

# BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

## BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

MAY 2018

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## JANET EDWARDS

*May 11th*



This month we welcome back SF author, Janet Edwards. For those members who do not know her, Janet Edwards is a talented science fiction writer and a member of the Brum Group. She began writing seriously in 2007 having started attending BSFG member Chris Morgan's adult education writing class. She initially

wrote short stories including one which was a finalist in the British Fantasy Society competition and another which was broadcast on

**June 8th - SF author, Alastair Reynolds.**

BBC Radio Somerset. About eight other stories were highly commended or in the short list for competitions.

Her first novel *EARTH GIRL*, came out in August 2012, followed by two sequels *EARTH STAR* and *EARTH FLIGHT*. The series was published by Harper Voyager (UK) and Pyr (USA). The novels are set in a future where humanity can quickly travel between the planets using portal technology. Only the handicapped, those with an immune system which cannot survive on other planets, remain on Earth. These “throwbacks” are mocked and pitied. The 18-year old heroine, Jarra is one of these people and the books follow her struggle to disguise her “handicap” and prove her worth.

Books in the *Earth Girl* series have been listed as Best Young Adult books by Amazon, Kobo, Kirkus, Booklist Editor’s Choice.

Since finishing that trilogy she has moved into self-publishing. Initially issuing extra stories in the *Earth Girl* series (set in the 28th Century Portal Future) she has also written new novels. These are *SCAVENGER ALLIANCE* (set in the 25th Century Portal Future), *REAPER* (a Game Future where people don’t die but enter the virtual reality of a global game) and two novels, *TELEPATH* and *DEFENDER* (and a novella, *PERILOUS*) that are set in the Hive Future (where people live in large contained hive cities). Several reviews of her work have appeared in the *BSFG* newsletter (numbers 491, 507, 518, 545, 553 and this issue). For more information about Janet and her work, see her website [www.janetedwards.com](http://www.janetedwards.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 for members and £4 for non-members.*

## ***ERRATUM***

***Vernon Brown***

In my article in last month’s newsletter about the Brian Aldiss Afternoon (and Evening) the date given should, of course, have been March 20th. *VB*

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

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

***DEADPOOL 2*** – Release date May 15th. Superhero battles evil villain Cable to save a boy’s life.

***2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*** – Release date May 18th. SF. Astronauts are sent to investigate a mysterious black monolith.

***SOLO: A STAR WARS STORY*** – Release date May 25th. *Star Wars* prequel. How the young Han Solo meets his wookiee companion, Chewbacca.

***JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM*** – Release date June 6th. SF. Scientists try to save dinosaurs from an erupting volcano. *CG*

## ***FORTHCOMING BOOKS***

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

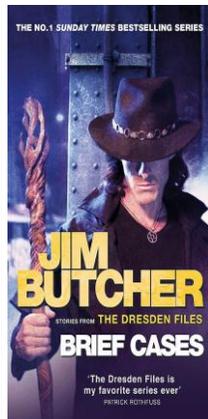


***THE SOLDIER (Rise of the Jain 1)*** by Neal Asher / Macmillan / 464 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1509862399 / May 17th. SF. Rogue humans and aliens plot to exploit quarantined lethal alien technology.

***THE TESTAMENT OF LOKI*** by Joanne Harris / Gollancz / 304 pgs / £14.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1473202399 / May 17th. Centuries after Ragnarok, Loki returns but so do darker things which he must fight.

***GREY SISTER (Book of Ancestor 2)*** by Mark Lawrence / Harper Voyager / 416 pgs / £16.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0008152345 / May 17th. Nona must find her path despite competing pulls of friendship, revenge and ambition.

***EVE OF MAN*** by Tom and Giovanna Fletcher / Michael Joseph / 416 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0718186340 / May 31st. SF. Eve is the first girl born in fifty years. At sixteen, the future of humanity is in her hands but she wants control and freedom.



***HUNTED (Voices 2)*** by G X TODD / Headline / 496 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1472233127 / May 31st. Two opposing forces hunt for a girl with a voice hiding in her head.

***BLUE SHIFT (Second Species 1)*** by Jane O'Reilly / Piatkus Books / 336 pgs / £13.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0349416595 / June 1st. SF. A pilot stranded on a prison spaceship uncovers a deadly secret.

***BRIEF CASES (The Dresden Files)*** by Jim Butcher / Orbit / 448 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0356511689 / June 7th. Collection of short stories from the *Dresden Files* world.

**ADRIFT** by **Rob Boffard** / Orbit / 400 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356510439 / June 7th. SF. A group of space tourists who are the only survivors of an alien attack work together to escape. *CG*

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



The newly announced International Astronomical Union list of approved **names for features on Charon** (Pluto's largest moon) includes many SF authors or characters. They include mountains named after Octavia Butler and Arthur C Clarke and craters named for characters from works by L Frank Baum (Dorothy), Stanislaw Lem (Pirx) and Jules Verne (Nemo). There is also a Kubrick Mountain. A full list is at [www.iau.org/news/pressreleases/detail/iau1803/](http://www.iau.org/news/pressreleases/detail/iau1803/) .... The **Terry Pratchett exhibition** at Salisbury and an accompanying book (**TERRY PRATCHETT: HIS WORLD** by Stephen Briggs) has raised £20,000 for charity (Research Institute for the Care of Older People) .... The **2018 David Gemmell Awards** shortlists have been announced. Voting is open to everyone at [www.gemmellawards.com](http://www.gemmellawards.com) and will close on 1st June .... The winners of **the Kitschies Awards** (for "progressive, intelligent and entertaining science fiction" were Best Novel: Nina Allan (**THE RIFT**); Debut Novel: Alex Wells (**HUNGER MAKES THE WOLF**); Jack Smyth and Simon & Schuster Art Dept for **THE HISTORY OF BEES** by Maja Lunde .... **Margaret Atwood** is to receive a Hay Festival Medal for "a lifetime of ingenious and visionary fiction" .... Astrid & Greg Bear have founded the **Poul and Karen Anderson Memorial International Travel Fund** to cover travel costs for someone outside the USA to attend the Clarion West Six Week summer writing workshop. Details at [www.clarionwest.org](http://www.clarionwest.org) .... Amazon is to make a series based on **THE PERIPHERAL** by **William Gibson**. It will be written by the same team who wrote the recent *Westworld* series. It is also adapting **CONSIDER PHLEBAS** by **Iain M Banks** .... An article in *The Bookseller* has caused uproar and upset by describing Gollancz as "merely a science fiction imprint" and "the story of its last two decades a tragedy". Another example of literary prejudice against SF? (sigh). *CG*



## BOOK REVIEWS



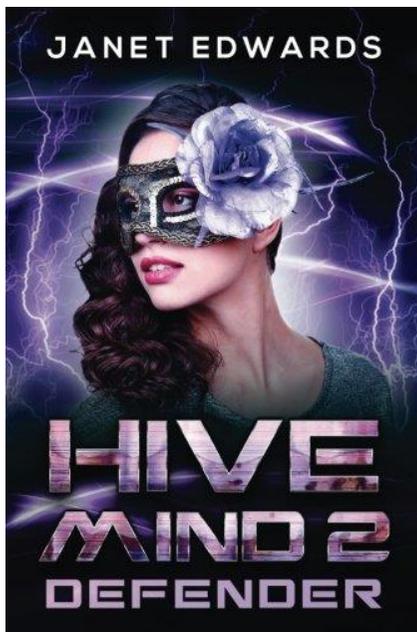
(**REVIEWERS** please note: - all reviews should be emailed direct to me at [goodwincd@yahoo.com](mailto:goodwincd@yahoo.com) Deadline for each issue is 14 days prior to the date of the monthly meeting)

*DEFENDER (Hive Mind 2)* by Janet Edwards

CreateSpace / 354 pgs / £8.99 paperback, £3.99 ebook / ISBN 978-1981728275

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.

I am not a fan of the term YA as I feel it creates an artificial separation and removes many excellent novels from the attention of “adult” readers. Indeed, many fondly remembered SF books from earlier years such as Andre Norton or much Robert Heinlein, would now probably be classified as YA. Janet’s novels to me have that same appeal to a very wide readership - indeed my son was fighting me to read this book first when he saw I had it which is not something he does with most of my reading material (Jim Butcher and Ben Aaronovitch being the other notable exceptions).



In the first book, *TELEPATH* we saw Amber as she turns eighteen and enters the Lottery, the psychological testing that determines the future role and rank of every citizen based on their aptitudes and society’s needs. However, Amber is found to be a very rare and valuable telepath. Telepaths are vital in detecting criminals and preventing crimes in the vast closed community of the Hive in which she lives. So valuable is this ability that unlike other citizens she will not be imprinted with relevant information (and attitudes) and she must be protected and her abilities kept secret from all but a handful of people.

In the first book we saw Amber getting to know her team who both protect her and help her hunt. She had to come to terms with incidents from her childhood and adapt to her new circumstances. In this second book, set only a few months later, Amber is now working effectively with her team in identifying potential criminals and preventing incidents. However, finding a dead body of someone they knew without Amber having detected any warning signs of a crime precipitates a crisis. Someone with close knowledge of telepaths and how their teams work is clearly involved. As they try to uncover the traitor and their plans for massive destruction and disruption, Amber must also struggle within her mind as opening her thoughts to others brings its own threats to her sanity and identity.

As with other books by this author, **DEFENDER** combines well a strong plot and narrative with interesting and fallible characters. The story is well paced and the reader wants to keep reading to see what happens next. Amber in particular is extremely likeable and shows development and growth as she deals with both professional and personal crises. As well as the plot strands of the traitor and Amber's psychological health, there is clearly a larger arc plot developing around Hive Societies and the complexities of being a telepath as Amber starts to learn and importantly question her new circumstances. YA or crossover it may be but there is a lot of story and depth in these books while still appealing to that market. The author is not afraid to move to different characters and settings than her previous series and the world of the Hives is interesting and very different from that of the *Earth Girl* series. The style and SF settings remind me very much of Anne McCaffrey's non-Pern series (eg *The Talent*, *Crystal Singer* and *The Ship Who ...* series) and anyone who enjoyed those will find much to like here. Another thoroughly enjoyable SF novel that will appeal to many.

CG

*(Review copy kindly donated by the author)*

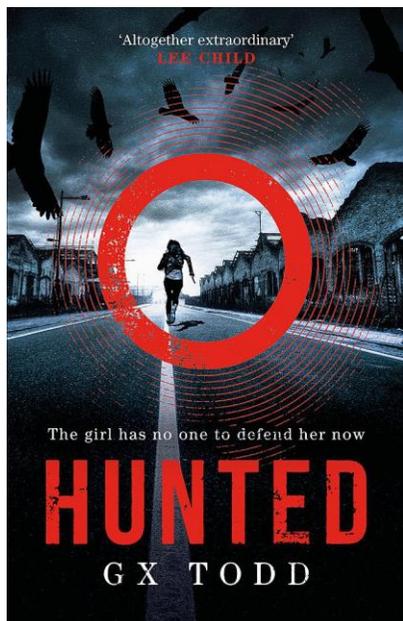
***HUNTED (The Voices 2)* by G X Todd**

**Headline / 496 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1472233127**

**Reviewed by Carol Goodwin**

The first book in this series, **DEFENDER** (reviewed in BSGF newsletter #544 January 2017) showed a post-apocalyptic America which collapsed in violence and self-harm prompted by a mass outbreak of people hearing voices in their head. In this ruined world, we followed

Lacey and Pilgrim as they tried to find Lacey's niece, Addison and were threatened by a group of misogynistic thugs who were collecting anyone who hears a "voice" on behalf of a mysterious and menacing "Flitting Man".



In this second novel, Lacey, Addison and Alex (a woman they rescued in book 1) are still fleeing from that group. However, things are starting to change with the Voices - both Lacey and Posy, the new leader of their enemies have gained "voices" which "jumped" when the previous host died. Whilst Lacey's "voice" appears benign, Posy's "voice" is anything but and pursues Lacey's party for many reasons - revenge, a bargaining chip for the "Flitting Man" and to understand more of how voice transfer works. However, another group led by Albus, and guided by the voice of his dead sister, Ruby are also racing to try and

reach the three women in time as they believe one of them is crucial to the future.

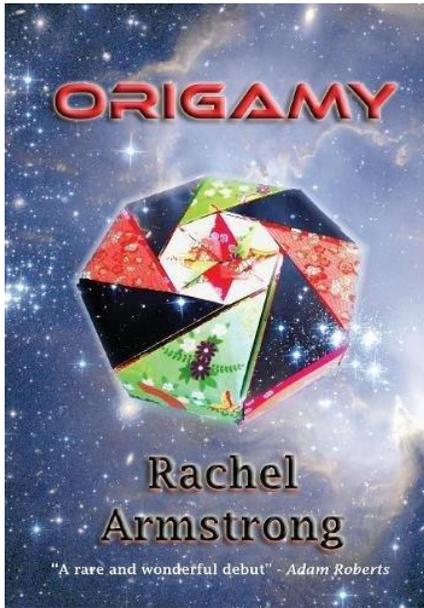
**DEFENDER** was the debut novel for this author and I commented at the time that it felt very similar to many other post-apocalyptic stories but that there was enough to hope that it would develop into something more individual and unique. Thankfully, that is exactly what I feel has happened in this second volume. The mystery and nature of the Voices is further explored (though still not fully explained) and it becomes clear that they are something separate with their own personalities and motivations and not just delusions. The story is well-told and the inclusion of Albus' group adds welcome new viewpoints and characters that add depth to the plot. The writing is in a style that is easy to read but still establishes the locations and characters very effectively. It pulls the reader along and builds to an exciting and dangerous climax and I enjoyed this book far more than the first one. The author has clearly gained in confidence and competence and her depiction of characters - their inner motivations and struggles in

particular – is excellent. As a caveat, there are a few violent or disturbing scenes but these are minimal and only necessary and relevant to the plot. As a bit of a wuss and a non-horror reader, there was nothing that I found too nasty or unreadable. The author has delivered a satisfying and substantial sequel but left enough to be explored and resolved in the next book, which I am looking forward to reading. *CG*  
(Review copy kindly donated by *Headline Publishing*)

**ORIGAMY** by Rachel Armstrong

NewCon Press / 256 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1910935781

Reviewed by Carol Goodwin



NewCon Press do publish some excellent books and are not afraid to take chances that larger publishers will not. **ORIGAMY** by new author Rachel Armstrong is an unconventional and avant-garde book that is clearly dividing opinion. Well-respected authors such as Adam Roberts, Justina Robson and Adrian Tchaikovsky have highly praised it but I must admit that I really struggled with it.

Normally when writing a review, I like to give an idea of the main plot but discerning one is one of the major difficulties I have with this novel. The structure is not conventional, consisting of

very short chapters, ranging from a couple of lines to a few pages and it jumps from one often unconnected scene to another. The reader is flung in at the deep end and spends a lot of time and effort trying to comprehend what is happening. After a lot of struggle, it appears to concern Mobius, a member of a strange family of circus acrobats/spacetime travellers. By pulling “threads” from spacetime they can weave them and jump to different parts of the galaxy as observers. Mobius is an unreliable narrator as her memory is patchy and events are not necessarily being shown in chronological order. As we jump from one scene to the next it gradually becomes apparent that something

dark is affecting and threatening the universe and the weavers must unite to prevent catastrophe.

The novel is a dizzying melange of ideas from crafts, poetry, biology, physics etc. While some readers may enjoy this deluge of information, I found the long digressions into things as diverse as the Philae spacecraft to the ecology of a “stomach garden” tiring and of little obvious relation to the plot. This patchwork of scenes is clearly intended to stitch together into a coherent whole but unlike the character in the book who urges “You don’t need to understand, Mobius. Sometimes too much rationalisation gets in the way” I am afraid that I do like to understand and felt that more explanation and less sheer unrelated details and exposition would have improved this book immensely for me.

In addition, I could not feel any connection or interest in the characters – Mobius’ parents in particular seemed very remote and not fully rounded – existing mostly to talk in ambiguous maxims or enigmatic parables or stories. The reader does not really get into the characters’ heads and I felt they operated only on a cerebral level with little emotional depth. This meant that I had no great interest in what happened to them to keep me wanting to read.

All of the above also meant that I found the pace of the book extremely slow and found myself suffering from a kind of “reader fatigue” where I could only read in short bursts at a time. Its *Alice In Wonderland/Grand Tour of the Universe* combination may appeal to some but is definitely too literary and unconventional for me. *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. 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.

**WHO PUT BELLA IN THE WYCH-ELM** discussion, 24th May, Birmingham. Author Cathi Unsworth & historian/filmmaker Jayne Harris discuss Jayne’s documentary and Cathi’s **THAT OLD BLACK**

MAGIC novel based on local mystery. Waterstones 6pm. £3 (deductible from novel purchase). At 0121 631 4353 or instore.

**THE CHICXULUB IMPACT, 16th May, Birmingham.** Prof. Joanna Morgan talks about the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs and discoveries at Chicxulub site in Mexico. Birmingham & Midland Institute 5:30 to 7 pm. Free but must book at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni/events/Registration-for-Keith-Palmer-Lecture-16-May.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni/events/Registration-for-Keith-Palmer-Lecture-16-May.aspx)

**MEET ESA ASTRONAUT, JEAN-FRANCOIS CLERVOY, 26th May, Leicester.** J-F Clervoy and photographer E Martins discuss living in space & the ESA shown by photos in accompanying exhibition. New Walk Museum, Leicester. 11:30 - 1pm. Free but must book at [www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/meet-an-astronaut-tickets-44140010961](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/meet-an-astronaut-tickets-44140010961)

**VICTORIA AVEYARD signing, 6th June, Birmingham.** The author is signing WAR STORM. Waterstones 12 noon. Free. No booking necessary.

### ***CONVENTIONS and EXHIBITIONS***

**SATELLITE 5, 25th - 27th May, Glasgow.** Guest of Honour Paul McAuley. At the Crowne Plaza, Glasgow. Attending £70. Details at <https://six.satellitex.org.uk/about>

**EDGE-LIT 7, 14th July, Derby.** Literary SF/Fantasy festival. Guests of Honour Frances Hardinge & Paul Tremblay. Tickets £30 at [www.derbyquad.co.uk/events/edge-lit-7.aspx](http://www.derbyquad.co.uk/events/edge-lit-7.aspx)

**NINE WORLDS GEEKFEST, 10th - 12th August, London.** Multi-media con with strong literature strand. Tickets £99 at <https://nineworlds.co.uk/>

**BRISTOLCON, 27th October, Bristol.** Guests of Honour Joanne Hall & Dave Hutchinson. Doubletree Hotel. £20. Details at [www.bristolcon.org](http://www.bristolcon.org)

**FANTASYCON, 19th - 21st October, Chester.** The Queen Hotel. Tickets (until May 1st) £51 + £36 Awards Banquet [www.hwsevents.co.uk/shop-2](http://www.hwsevents.co.uk/shop-2)

**NOVACON 48, 9th - 11th November, Nottingham.** Guest of Honour is Chris Beckett. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £48. Details at [www.novacon.org.uk](http://www.novacon.org.uk)

**TOLKIEN 2019, 7th - 11th August 2019, Birmingham.** 50th Year Anniversary of Tolkien Society, MacDonald Burlington Hotel (New Street). £95 [www.tolkiensociety.org](http://www.tolkiensociety.org)

**WORLDCON 2019, 15th - 19th August 2019, Dublin.** Guests of Honour Ian McDonald, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Steve Jackson, Diane Duane, Ginjer Buchanan and Bill & Mary Burns. Convention Centre. 180 Euros. <https://dublin2019.com/>

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

June 8th - SF author **Alastair Reynolds**

July 13th - tbc

August 10th - **Summer social**

September 14th - tbc

October 12th - Comics writer & editor, **David Leach**

November 16th - Astrophysicist & NASA Kepler mission leader, **Professor Bill Chaplin**

December 7th - **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. Details of how to join/pay can be obtained at a meeting or by email to [bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk)