

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

JANUARY 2017

ISSUE 544

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## THE AGM AND BOOK AUCTION

*January 13th*



A Happy New Year to all our members from the committee. We hope that you enjoyed your Christmas and that the New Year will be a good one.

January is once again the time for the Annual General Meeting followed by the Book Auction. The Annual General Meeting is a legal necessity. A new

February 10th - Annual SF Quiz

committee needs to be elected and it is the time for you to voice your views on the Group and any changes you would like to be considered. Full details of the committee member roles and requirements were included in previous newsletters. To stand for a Committee post you must be a member of the group and ideally should have been a member for at least 12 months.

The AGM is usually completed very quickly and we can get on with the main event of the evening - **the Auction**. But we do need items to sell so please donate. All of the proceeds go to help the running of the Brum Group - without the money raised from auctions we would probably have to increase membership fees. So please bring a few items - books, magazines, fanzines, artwork, posters, DVD's, CD's etc. 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 for members and £4 for non-members.*

### ***ELLA LANE***

Sadly, Ella Lane (mother of Joel Lane) passed away on Boxing Day after suffering with pneumonia. For those members who knew the family, the funeral will be on Tuesday 10th January at 2:30 pm at Robin Hood Crematorium, Streetsbrook Road, Shirley, B90 3NL. No flowers please.

The wake will be later at Moseley Golf Club, Springfield Road, Kings Heath, B14 7DX. Please pass this information to anyone you know who may be interested. PM

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

Actress and writer **Carrie Fisher** died at the age of 60 after a heart attack. She was most well-known for her role as Princess Leia in the original *Star Wars* trilogy and in the recent STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS. Other films included THE BLUES



**BROTHERS, WHEN HARRY MET SALLY** and **HANNAH AND HER SISTERS**. She was a successful author with books such as the semi-autobiographical **POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE**, as well as being a “script doctor” to films such as **SISTER ACT**, **THE RIVER WILD** and **THE WEDDING SINGER** .... Astronaut **John Glenn** died on December 8th. He was the first American to orbit the Earth

and the last of the first astronauts, the Mercury Seven. He was a highly-decorated pilot in World War 2 and became a Senator in 1974, serving for 24 years. In 1988, he flew on the *Discovery* space shuttle earning the distinction of the oldest person to fly in space .... **Christopher Tolkien**, son of **JRR Tolkien** has received the Bodley Medal for his contribution to the world of literature. This is in recognition of his work in editing and publishing his father’s previously unpublished writings .... Candidates for **TAFF** (the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund) have been announced as Sarah Gulde, Alissa McKersie and John Purcell. This is to sponsor a North American fan to attend the Helsinki Worldcon. Voting closes on March 4th. Details at <http://taff.org.uk/> CG

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

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

***UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS*** - Release date January 13th. Selene fights to end the eternal war between vampires and lycans.

***THE BYE BYE MAN*** - Release date January 13th. Horror. The Bye Bye Man is the “cause of the evil behind man’s most unspeakable acts”.

***SPLIT*** - Release date January 20th. Three teenagers kidnapped by a man with multiple personalities try to find the personalities that will help them escape.

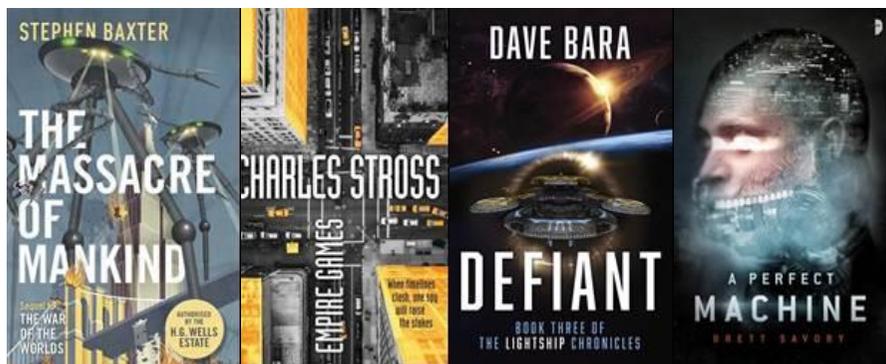
**RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER** - Release date February 3rd. Fantasy/Horror. Alice continues to fight against the undead.

**RINGS** - Release date February 3rd. Horror. Third instalment where watching a strange video will kill the watcher within 7 days.

**THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE**- Release date February 10th. Comedy Animation. Bruce Wayne must deal with criminals and raising the boy he adopted.

### **FORTHCOMING BOOKS**

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



**THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND** by Stephen Baxter / Gollancz / 464 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473205093 / January 19th. SF. Authorised sequel to WAR OF THE WORLDS. The Martians return and they have learned from their previous mistake.

**EMPIRE GAMES** by Charles Stross / Tor / 400 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1447245391 / January 26th. SF. In a cold war between two USA's from alternate timelines, a reluctant US spy must decide which side to support.

**DEFIANT (Lightship 3)** by Dave Barra / Del Rey / 336 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0091956431 / January 26th. SF. Lt. Peter Cochrane must fend off an Empire attack on the planet of Skondar.

***A PERFECT MACHINE*** by Brett Savory / Angry Robot / 384 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857666291 / February 2nd. SF. To protect their families, Runners agree to be hunted every day across the city.



***BLOOD UPON THE SAND*** (*Songs of the Shattered Sands*) by Bradley Beaulieu / Gollancz / 592 pgs / £14.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473203044 / February 9th. Fantasy. Ceda must decipher more riddles to make an effective stand against the Twelve Kings.

***NORSE MYTHOLOGY*** by Neil Gaiman / Bloomsbury / 304 pgs / £20 hardback / ISBN 978-1408886816 / February 7th. Fantasy. Retelling of the original Norse myths.

***THE STARS ARE LEGION*** by Kameron Hurley / Angry Robot / 464 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857666614 / February 7th. SF. A generations-long war wages for control of the decaying, travelling world-ships known as the Legion.

***WINTERSONG*** by S Jae-Jones / Titan Books / 368 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-178655449 / February 7th. Fantasy. Liesl must venture Underground to rescue her sister from the Goblin King.  
CG



# BOOK REVIEWS



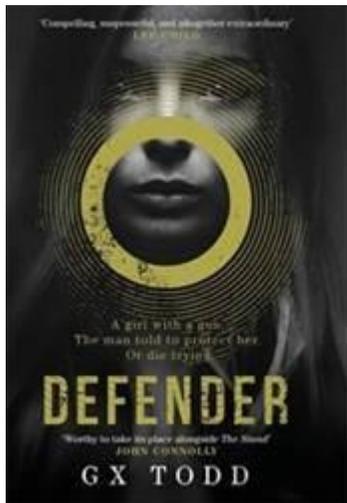
(**REVIEWERS** please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at [goodwincd@yahoo.com](mailto:goodwincd@yahoo.com) **Deadline** for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting)

**DEFENDER** by G X Todd

Headline / 464 pgs / £12.99 hardcover / ISBN 978-1472233080

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.

DEFENDER is set in a post-apocalyptic America which will be familiar to any reader of this type of novel. Anyone who is acquainted with Stephen King's THE STAND, THE WALKING DEAD or the FALLOUT computer games will recognise the setting. Where it does differ is in the reason for the collapse of society. In this novel, it began when people suddenly started hearing voices in their head. In many cases, the voices persuaded them into acts of violence - to others or against themselves. Now some years later, society has collapsed and the population has been decimated.



The story starts with a meeting between the two main protagonists, Lacey and Pilgrim. Lacey is a teenager who has been living a sheltered life in an isolated farmhouse, protected by her grandmother. Now that her grandmother has died, she needs to move and try to contact her older sister and young niece. When Pilgrim, an older drifter passes by the farmhouse, she persuades him to escort her to Vicksburg where her relatives lived. Pilgrim has a traumatic past, large parts of which he does not remember in detail and also has a Voice companion, although in his case the voice seems to be benign. As they travel, they fall foul of an organised group of misogynistic and brutal thugs who are collecting anyone who hears a voice on behalf of the mysterious Flitting Man.

This is the debut novel by a local author and is competently written and readable, although in my opinion it does not quite live up to the high praise on the cover (from John Connolly and Lee Child). I also

found it a little strange that a UK author would choose such a US setting. That being said, I enjoyed the story enough that I would be willing to read the sequel and hope that the story will develop into something more individual and unique. There are enough allusions and foreshadowing to hint at a larger story to be uncovered in the next volumes (this is the first in a four-part series) whilst still coming to a definite conclusion at the end of this volume. The nature and origin of the voices is not revealed (presumably this will be in later volumes) so it is still not clear whether they will have a SF or Fantasy based origin. From my personal point of view, I hope it is not a supernatural one as this would make it too similar to *THE STAND* etc. Worth a try if you like post-apocalyptic fiction. CG

*(Review copy kindly donated by Headline)*

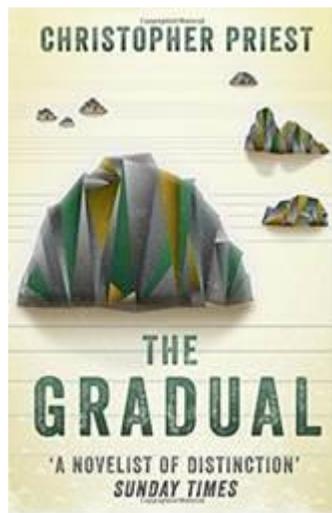
***THE GRADUAL* by Christopher Priest**

**Gollancz / 346 pgs / £16.99 hardback/£8.99 eBook / ISBN 978-1473200548**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.**

Christopher Priest is a very stylish writer. Not only is he able to tell an enthralling story without the verbosity of some modern writers, he fills the prose with subtlety and reaches out to the intellect of the reader. *THE GRADUAL* is a very fine book.

Priest first visited the Dream Archipelago in a series of stories written between 1978 and 1999 when they were collected together in a volume bearing that title. The Archipelago consists of thousands of islands mostly scattered across an equatorial sea. Although many have names, it has proved impossible to map them. No attempt provides the same pattern but each island has its own characteristics. The 2011 novel, *THE ISLANDERS*, is written as a gazetteer of some of the islands throughout which a narrative unfolds. The sequence begins to show in more detail the anomalies visitors have to contend with. In *THE GRADUAL*, some of these are explored rather than explained.



This novel is narrated by Alesandro Sussken. He is a native of the continental country of Glaund. His country has been at war with its neighbour for a long time. Tired of bombing each other's civilian populations, they have agreed to fight the war on the uninhabited Southern continent. Each youth is expected to do military service and Alesandro's older brother is waved off with the expectation that he will return in four years. It doesn't happen. Alesandro gets on with his life, making a name for himself as a composer. It is this that gains him a place on a cultural exchange tour of part of the archipelago. It is only when he returns after the tour of nine weeks that he discovers there is a problem. In Glaund, eighteen months have passed. His house is closed up with bills left unpaid, his wife has moved out and his parents have died. Alesandro is philosophical. He cannot understand what has happened but there is nothing can do about it. So, he gets on with his life, composing and teaching. Then, at the age of fifty, he gets an offer he cannot refuse. The Generalissima, leader of the country, honours him by asking him to create the music for a gala celebration. He will be paid more money than he has ever earned in his life. She outlines the pattern that she wants his composition to take. Refusal is likely to be taken as traitorous behaviour and since the country is under martial law, this probably means execution. Alesandro accepts the money, transfers as much as he can to an off-shore account and flees into the Dream Archipelago.

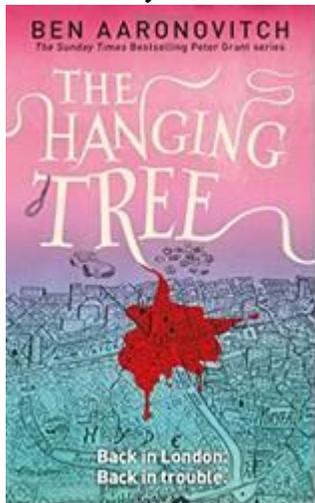
As Alessandro begins his travels, he starts to understand what happened all those years ago on the concert tour. The archipelago is threaded through with a gradual. This speeds up or slows down the passage of time. He needs the help of the young people he noticed hanging around the Shelterate building that acted as customs and immigration on his previous visit. These guides help adjust the time lost and gained by circuitous routes so that overall expected time progression is maintained.

THE GRADUAL has a tightly controlled narrative where some of the plot twists are as unexpected as the gradual itself. Some follow logically from the narrative but Priest is the kind of writer who will happily play with the minds of characters and readers. To explain here the themes that run through the archipelago would be to spoil the satisfaction of the reader as they work it out.

Alessandro developed a fascination with the islands of the Dream Archipelago from the moment he glimpsed the nearest from an

attic window, even though the history of his country denied their existence. As a reader, I hope you will become equally fascinated by them. This is a thoroughly enjoyable novel. *PM*  
(Review copy kindly donated by Gollancz)

***THE HANGING TREE (Rivers of London 6)* by Ben Aaronovitch**  
**Gollancz / 400 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575132559**  
**Reviewed by Carol Goodwin**



For those of you who are unfamiliar with this popular and wonderfully humorous series, it is an urban fantasy set in London. PC Peter Grant is a serving officer in the Metropolitan Police Force but he is also a trainee wizard, the first in fifty years. He and Inspector Nightingale (his mentor) are expected to deal with any crimes the Met reluctantly accepts may have a “supernatural” element. Some of the magical beings in London are incarnations of the various rivers of London (hence the series title).

In this book, a suspicious death of a rich young woman in an expensive apartment in Hyde Park would not normally concern PC Grant. However, he owes a favour to Lady Tyburn (one of the more powerful Rivers) and as her daughter was present, Lady Ty wants her daughter protected. As Peter digs further into the case it becomes clear that the death links back to an old enemy, the Faceless Man and Peter is in grave danger as he tries to solve the case.

After book 5, which took place in the countryside, this is a welcome return to London where PC Grant (and it seems also the author) is back in his comfort zone. PC Grant’s “voice” - his hilarious and wry observations of the supernatural Londoners and the conventional police who have to grudgingly accept and deal with them is one of the great joys of this series. In particular, the characters of DC Guleed and the long-suffering DCI Seawoll are excellent and amusing. The story rattles along at a fast pace and plot strands from previous novels are brought nicely back into this narrative, so the overall series story arc progresses as well as the individual case in this book. I also like

that there are some interesting new characters introduced who are clearly going to be important in the future books and who nicely expand the possibilities for story development.

The author also has allowed Peter Grant to grow, both personally and magically. He has gained power and experience although he clearly is not strong enough to take down the Faceless Man by himself. That confrontation is clearly intended to ultimately involve his master, Inspector Nightingale. Here however, is the one niggle I had with this book as I definitely felt that the author kept contriving unlikely circumstances just to keep the Faceless Man and Nightingale apart. That being said, for the many fans of this series, this is an excellent addition. If you haven't tried this series before, it is well worth trying. Fans of Jim Butcher or Benedict Jacka's *Alex Verus* novels will definitely find much to like. CG

*(Review copy kindly donated by Gollancz)*

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

*All details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise contacting organizers before travelling. Any information about forthcoming SF/Fantasy/Horror events is always welcome - please send to Carol at [goodwincd@yahoo.com](mailto: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.

**DEFENDER LAUNCH WITH G X TODD, 12th January, Birmingham.** Local Author will be discussing her debut novel, DEFENDER - likened to Stephen King & Clive Barker. Waterstones High Street 7:30 pm. Free. Booking: 0121 631 4353, or call instore.

**STEPHEN BAXTER SIGNING, 19th January, Birmingham.** Stephen Baxter will be signing his new novel, THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND. Waterstones High Street 12:30 to 1:30 pm. Free.

**PUBLISHING WORKSHOP: How to edit your novel, 25th January, Birmingham.** With Fantasy authors Stephen Aryan and G X Todd, crime writer Gillian McAllister and Amanda Rutter (agent/editor). Waterstones High Street 12:30 to 1:30 pm. Free. Booking: Instore, Twitter or 0121 631 4353.

## **CONVENTIONS**

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

### **WINDOWS ON OTHER WORLDS, October - January, Dronfield.**

Exhibition of SF art by Alex Storer at Art 4 Restore Gallery, The Forge, Church Street, Dronfield, Derbyshire S18 1QX. Tues-Sat 10am - 5pm

### **BIRMINGHAM HORROR CON, 4th February, Birmingham.**

At Edgbaston Stadium. Guests include Caroline Munro, David Moody, Adam Millard, Adam Nevill. Prices £8-10. <http://horrorfan.co.uk>

### **PICOCON 34, 18th February, London.**

At Imperial College Union. Guests include Jaine Fenn, Paul McAuley, Al Robertson and Justina Robson. Prices £12. [www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/](http://www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/)

### **ROBOTS: 500 years of Humanoid Robots, 8th February - 3rd**

**September.** Major exhibition at the Science Museum, London. £15 at [www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/)

### **REDEMPTION '17, 24th - 26th February 2017, Sheffield.**

At Royal Victoria Hotel. Guest of Honour: Dr Lynette Nusbacher, Steve Lycett (others tbc). Tickets £70 at <http://redemptioncon.org.uk>

### **SCI-FI WEEKENDER, 30th March - 2nd April, 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)

### **INNOMINATE (EASTERCON), 14th - 17th April, Birmingham.**

Guests of Honour are Pat Cadigan, Judith Clute and Colin Harris. At the Hilton Metropole, NEC, Birmingham. Membership £60 (will rise in New Year) at [www.eastercon2017.uk/home](http://www.eastercon2017.uk/home)

### **INTO THE UNKNOWN: A JOURNEY THROUGH SCIENCE**

**FICTION, 2nd June - 1st September, London.** Major exhibition at the Barbican Centre. Includes original manuscripts by Jules Verne and others, music, film and art. Details at [www.barbican.org.uk/](http://www.barbican.org.uk/)

### **EDGE-LIT 6, 15th July, Derby.**

Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guests of Honour Joanne Harris and Stephen Baxter. Tickets £30 at [www.derbyquad.co.uk/film/edge-lit-6.aspx](http://www.derbyquad.co.uk/film/edge-lit-6.aspx)

**NOVACON 47, 10th - 12th November, Nottingham.** Guest of Honour is Adrian Tchaikovsky. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £48. Details at [www.novacon.org.uk](http://www.novacon.org.uk)

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

January 13th - **AGM**

February 10th - **Quiz**

March 10th - Space scientist, writer and SF Fan, **Gerry Webb**

April 7th - SF writer **Dave Hutchinson**

May 12th - SF/Fantasy writer **Adrian Tchaikovsky**

June 9th - SF/Fantasy writer **Aliette de Bodard**

July 14th - tbc

August 11th - **Summer Social**

September 8th - tbc

October 13th - **Andy Sawyer**, from the SF Foundation

November 3rd -

December 1st - Christmas social (date subject to change)

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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