best friend, Elliot - a dragon

LIGHTS OUT - Release date August 19th. Horror. Children are terrorised by an entity connected to their mother.

CELL - Release date August 26th. SF. Amidst the apocalyptic chaos after a mysterious mobile phone signal, an artist searches for his son.

MORGAN - Release date September 2nd. A consultant has to decide whether to terminate a laboratory-made artificial being.

DON'T BREATHE - Release date September 9th. Horror. A group of friends break into a wealthy blind man's house. However, it is not the easy robbery they expect. CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



BEYOND THE AQUILA RIFT by Alastair Reynolds / Gollancz / 784 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473219861 / July 21st. A collection of SF short fiction.

NEVERNIGHT by Jay Kristoff / Harper Voyager / 448 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-008179991 / August 11th. Fantasy. A child raised in shadows by a murder cult, plots revenge against her enemies.

OBELISK by Stephen Baxter / Gollancz / 320 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-1473212749 / August 18th. SF. A collection of short stories.

HEART OF GRANITE: Blood and Fire by James Barclay / Gollancz / 416 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473202436 / August 18th. SF. Max is happy as a fighter pilot until he hears something he shouldn't.



IMPACT (Outer Earth 3) by Rob Boffard / Orbit / 496 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356505176 / August 25th. SF. A signal is received from “uninhabitable” Earth. But nothing on Earth is what it seems.

THE LAZARUS WAR: ORIGINS (Bk 3) by Jamie Sawyer / Orbit / 480 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356505497 / August 25th. SF. Soldiers who use simulant bodies have a final mission which is the key to ending the war against the alien Krell.

THE SIXTH WATCH (Night Watch 6) by Sergei Lukyanenko / William Heinemann / 400 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1785150302 / September 1st. Fantasy. Light magician Anton must reunite the mysterious Sixth Watch or all life will end.

CHASING EMBERS by James Bennett / Orbit / 464 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356506647 / September 8th. Urban Fantasy. Ordinary looking Ben Garston's job is to keep secret the mythological creatures that live in the modern city. CG



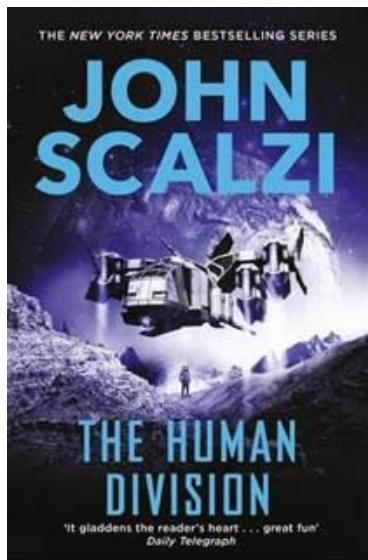
BOOK REVIEWS



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

THE HUMAN DIVISION (Old Man's War 5) by John Scalzi
Tor UK / 493 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1447290476
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The structure of a novel is often more important than the reader realises. Choosing the wrong approach can be a minefield. The reader has to be absorbed by the plot that the framework supports but at the same time, the out of the ordinary can add a dimension. Many novels, especially those written in first person, are linear starting at the beginning and ending... with maybe a flashback or two. Others have complex formats. Experimenting with structure can produce startling effects. **THE HUMAN DIVISION** doesn't quite do this but the unconventional structure fits the book well.



In the first book in this series, **OLD MAN'S WAR**, we were introduced to an interesting concept. At the age of seventy-five, you could join the army. So, after having a good life on Earth and whatever the state of your health, you were promised a brand new, young body. The only set-backs were that it was green and you had to fight aliens. Most recruits died. If you survived ten years you got the chance to become a colonist. It was a tempting offer that many took. Since then, things have changed. Many of the alien races have got together to form the Conclave and put a stop to colonisation and human expansionism. The Colonial Union, made up of the human colonised planets, isn't happy with this development. Earth is not happy either. Having discovered that the Union has deliberately kept

advanced technology from the home planet, they are not going to allow the Union to recruit any more soldiers or colonists. As a result, the weapon in the arsenal is diplomacy.

THE HUMAN DIVISION is structured as thirteen separate episodes, each one of which can be read as a separate short story but need to be taken in the order laid out in the book. The whole has the feel of a novel as each episode progresses the story. The main human characters are Harry Wilson, who, although a technician is one of the Union's green-skinned soldiers. He is assigned to the *Clarke*, a 'civilian' ship that is transport to the team of Ambassador Abumwe. Her deputy and Harry's friend is Hart Schmidt. This team are regarded as a B-team, usually given low-priority ambassadorial missions but when another negotiating team is unexpectedly destroyed, they are drafted in to a crisis that could become a severe diplomatic incident. Failure to solve the problem could mean war.

Not all the episodes are from the point of view of members of this team, who prove themselves increasingly adept at getting results under pressure, but each one adds something to the overall picture. Even if the characters do know the exact nature of the climactic events, the reader will have a better notion, having gained an overview.

The book is cleverly drafted and each episode would easily fit within an anthology or magazine. The whole is an enjoyable read.

It should perhaps be noted that the book also contains two short stories, one of which takes place before the start of the novel.

(Review copy kindly donated by Tor)

PM

SOUTH by **Frank Owen**

Corvus / 407 pgs / £12.99 trade paperback / ISBN 978-1782399612

Reviewed by Jim Pearce

SOUTH is a saga of the end of the Southern American states and is set in a world where there is and never was a USA. Just the Northern and Southern states, no unification, in fact that is a dirty word to the Southerners who when asked would tell you that a common currency is unification enough. But the Northerners disagree. Eventually there is a referendum. All inhabitants have to return to their home states and vote. However, knowing that they cannot win this referendum the Northerners delay declaring the

result and secretly build a dividing wall. This starts a civil war which drags on for many years and is effectively ended when the North unleashes a series of windborne viruses attempting genocide. Thirty years later the viruses keep on coming and to the few southern survivors the wind is to be feared as it brings disease and death.



SOUTH vividly describes the horror of life in this harsh, disease-ridden and devastated land following the brothers Garrett and Dyce Jackson as they flee the brutal vigilante law-enforcing clan, the ‘Callahans’. These are led by the vindictive Tye. One night while sheltering from the wind they meet up and join forces with a young woman, Vida, who is on a secret quest of her own. Standing out among other brilliantly described

supporting characters is Felix, a reclusive weatherman.

SOUTH is one of those books that seem to start indifferently but quietly and gently it firmly sets its hooks into you and turns out to be an absorbingly excellent read. It is to be commended.

Frank Owen is the pseudonym for two authors - Diane Awerbuck and Alex Latimer. Diane’s debut novel **GARDENING AT NIGHT** won the 2004 Commonwealth Writers Best First Book Prize. Alex Latimer is an award winning writer and illustrator whose books have been translated into several languages. *JTP*

(Review copy kindly donated by Atlantic Corvus Books)

OCCUPY ME by Tricia Sullivan

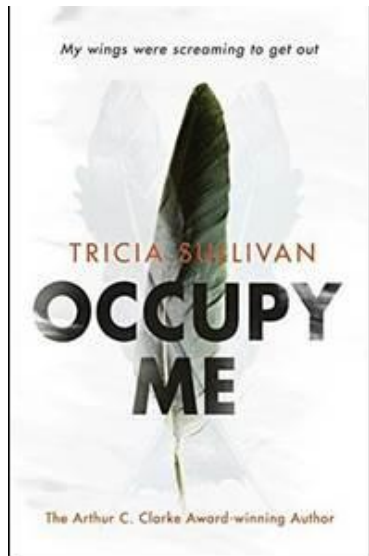
Gollancz / 265 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN: 978-1473212961

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Tricia Sullivan is an Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning author. Unlike some awards that are decided by popular vote, this one chooses the winner by a panel of peers, reviewers and enthusiasts, people who know something about good writing. They don’t only look for books

that are well written, they also want to find books that push at the boundaries of Science Fiction. Any genre that does not do this either stagnates or dies; the western is a thing of the past and the traditional romance is predictable. To keep a genre vibrant, authors need to work at the cutting edge. That doesn't mean that everyone will like or understand what they do.

To encapsulate the plot will make it sound mundane. This book is anything but. It begins with an appendix to the instructions for an HD waveform launcher. Instantly, the reader is wrong-footed because it is unclear what this device is though it turns out to be integral to everything else that happens. Don't, however, expect clear explanations. Writing in the second person is rare though some novelists have done so to great effect. Sullivan uses it to good effect when Kisi Sorle is the viewpoint character. He is an orthopaedic surgeon who has been persuaded to care for the very wealthy Austin Stevens during his dying days. He is hoping the remuneration will enable him to build clinics in his home country of Kuè. Except that his body has been hijacked. There are spaces in his memory when another persona takes control. So he doesn't know where the briefcase that he suddenly finds in his possession comes from.



First person passages are from the point of view of Pearl. Her first recollection of arriving on Earth is the inside of a derelict fridge. She, though, is an angel. Well she has wings which are mostly not in this dimension. Pearl is not what most people would expect an angel to be like. She becomes part of the Resistance. What they are resisting is entropy and they do it with small kindnesses. A brush of her invisible feathers can soothe, which makes her an ideal air steward. Except for the time when Kisi is on her flight and she

recognises his briefcase as hers. There are also third person passages. And a pteranadon.

Confused? Don't despair. The central plot concerns the briefcase, what it is, what it does, who owns it and who can open it. There is also an element of corporate greed.

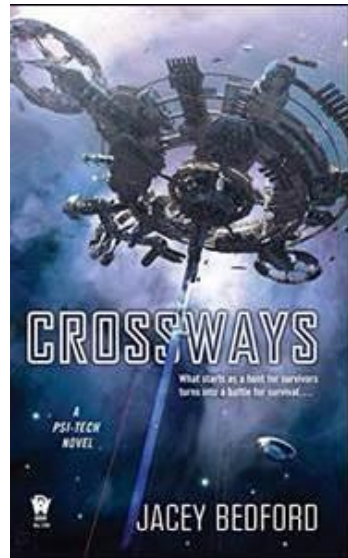
This is the kind of book that will cause many readers to give up but it is well worth persevering with. It doesn't quite matter if you don't understand everything, it is more a case of following the drift. This is a book for the discerning reader who likes a challenge. *PM (Review copy kindly donated by Orion Gollancz)*

***CROSSWAYS (Psi-Tech 2)* by Jacey Bedford**

Daw Books / 544 pgs / £6.03 paperback / ISBN 978-0756410179

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

In the first book in the series (EMPIRE OF DUST) the reader was introduced to an economy dependent on the "gates" (which control access to "fold space") for most travel between solar systems. The gates need Platinum to work and this along with most other resources is controlled by the ruthless mega-corporations. When the planet of Olyanda is discovered to have substantial deposits of Platinum, the fledgling colony and the accompanying Psi-Techs (people with technologically enhanced mental abilities) are an inconvenience to be eliminated.



In the second book, the remaining survivors of Olyanda have outmanoeuvred the mega-corporation and have negotiated a deal for refuge on the crimelord-run station of Crossways. However, they are still in danger because of their control of Olyanda's Platinum and their possession of evidence of mega-corporation corruption. The two most powerful mega-corporations co-operate in an attempt to eliminate both the Olyandans and the Crossways station, whose independence has become a major irritant. In their attempts to survive and also rescue missing colonists and family, the Psi-Techs

are forced to take more risks in the strange world of foldspace. In doing so they uncover more about the nature of foldspace. This offers them a potential opportunity to outwit their persecutors but at the same time introduces new dangers.

The second book in a trilogy can be the most difficult to write well. The author has to balance having an interesting story with the necessity of setting things up for the final volume. In this book, Jacey Bedford has succeeded excellently and yet again I thoroughly enjoyed her storytelling. She is still exceptional at characterisation; the two main protagonists (Ben and Cara) are competent, likeable and credible. This ability also shows in the “villain”, Crowder as he is not just a cardboard baddie – we see some of his self-justifications for his actions so he does not regard himself as evil. The story development is logical given the events of the first book (something often lacking in sequels) and is well-paced building to an exciting confrontation at the climax. If you like intelligent space opera, I thoroughly recommend this series and look forward to the final book NIMBUS.

CG

(Review copy kindly donated by the author)

ONCE BITTEN edited by Steve Lewis

Knightwatch Press / 213 pgs / Kindle edition £2.55, £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1515345657

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Too many authors have been asked, by non-writers, where their inspiration comes from. There is never just one answer. It can be from anything – a piece of music, an overheard conversation, a newspaper report. Many will tell you that writing is about hard work rather than inspiration, but the initial spark, the starting point has to come from somewhere. In the case of this volume, the starting point was the art work. Theresa Derwin, the instigator of *Once Bitten*, saw the painting by Stephen Cooney and thought it would make the ideal cover for a horror anthology. The fifteen stories that finally ended up between the covers all have a theme of love or obsession. There is a very fine line between the two, and there is always a problem when the object of desire doesn't return the affection.

The two stories that are most memorable in this volume are ‘Housebound’ by Jacob Prytherch and ‘Mama’s Boy’ by Steven

Chapman. In the first, Tom Harper is the object of desire and she is very jealous. He cannot leave his house. All his groceries are ordered online. It is the house itself which loves him, and will kill intruders to keep him. The second has similarities. In this case it is Roger, a postman, who is the prisoner, but he is being kept in the basement by a woman who treats him as though he were her baby.

In some stories, the obsession doesn't always become apparent until the end as in 'Paper Frog' by Martin Nike. A meeting on the train between Donald and Suzy develops nicely especially as he realises that she can read minds. The other significant characters are well drawn but the end of this particular story is disappointingly rushed and confused.



The brief for these stories didn't confine the writer to contemporary horror and SF and fantasy scenarios have been exploited. 'To The End Of Love' by Elle Joyce is a future setting where civilisation has suddenly broken down. There is no explanation but none is needed. In fleeing from an exploitative man, Gina

falls, literally, into a safe house. Marax is willing to keep her safe in exchange for experiences he cannot otherwise have via the use of a drug. Here, both the drug and love are addictive. It is a well-executed piece of writing. 'Love Bites' by Nic Martin is also set in a civilisation which is disintegrating. When Tom is bitten on the way home from shopping he becomes ill and Deb loves him too much to carry out the necessary mercy stroke the media tells her she ought. These stories, despite similarities, have strengths in different areas and are good counterpoints to each other.

'Oblivion Is The Sweetest Word' by John R Fultz is the only story that actually uses the cover image as the focus. It is a fantasy in which Taizo the thief is promised great riches to acquire the venom of the sacred spiders of Ghoth. He falls in love with one of the local

girls, a love that is doomed by tradition and by what he later discovers. Not only does it match the cover but it is also well crafted.

Myth is always a good source for stories. Unfortunately, too many are just retellings without adding anything to the myth. No so in the case of 'Thrill Of The Chase' by N O A Rawle. It starts shakily but gains strength as the narrator gains confidence. It works on the premise that there are monsters living amongst us, in this case a lamia. She wants to fit in to human society but her true nature is always likely to surface.

The eight other stories all have something that gives them a touch of originality. Not all of them are brilliantly executed - they may start heavily and improve towards the end, or do not have clear enough endings. Ambiguity is fine in a story, so is surrealism but confusion lets it down.

All the stories have a horrific or macabre element to them and if you enjoy that kind of story, there will be something here to like.

PM

(Review copy kindly donated by KnightWatch Press)

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

NOTE: Waterstones Birmingham have kindly agreed to a 50% discount on any of their events for Brum Group members. Just tell them you are a member when booking your place.

MIDDLE EARTH WEEKEND, 4th - 5th September, Birmingham. Family friendly event celebrating JRR Tolkien and his works. Includes music, arts and crafts, historical re-enactments etc. at Sarehole Mill, Hall Green. Free entry (£2 car park). Charge for the Mill. Details at <http://middleearthfestival.co.uk/>

GOLLANCZ FESTIVAL, 17th - 18th September, Online and London. Gollancz and Foyles present genre fiction festival

combining panels, signings, readings etc at Foyles Charing Cross Road with digital author events both featuring various SF and Fantasy authors. Three separate panel events each costing £15. Further details and booking at www.foyles.co.uk/Gollancz-Festival Tel: 0207 8512400. Digital events see www.gollanczfest.co.uk

CHRIS HADFIELD VISIT, 13th October, Leicester. At Leicester Space Centre - Q & A with astronaut Chris Hadfield. Prices from £30 (inc space centre admission), £60 with dinner. Details at www.spacecentre.co.uk/

CONVENTIONS & EXHIBITIONS

(Thanks to Dave Lally for information on 2017 London exhibits)

NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 12th - 14th August, London. Multi-media con with strong literature strand. Tickets £100 at <https://nineworlds.co.uk/>

FANTASYCON BY THE SEA, 23rd - 25th September, Scarborough. Guests of Honour Adam Nevill, Frances Hardinge, Scott Lynch, James Smythe, Elizabeth Bear & Mike Carey. At the Grand and Royal Hotels. Tickets £50 + £35 Awards Banquet. <http://fantasyconbythesea.com>

BRISTOLCON, 29th October, Bristol. Guests of Honour Ken MacLeod, Sarah Pinborough and Fangorn. Doubletree Hotel. £20. Details at www.bristolcon.org

NOVACON 46, 11th - 13th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour is Juliet McKenna. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £46. Details at www.novacon.org.uk

SLEDGE-LIT, 26th November, Derby. Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guests of Honour Justina Robson & Stephen Volk (novelist & screenwriter). Tickets £25 www.derbyquad.co.uk/special-event/sledge-lit

ROBOTS: 500 years of Humanoid Robots, 8th February - 3rd September. Major exhibition at the Science Museum, London. £15 at www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/visitmuseum/plan_your_visit/exhibitions/robots

INNOMINATE (EASTERCON), 14th - 17th April 2017, **Birmingham**. Guests of Honour are Pat Cadigan, Judith Clute and Colin Harris. To be held at the Hilton Metropole, NEC, Birmingham. Membership £60 at www.eastercon2017.uk/home

INTO THE UNKNOWN: A JOURNEY THROUGH SCIENCE FICTION, 2nd June - 1st September 2017, **London**. Major exhibition at the Barbican Centre. Includes original manuscripts by Jules Verne and others, music, film and art. Details still to follow.
www.barbican.org.uk/news/artformnews/art/into-the-unknown-a-journey-throu

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

August 20th - **Leicester Space Centre visit**

September 9th - **Andromeda 2 cancelled - new details tba**

October 14th - astronomer and lecturer **Andy Lound**

November 4th - **Film night**

December 2nd - **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