

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

SEPTEMBER 2016

ISSUE 540

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WEBSITE:

www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk/

FACEBOOK:

www.facebook.com/groups/BirminghamSFGGroup/

EMAIL:

bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk

TWITTER:

@BirminghamSF

SF Film Discussion 9th September

Because the joint Andromeda 2 BSFG meeting was cancelled at quite a late date, obtaining a replacement speaker has proved

difficult. A “best of” discussion evening has therefore been arranged, a format that has proved very popular several times in the past, so much so that they have had to be drawn to a close at around 10 pm to allow participants to refresh themselves. The evening will revolve around determining the best five SF films of all time.

There will be a prize for one lucky winner so please come ready for the fray armed with your suggestions.



October 14th - Astronomer Andy Lound will be talking about “Pluto and the Outer Worlds”.

The meeting will take place in the conference room on the first floor of The Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, off New Street.

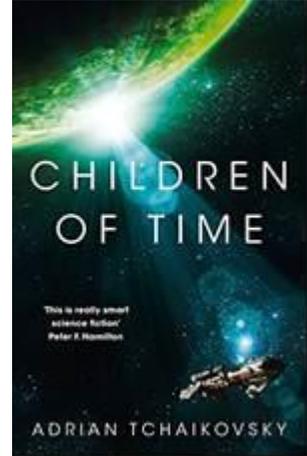
The doors open at 7.30pm and the meeting will normally commence at 8.00pm so please arrive early, get your drinks from the bar on the ground floor, and be seated in plenty of time. The entrance fee for our January AGM is free and the August and December socials are ticket only events. All other meetings the entrance fee is £3 for members and £4 for non-members.

ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD

The winner of the 30th Arthur C Clarke Award has been announced as **CHILDREN OF TIME** by **Adrian Tchaikovsky** (Tor). The award was held at Foyles bookshop in London. Sir Arthur C Clarke's niece, Angie Edwards was present and led a toast to his memory. The winner received a cheque for £2016.

In the novel, Kern's World was terraformed and seeded with life in the final days before human civilisation tore itself apart. Two thousand years later the ark ship *Gilgamesh* is heading back, desperate to find a new home for humanity. However, the ancient "uplift" project has continued working and Kern's World is now home to a civilisation of intelligent spiders. Which of the Children of Earth will survive and inherit the new Eden? This novel was reviewed in the November issue (#530) of the newsletter and highly recommended.

It was announced that from next year, **self-published novels** will also be eligible for consideration. It was also announced that the Clarke Award is partnering with **Ada Lovelace Day** (assisted by SF author, Anne Charnock) to celebrate the achievements of women in STEM. A new award, the **Nommo Award for African SF and speculative fiction** is to be instituted, thanks to Geoff Ryman and Tade Thomson. It was also announced that there are plans for a **Clarke conference** in 2017, organised by the Award Chair, Andrew Butler.



CG

HUGO AWARDS 2016

The 2016 Hugo Award winners were announced on August 20th. The ceremony was held in Kansas City at MidAmericon II (Worldcon 74).

Best Novel: THE FIFTH SEASON by N K Jemisin (Orbit)

Best Novella: BINTI by Nnedi Okorafor (Tor.com)

Best Novelette: "Folding Beijing" by Hao Jingfang (*Uncanny* 1-2, 2015)

Best Short Story: "Cat Pictures Please" by Naomi Kritzer (*Clarkesworld*, 1, 2015)

Best Related Work: No Award

Best Graphic Story: THE SANDMAN: OVERTURE written by Neil Gaiman, illustrated by J H Williams III (*Vertigo*)

Best Dramatic Presentation (Long Form): THE MARTIAN

Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form): "AKA Smile" from *Jessica Jones*.

Best Editor - Short Form: Ellen Datlow

Best Editor - Long Form: Sheila E Gilbert

Best Professional Artist: Abigail Larson

Best Semiprozine: *Uncanny Magazine*

Best Fanzine: File 770

Best Fancast: No Award

Best Fan Writer: Mike Glyer

Best Fan Artist: Steve Stiles

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (not a Hugo): Andy Weir

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kenny Baker, the actor who was most well-known as the man inside R2-D2 in the first six *Star Wars* films has died. He also appeared in *WILLOW*, *TIME BANDITS* and *LABYRINTH*. Actor **Gene Wilder** has died at the age of 83, from complications due to Alzheimer's disease. He played the role of Willy Wonka in the children's fantasy film



WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY and starred in many Mel Brooks films including YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN The 2018 Worldcon has been awarded to San Jose, California. Guests of Honour will be Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and Spider Robinson **George R R Martin** also announced his **Alfie Awards** (named after Alfred Bester) for those who would have won Hugo's in the absence of slate voting. They included Best Fancast to former BSFG guest, **Emma Newman** and Special Committee Award to *Locus* magazine. See www.locusmag.com/News/2016/08/2016-alfie-awards/ There were also **Retro Hugos for 1941**. Best novel was *SLAN* by **A E Van Vogt** and "Robbie" by **Isaac Asimov** won best short story. Details at www.locusmag.com/News/2016/08/1941-retro-hugo-awards-winners/ A collection of 33 stories, some poems and essays all based on notes from the estate of Birmingham author **Joel Lane** will be launched at FantasyCon in September. Titled SOMETHING REMAINS, the book will be published by Alchemy Press and has been edited by Peter Coleborn and BSFG member, **Pauline Morgan** (under the name of Pauline Dungate) Astronomers have discovered an Earth size planet in the so-called "Goldilocks" zone where liquid water could occur, orbiting around Proxima Centauri, which is the closest star to our own Solar System. *CG*

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

KUBO AND THE TWO SPRINGS - Release date September 9th. Animation. Fantasy about a young boy searching for lost magical armour.

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH - Release date September 9th. Re-release of the 1976 SF film starring the late David Bowie.

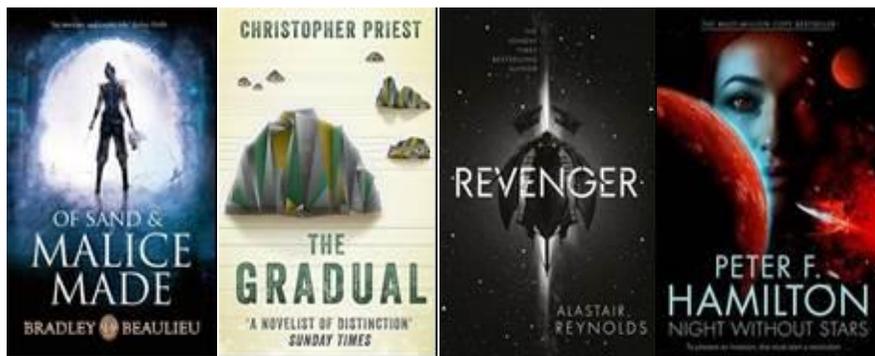
BLAIR WITCH - Release date September 15th. Horror. James and friends head to the haunted woods after finding a video of his lost sibling.

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS – Release date September 23rd. SF. In a dystopian future, a teacher embarks on a journey with a special young girl.

MISS PEREGRINE'S HOME FOR PECULIAR CHILDREN – Release date September 30th. A boy follows clues to a hidden home for children with special powers. CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



OF SANDS AND MALICE MADE by Bradley Beaulieu / Gollancz / 240 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473218451 / September 8th. Fantasy. Successful Pit-fighter, White Wolf battles to save her life and soul from a monstrous desert predator.

THE GRADUAL by Christopher Priest / Gollancz / 352 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473200548 / September 15th. Musician from a fascist state is sent on a cultural tour of the Dream Archipelago.

REVENGER by Alastair Reynolds / Gollancz / 432 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575090538 / September 15th. SF. Captain Rackamore and his crew search for lost technology amongst the ruins of ancient civilisations.

NIGHT WITHOUT STARS (Chronicle of the Fallers 2) by Peter F Hamilton / Macmillan / 750 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-

0230769496 / September 22nd. SF. Bienvenido planet has escaped the Void, but humans continue to fight the body-snatching Fallers for control of their world.



***THE RISE OF IO* by Wesley Chu** / Angry Robot / 352 pgs / £11.57 paperback / ISBN 978-0857665829 / October 4th. SF. A thief must help solve murders with the help of the alien who shares her body.

***THE HIDDEN PEOPLE* by Alison Littlewood** / Jo Fletcher Books / 384 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1848669901 / October 6th. When Lizzie Higgs is burned to death as a changeling, her cousin travels to her superstition-filled village to investigate.

***DAUGHTER OF EDEN (Dark Eden 3)* by Chris Beckett** / Corvus / 400 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1782392392 / October 6th. SF. Hostilities between the groups stranded on the dark planet of Eden erupt into war.

***BRIDGING INFINITY* edited by Jonathan Strahan** / Solaris / 400 pgs / £9.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781084182 / October 8th. SF. Anthology with a theme of large scale structures such as Dyson spheres, rebuilt planets, terraformed landscapes etc CG

📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

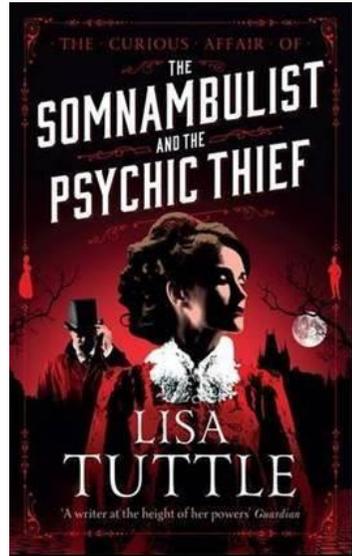
(REVIEWERS please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at goodwinced@yahoo.com **Deadline** for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE SOMNAMBULIST AND THE PSYCHIC THIEF by Lisa Tuttle

Jo Fletcher Books / 408 pgs / £16.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1784299806

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

The Victorian era has a fascination for many writers, and readers. Like now, it was a period of great change, when a different kind of technology was spreading at an enormous rate through society. Then, as now, some embraced it in its totality, others thought the reshaping of the world was going too fast, and were reluctant to consider the implications. Looking back can be a means of making sense of the present. Some mainstream authors travel into the dark underworld of crime, whereas genre writers have invented a whole new scenario, that of Steampunk, where Victorian era science and technology is taken to the ultimate extremes.



Lisa Tuttle's *THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE SOMNAMBULIST AND THE PSYCHIC THIEF* has elements of the former but adds touches of fantasy. The novel begins with Aphrodite Lane making a hurried exit from Scotland. She had been there with a friend at the behest of the Society for Psychical Research (a real and continuing organisation), to investigate a haunted house. She leaves because she discovers that her friend is faking evidence. Arriving back in London, she had a dilemma. In 1893, a lone woman with little money would be in need of a job and lodgings. She had neither but by chance she comes on an advertisement in a newsagents of a detective requiring an assistant. To her surprise and delight, she not only gets the job but a room and board in the house of her employer, Jasper Jespersion.

Their big break comes almost by accident. The household is running short of money so Jespersion goes to talk with the landlord

who agrees to give them more time to pay the rent if they will solve the problem of his sleep-walking son-in-law. In the meantime, there have been some inexplicable burglaries and then, Gabrielle Fox, the woman whose behaviour caused Miss Lane to leave Scotland, arrives to hire them. She is concerned that several genuine mediums have disappeared. Yes, there are people with genuine psychic powers in this version of Victorian London, unfortunately, there are more fakes than the genuine article. Gabrielle does not want her new protégé to suffer the same fate.

Tuttle has caught the manners and ideals of the era of her setting but her characters are all from the middle and higher echelons of society. There is no attempt to delve into the dark underbelly of the city. This is a genteel novel as crime is just as rife amongst the privileged though their motives are different. Jesperson and Lane are very likeable characters who are well counterpointed by Miss Fox and friends.

This is a welcome addition to the historical crime genre and the inclusion of mesmerism and stage magic add the touch of fantasy that Tuttle's readers have come to expect. It is not overdone so should keep the general crime aficionado on board for the climax. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

PM

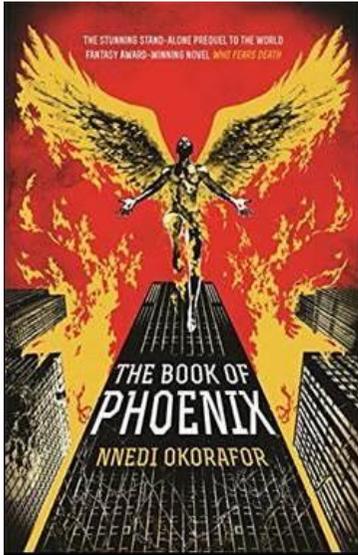
(Review copy kindly donated by Jo Fletcher Books)

THE BOOK OF PHOENIX by Nnedi Okorafor

Hodder & Stoughton / 240 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473617940

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

I had high hopes for this book before starting to read it. Firstly, it was on the shortlist for this year's Clarke Award for the best SF novel which hopefully indicates a degree of quality. Secondly, with a Nigerian American author, I anticipated a distinctive and potentially unusual perspective which is something I usually appreciate. Unfortunately, I was severely disappointed and really struggled to even finish the book.



This is the story of Phoenix, a black woman who is an “accelerated organism”. She is the result of genetic engineering, held captive in Tower 7 and subjected to ongoing and painful testing. There are other test subjects there, all of whom are non-Caucasian. When the man she loves apparently dies, she uses her abilities to escape and then embarks on a quest for revenge which ultimately ends with her devastating the whole world.

I have two major problems with this book, Firstly, I don’t think it is science fiction. The story reads more like a fairy story or fable, which is clearly deliberate and includes mystical elements such as the giant Backbone tree and its seed which she replants back in Africa. Phoenix has abilities to match her name; her body temperature can be raised until she burns everything around her, when she dies she is reborn (even if her body has been destroyed), and she can fly. There is no attempt to provide any scientific plausibility to these abilities and the Phoenix character is more like a comic book superhero (or more accurately super-villain).

My second problem is with the narrative of the book itself. The book is clearly intended as an angry polemic about racism. That in itself is fine but the book lacks subtlety and characters are very much good or evil with little middle ground. I recognise that many of the issues raised are real and important, but having every white person as evil and the only effective response to these issues as violence (with Phoenix showing callous indifference to large scale collateral damage) does them a disservice. There is little if any depth of characterisation and the story is advanced by implausible but convenient “helpers” or a new ability. At every point where Phoenix needs help or information there is “magically” just the right person available, ranging from the Ethiopian couple who feed and shelter her when she first escapes to finding a convenient congressman (who

also happens to be the only black congressman in the government) who provides them with security clearance and false papers whenever required. While some might claim that the above issues are intentional and the book is intended as satirical, other books deal far more effectively with the issues raised and with far better writing. In short, I found this a thoroughly unpleasant book to read and would not recommend it. CG

(Review copy kindly donated by Hodder & Stoughton)

NOW WE ARE TEN: Celebrating the First Ten Years of NewCon Press edited by Ian Whates

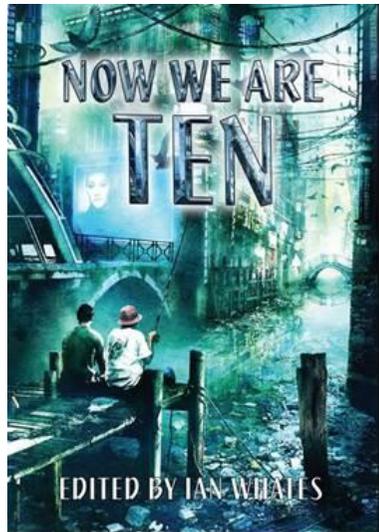
NewCon Press / 268 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1910935194

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin

This anthology was released in July this year and (as implied in its subtitle) was issued to celebrate the 10th anniversary of NewCon Press. In the harsh world of independent press companies, to successfully survive for 10 years is a rare achievement. Indeed, NewCon Press has not only survived but has received many awards for the quality of the fiction it has published.

Whilst many anthologies contain mostly collected stories which have been previously published elsewhere (with a few new stories as an enticement) all the stories in this book have been specifically written for this volume. Anyone familiar with the British SF/Fantasy field will recognise many of the authors in this collection, such as Peter F Hamilton, Jaine Fenn, Eric Brown and Ian McDonald etc although it also includes excellent stories by some less recognised but quality writers.

The anthology includes both SF and Fantasy stories with a loose theme of 10, which leaves plenty of room for significant variety



between the stories. In my opinion, this is one of its strengths as too restrictive or narrow a theme can result in too many similar stories which can leave a reader dissatisfied. This is most definitely not the case here.

The first story, “The Final Path” by Genevieve Cogman is an enjoyable story where adults trying to shield their children from dangers outside their walls fail to see the seductive menace infiltrating via the children’s computer games. Whilst not wholly convinced of its plausibility, I did like the structure and the role-playing games (RPG) elements.

“Women’s Christmas” by Ian McDonald is a wonderful observational piece about five sisters who meet up every Epiphany (or Women’s Christmas which apparently is a real festival) and consider their aunt who emigrated to the moon and has financed them all. In a short story it covers a lot about the gulf (both physical and emotional) between those who leave and those who stay behind and this emotional content gives it true heart.

“Pyramid” by Nancy Kress takes a little while to get into but it repays patience as the reader slowly realises it is a very clever allegory about writing, in particular SF/Fantasy. Identifying the references and metaphors in this story was a large part of its appeal to me and will be to many readers.

“Liberty Bird” by Jaine Fenn is ostensibly about privileged families racing space yachts for prestige, but also addresses multiple issues such as duty versus desire, having the courage to defy society’s expectations and the hope for change.

“Zanzara Island” by Rachel Armstrong is set in a near-future polluted Venice and has themes related to biotechnology. However, I found it confusing and hard to follow the narrative or discern the “message” of the story.

Eric Brown is one of my all-time favourite writers and in contrast to the last story, I was thoroughly entertained by his story, “Ten Sisters”. It concerns clones raised as spare parts for a rich businesswoman but they have their own ideas about that! It is clever, witty and amusing and has a plot consistent with the personalities of the participants.

“Licorice” by Jack Skillings has an unreliable narrator, so that the reader is never quite sure whether the protagonist could be a creator of universes or merely mentally ill and deluded. Unreliable narrator stories are not my favourite type of story and whilst competent, this story left me not particularly concerned about the reality or otherwise of the conclusion.

“How to Grow Silence from Seed” by Tricia Sullivan is a complex story which I think will really divide readers. It is a story which brims with ideas, which some people will love, but it throws the reader in at the deep end with little explanation and the constant new and hard to follow concepts can distract from following the central narrative. Although it didn’t quite work for me, I would not be surprised to see it as a great favourite of other readers.

“The Time Travellers’ Ball” by Rose Biggins is a story in 10 words only. With so little room for manoeuvre, it is very much to the author’s credit that she writes a very clever and amusing little story.

“Dress Rehearsal” by Adrian Tchaikovsky tells of a theatre company which travels across dimensions and the perils in an extra tenth performance. It is nicely plotted and atmospheric, where the reader knows that something is not right but the reveal is nicely concealed.

“The Tenth Man” by Bryony Pierce is another competent story, which reminded me of old magazine stories. There is a “mad scientist” locked up in an asylum who may have multiple personality disorder or be possessed by personalities from different universes. Whilst a little predictable, it was still amusing.

“Rare as a Harpy’s Tear” by Neil Williamson is a fantasy story told in 10 tears. Based on Arabian mythology, I really loved the use of language and vocabulary in this story. There is a very effective slow build-up of information and emotion and the reader really sympathises with the aching sadness of the “monster” in the story.

“Utopia+10” by J A Christy was about a man’s urge to provide food in a polluted world but was one that I just did not find particularly entertaining.

The next two stories “Ten Love Songs to Change the World” by Peter F Hamilton and “Ten Days” by Nina Allan both deal with time travel. I like the concept of the first story where certain people

can only travel back mentally so it is their conversations/ideas that can change the past. The second is more traditional, where a woman tries to travel back in time to save a woman wrongly hanged for murder. It is a well-written story but did not hook me particularly on an emotional level.

The final story in the collection is “Front Row Seat to the End of the World” by E J Swift. I am a fan of E J Swift’s *Osiris Project* trilogy and here again she shows her excellent writing skills. When there are only ten days till the certain destruction of the Earth, in the tradition of Nevil Shute’s *ON THE BEACH* it expertly observes how ordinary people might react and focuses on whether a mother can heal the rift with her estranged daughter.

In summary, this is an outstanding collection of stories. There are some superb stories which I fully expect to see on award lists and whilst not everything is to my personal taste, (nor do I ever expect it to be in an anthology) there is a much higher than normal percentage of stories of first-rate quality. Its diverse range is a major strength and provides a splendid introduction if needed to some skilled contemporary SF/Fantasy authors.

CG

(Review copy kindly donated by NewCon 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/>

BIG COMFY LITERATURE FESTIVAL, 9th - 11th September, Coventry. Many authors/panels including Dom Russell “Martian, Morlocks and Selenites: A rampage through Victorian Science Fiction”. Big Comfy Bookshop, Fargo Village, Far Gosford Street, CV1 5ED. Details at www.facebook.com/events/990963024285218/

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 online 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

PETER HAMILTON and ALASTAIR REYNOLDS, 26th September, Birmingham and Nottingham Signing only at Waterstones High Street 12 - 1 pm. Free. No Booking. Call 0121 631 4353, or ask instore.

Also In conversation at Waterstones Nottingham 7 pm. £3. Call 0115 947 0069 or ask instore.

CONVERSATION WITH MIKE CAREY, 9th October, Birmingham. Talks about his writing and the making of THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS film. Part of Birmingham Literature Festival, Studio Theatre, Library of Birmingham. 6 - 7pm. £8. Book: 0121 245 4455 or at www.birmingham-box.co.uk/event/in-conversation-with-mike-carey/

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW, 10th - 15th October, Birmingham. Rock and Roll Horror musical comedy. New Alexandra Theatre. www.atgtickets.com/venues/new-alexandra-theatre-birmingham/ £17.90 - 52.40

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/

INTO THE NARROWS with JAMES BROGDEN, 15th October, Birmingham. Local fantasy author James Brogden talks about writing and getting published. Part of Birmingham University Book to the Future, Venue **tba.** 2 - 3pm. Free - limited spaces. Book at www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/colleges/artslaw/events/btff/2016/james-brogden-register.aspx

AN EVENING WITH CHRIS BECKETT, 25th October, Birmingham. Author will be discussing **DAUGHTER OF EDEN** with Arthur C Clarke Award Director, Tom Hunter. Waterstones High Street 7 - 9 pm. Free. Booking: 0121 631 4353, or call instore.

CONVENTIONS & EXHIBITIONS

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

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>

SCI-FEST YORKSHIRE, 24th - 30th October, Huddersfield. SF-themed festival featuring Ken MacLeod. Events priced individually. <https://scifestyorkshire2016.wordpress.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

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

November 4th - **Film night**

December 2nd - **Christmas Social**

January 13th - **AGM**

February 10th - **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