

BRUM GROUP NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

DECEMBER 2018

ISSUE 567

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Christmas Social

December 7th



The Christmas Social will be held at The Selly Park Tavern, 592 Pershore Road, Selly Oak from 7 till 11pm. The postcode is B29 7HQ for anyone travelling by car. By bus, from the centre of Birmingham take

a 45 or 47 bus from outside Boots, opposite New Street Station's old entrance on Smallbrook Queensway, or from near Boots in High

January 11th - AGM and book auction. Please donate your books - all proceeds go to support the Brum SF Group.

Street. NB Bus stops are changing so check the destination sign carefully. Ask for The Selly Park Tavern - it is about a 15-minute ride. The Selly Park Tavern is on the left a few stops past the Edgbaston Cricket Ground and the stop after the Nature Centre. Remember, the Skittle Alley is behind the main pub. Walk down the side of the Tavern into the car park and it is on your right.

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

At the forthcoming January AGM, the committee members will, as usual, step down from their posts. The 2019 committee will then be elected by those present.

An outline of the various committee members' duties was given in the November newsletter. If you are considering standing for any of the positions please ask Vernon, without any commitment, for more details at the December Social. Alternatively email Vernon via the Group address and he'll email them to you. *CG*

MEMBERS NEWS

BSFG member, space artist **David A Hardy** will be giving a public presentation - **TO THE STARS ON A PAINTBRUSH**. The talk, "illustrated mostly with his own art but with examples of the work of earlier artists, shows how space art has developed over the years, and how our increasing knowledge about space as a result of robotic and manned exploration has been reflected in the work of artists." (from I4IS - the Institute for Interstellar Studies). This will take place on Friday **14th December** at **6pm** in the Conference Room, Bone Mill, New Street, Charfield, South Gloucestershire, GL12 8ES. More info at <https://i4is.org/public-presentation-to-the-stars-on-a-paintbrush/>)



WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNERS

The World Fantasy Awards winners were announced on November 4th at the World Fantasy Convention in Baltimore.

Novel (Joint winners): THE CHANGELING by Victor LaValle (Spiegel & Grau).

JADE CITY by Fonda Lee (Orbit)

Best Novella: PASSING STRANGE by Ellen Klages (Tor.com Publishing)

Short Story: “The Birding: A Fairy Tale” by Natalia Theodoridou (*Strange Horizons*, December 2017)

Anthology: THE NEW VOICES OF FANTASY edited by Peter S Beagle & Jacob Weisman (Tachyon)

Best Collection: THE EMERALD CIRCUS by Jane Yolen (Tachyon)

Artist: Gregory Manchess

Special Award Professional: Harry Brockway, Patrick McGrath & Danel Olson for WRITING MADNESS (Centipede)

Special Award Non-Professional: Justina Ireland & Troy L Wiggins for FIYAH

Lifetime Achievement Winners: Charles de Lint & Elizabeth Wollheim.

NEWS IN BRIEF

The legendary comics writer and editor, **Stan Lee** (born Stanley Leiber) has died aged 95. He helped to create, often in collaboration with artist Jack Kirby, iconic characters such as Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk and Thor. Under his leadership at *Marvel* he revolutionised comics by humanising and adding complex personal lives to the characters of superheroes. In the 1970's he started to develop film and television adaptations and many of these have lately been huge international successes. Like Alfred Hitchcock he was famous for appearing in short cameos in these films. He received an Eaton Award for Lifetime

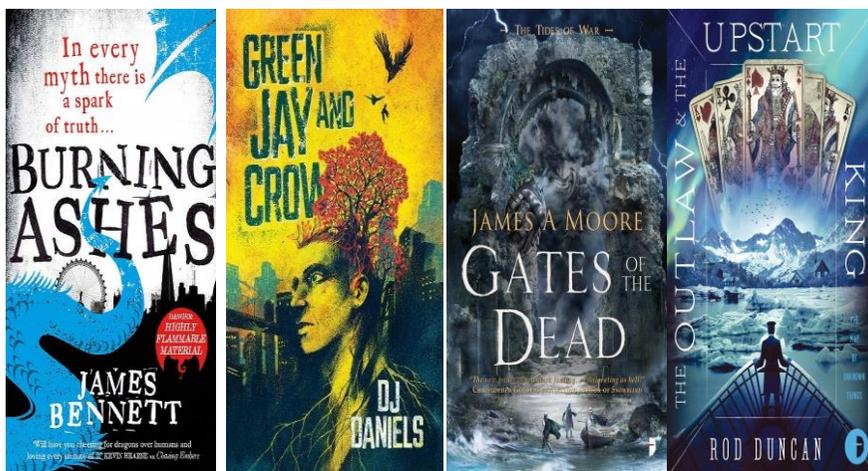


Achievement in SF (2012) and was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2017 The artist, novelist and screenwriter **William Goldman** died in November. He is probably best known for his novel, **THE PRINCESS BRIDE** (adapted into the cult classic film). He also wrote the screenplays for the Award-winning films **BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID** and **ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN**. Other more SFF-based films he wrote the screenplays for, included **THE STEPFORD WIVES** and **MISERY**. He was also rumoured to be a script doctor for **DOLORES CLAIBORNE** and wrote an unproduced adaptation of Daniel Keyes' **FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON** Director and cinematographer, **Nicholas Roeg** has died, aged 90. His six-decade long career included directing classic SFF films such as **DON'T LOOK NOW** (1973), **THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH** (1976) and Roald Dahl's **THE WITCHES** (1990). Earlier he worked on Roger Corman's **THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH** and Francois Truffaut's **FAHRENHEIT 451** The **BSFA nominations** for the 2019 awards are open to members until December 31st. In a change to the rules, they are dropping the UK publication requirement for novels British SF author **Richard Morgan** has won a Galaxy Award in China, for most popular foreign Science Fiction writer. The award was started in 1985 by China's prestigious SF magazine, *Science Fiction World* The candidates for the fan-funded **TAFF race** (to support travel to Dublin Worldcon) have been announced. They are Teresa Cochran, Sarah Gulde, Mike Lowrey & Geri Sullivan. Voting runs from December 1st to April 22nd. Details at <https://taff.org.uk> The Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) announced changes to the **Nebula Awards rules**. Associate members of SFWA now have full voting privileges. Previously this was limited only to active members. Also, Game Writing has been added as a new Nebula Award category and other updates were also announced, including changes to the Ray Bradbury and Andre Norton Awards The European Union has decided that member states may **lower the VAT on ebooks** to the same rate they charge for printed books. The minimum VAT for ebooks was 15% compared to 0% on printed books in the UK Chinese SF author, **Cixin Liu** was presented

with the Imagination in Service to Society Award by the Arthur C Clarke Foundation The *Game of Thrones* tv-series won nine Emmy Awards including for Outstanding Drama Series and Best Supporting Actor (Peter Dinklage) Scotland is to have its first **literary festival** dedicated to Fantasy, SF and Horror. The Cymera Festival will launch in Edinburgh in June for three days. Guests announced so far include Samantha Shannon, Ken MacLeod and Cassandra Khaw. CG

FORTHCOMING BOOKS

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



BURNING ASHES (Ben Garston 3) by James Bennett / Orbit / 416 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356506678 / December 13th. Ben Garston must try to prevent a world-destroying war between “mythical” creatures and humanity.

GREEN JAY AND CROW by D J Daniels / Abaddon / 384 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1781086445 / December 13th. SF. Eva, a 3D-printed copy of another person, should have disintegrated after 3 days. Now she is on the run pursued by those who want to know why she is still alive.

GATES OF THE DEAD (Tides of War 3) by James A Moore / Angry Robot / 400 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857667465 / January 1st. As millions of refugees crowd the last remaining city, a small group of warriors try to stop the destructive gods by destroying their sole entry-point, the Gateway

THE OUTLAW AND THE UPSTART KING (The Map of Unknown Things 2) by Rod Duncan / Angry Robot / 352 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0857667038 / January 3rd. A mysterious woman holds the key to Elias' revenge on those who made him an outlaw.



THE WINTER OF THE WITCH (Winternight 3) by Katherine Arden / Del Rey / 384 pgs / £12.99 hardback / ISBN 978-1785039713 / January 10th. Vasilisa must flee a burning Moscow, pursued by those who blame their misfortunes on her magic.

SHADOW CAPTAIN (Revenger 2) by Alastair Reynolds / Gollancz / 432 pgs / £18.99 hardback / ISBN 978-0575090637 / January 10th. SF. Now in charge of a fearsome spaceship, the Ness sisters search for the “greatest treasure in the universe”.

THE BASTARD LEGION: WAR CRIMINALS (Book 3) by Gavin G Smith / Gollancz / 368 pgs / £10.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473217294 / January 10th. SF. The Legion's mercenaries are hired to protect a group of colonists stranded in a war-zone.

THE GIRL KING by Mimi Yu / Gollancz / 496 pgs / £10.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1473223110 / January 10th. Two sisters become unwitting rivals in a war to become the next Emperor. *CG*

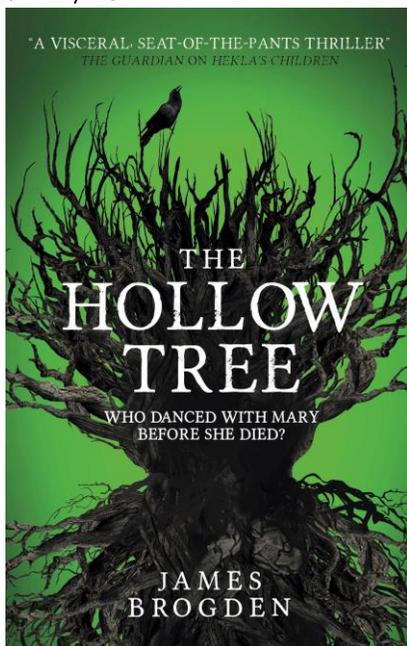
📖📖📖📖 **BOOK REVIEWS** 📖📖📖📖

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

THE HOLLOW TREE by James Brogden
Titan Books / 478 pgs / £7.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1785654404
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Novice writers are often told, ‘write about what you know’. This might seem unhelpful if your chosen field is historical fiction or SF as both areas deal with scenarios that living authors didn’t or will not experience. The advice, though is a lot more subtle. All stories have characters with human traits, strengths and failings. Observing how people react is likely to produce more rounded characters. Setting a story against a familiar background, even if it has been moved in time or twisted in some way. Some of the best writers of horror, fantasy or the supernatural have done just that. Joel Lane set many of his stories in the Black Country, Ramsey Campbell explores the darker side of Liverpool. Add James Brogden to that company. His best writing is set against a backdrop that he is familiar with - Birmingham.

Everyone has heard of the phenomenon of the phantom limb, the way that amputees still get a sense of the missing limb. After



Rachel Cooper loses her left hand in an accident during a canal boating holiday with her husband, Tom, she experiences exactly that, especially as her physiotherapist encourages her to imagine the hand is still there to keep the unaffected muscles well-toned. Not only can she sense the missing limb but it can touch things that she cannot see. In the garden, the phantom fingers curl around dead leaves. When her right hand touches the ground where her left should be, the leaves appear. She invents a rational explanation for this, the first time. She begins to think something weird is going on when on a visit to Avoncroft Museum of Buildings, her phantom hand encounters an invisible cat. Grasping it with her right hand, she suddenly has a scrawny feline that wasn't there before. She takes it home but later some fierce beast tries to get in to their home. She realises that if she takes something from the phantom world, there is a payback.

On a visit to the Lickey Hills with Tom, they discover a glade where the trees around it are festooned with ribbons and tokens. Although there is nothing visible, Rachel can feel a dead oak at the centre. Asking in the visitor centre, they are told that there was a hollow tree there and during the war, the skeleton of a woman was found inside it. No-one found out who she was, but there were rumours that she was a Nazi spy, a gypsy or a prostitute. After some troubling dreams, Rachel returns to the oak and pulls through the woman whose body had been hidden there, even though she is aware that there will be consequences. She and Tom need to deal with those consequences while Rachel is desperate to convince her mother and Tom's father that the trauma of losing her hand has not unhinged her.

This is a delightful novel balancing action and reaction between the real world and the phantom one that Rachel has discovered exists. It touches on a number of issues concerning the aftermath of death without getting too philosophical. Because he knows the area well, Brogden is able to paint convincing scenarios for the action to take place in. This is a novel of action and the supernatural that stands aside from the usual ghost story and becomes something fresh.

PM

(Review copy kindly donated by Titan Books)

THE SCENT OF TEARS (Tales of the Apt 4) by Adrian Tchaikovsky and Friends
NewCon Press / 208 pgs / £12.99 paperback / ISBN 978-1910935941

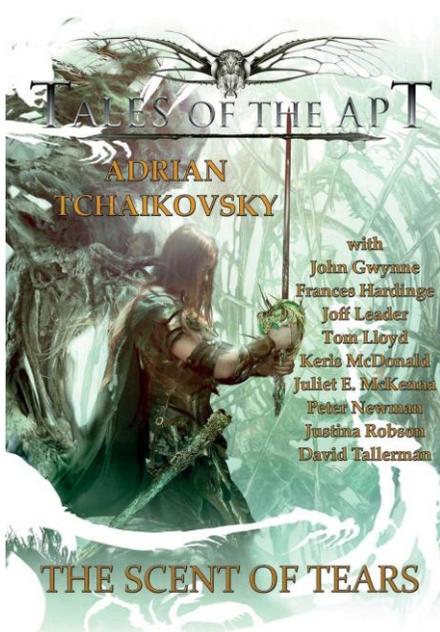
Reviewed by Carol Goodwin.

In this latest collection of short stories set in Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Shadow of the Apt* world, the author has taken the brave and potentially risky step of including stories written by other authors.

The shared world anthology has a long history in SF/Fantasy writing. According to the SCIENCE FICTION ENCYCLOPEDIA, an early example was MUGBY JUNCTION (1866) which included six stories by different authors, following instructions from, and also featuring a story by, Charles Dickens with all of the stories set at an eponymous railway station. Other well-known examples include Robert Asprin's *Thieves' World* and Andre Norton's *Witch World* series. However, there is

always a risk when the author allows others to play in their world that the stories will not fit or feel true to the already established "universe" and will disappoint fans of the original. Thankfully however in this collection, both the avid reader and the newcomer to the Apt world will find much to enjoy. Much of that success I feel is by the judicious inclusion of some excellent and well-regarded authors. While there will always be some stories which suit my tastes more than others, all the stories work well and I did feel that they fitted with the already established places and events of the *Apt* world.

The first and last stories in the collection are by Adrian Tchaikovsky himself. The first "Old Blood" concerns a major



character in the main series, and shows the origins of some of his actions and motivations. Despite that, the story still works well as a stand-alone, but definitely will have more resonance and significance for readers familiar with the Apt novels. The last story “The God of Profound Things” is set in the undersea society first encountered in *THE SEA WATCH* (Book 6). It concerns an obsessed woman driven to search out strange and dangerous deep-sea creatures, told from the viewpoint of the captain of the vessel she is travelling on. Like many of his stories, it is the characters that are interesting and compelling and this is one of my favourite stories in the book.

Other favourites include the title story “The Scent of Tears” by Keris McDonald (who also writes as Janine Ashbless) which is the story of how a woman who has been betrayed and abused as the result of a feud between two families manages to plot an elegant revenge. The characterisation of Dagmar is very good and the reader sympathises with her endurance and inner strength. Frances Hardinge (“Wonder”) and Juliet McKenna (“The Unforeseen Path”) both have similar themes about the difficulties and consolations of building relationships between different types of kinden (specifically ants who are telepathic, but only with people from their home town, and other non-telepathic kinden). Both stories work well and have an excellent depth of characterisation that I as a reader expect and appreciate in an Apt story. “The Poor Little Earwig Girl” by Tom Lloyd is also another enjoyable character study, looking at a despised and persecuted girl who is flattered by an unaccustomed respect for her abilities and who then dares to dream of a better life.

Other stories in the anthology are more action-focused. “The Promise of a Threat” by David Tallerman, expands the back story of a minor character, and “The Mantis Way” by Peter Newman looks at a mantis-kindin survivor attempting a revenge and rescue mission against invading wasp soldiers. John Gwynne’s “The Message” is a superb if decidedly creepy story about a small group sent to deliver a message from a despised artificer to his weird and reclusive relative. There are definitely shades of the Dr’s Frankenstein and Moreau here!

The final two stories, “Forwards” by Joff Leader and “Recipes for Good Living” by Justina Robson whilst still being

excellently written have a certain “strangeness” to them which makes them harder to categorise.

All together this is an outstanding collection of stories and I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone who appreciates well-crafted, insightful and reflective stories.

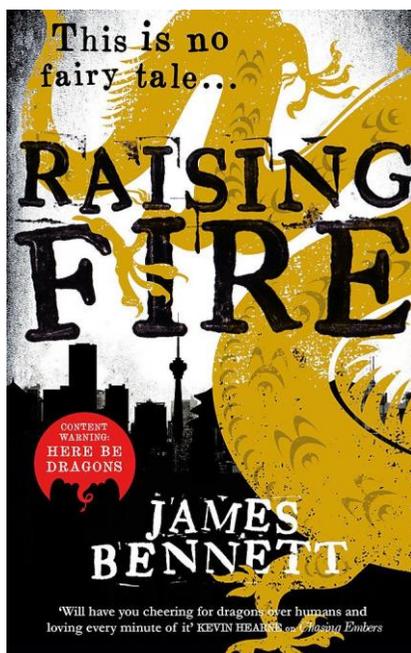
CG

(Review copy kindly donated by NewCon Press)

RAISING FIRE (Ben Garston Book 2) by James Bennett
Orbit Books / 416 pgs / £8.99 paperback / ISBN 978-0356506654
Reviewed by Theresa Derwin

So, here we are, at the second instalment of the Ben Garston trilogy, and without too many spoilers, here’s what happened.

Ben, a dragon when not in his human form, fought battles, got drunk and lost the love of his life - temporarily. There is, or was, a kind of accord, that so long as the beasts and magical kinds (“remnants”) didn’t meddle in human affairs, they’d be safe. Ben broke that rule. Or the *Lore* - said in serious Judge Dredd voice. Ben, an ‘awake’ Remnant - one of the chosen few - had been allowed to see and remain awake throughout history, and it had made him jaded, apart from how he saw his Rose, the love of his life. What with mummies, and dragons and dwarves, oh my, we had an action packed first book.



Now though, the adventure continues, and as with all second instalments in a trilogy, we have the building blocks to the finale, pieces in a puzzle partly answered, and a cliff-hanger to bounce us into **BURNING ASHES**, the third book out December 2018.

At the start of this one, **RAISING FIRE**, Ben’s currently, metaphorically flogging himself to death flying through the wintered, watery skies of Norway, reflecting on the delights of 1215. Yes, Red

Ben is old, and cynical. But there is, just a short spell into this second book, a difference in authorial voice and tone. I'm wary about saying this, yet at the same time - need to say it - the author appears to have grown in style, techniques and cynicism. And that's no critique. His writing is more fluid, and confident. This is a stronger voice here, as Ben goes into his second 'adventure'.

That adventure starts when he is captured by a seven-foot female assassin as, apparently the new version of a magical government - think a grimmer Ministry of Mayhem in Hogwarts terms - has condemned him to death during his absence. But they want information first. So, he is shackled with a magical cuff that confines him in human form until he helps them find what they are looking for.

The novel blends Arthurian and ancient Chinese legend, religious mythology and fae elements in a contemporary setting. In particular, the scenes in Paris are written with a poetic love, much like Anne Rice writing of New Orleans in *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*; both texts embedded with lush visuals and passion. I happen to know Bennett enjoys travelling, but if I hadn't known of his travels, it would be evident from the way he writes about the different cities and historical periods throughout the novel. Other things I enjoyed are Ben's jaded sense of humour, and the neo-noir vibe speckled with urban fantasy. Also, the character of Jia, her being "other" - and, as Bennett puts it, "she had committed the unpardonable sin of not being male;"; all work together to produce a fantastic story with modern sentiments.

Also, as Jia considers the past imprisonment and enforced sleep of the "remnants" or mythical creatures, their "Abandonment, loneliness, loss - these were the ghosts of all Remnants", Bennett is clearly celebrating the disenfranchisement and experiences of the 'other' in this novel,

Overall, this is a step above the first book in the trilogy and Bennett's writing has grown considerably, which is normally the case with debut authors. The only issues I had with the book were the switching through time periods, but this is mostly due to my own cognitive function issues. However, I loved travelling through these historical periods with Ben.

And speaking of Ben, I kind of have a literary character crush on him. Ben is a grumpy, surly, yet strong and honest dragon. What's not to love? TD

NEW CINEMA FILM RELEASES

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

AQUAMAN - Release date December 12th. Superhero film. Arthur Curry learns he is the heir to the underwater kingdom of Atlantis.

SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE - Release date December 12th. Superhero film. Spider-man teams up with other, alternative dimension Spider-men to deal with a threat to reality.

MORTAL ENGINES - Release date December 14th. Steampunk Fantasy. Two young people join a rebellion against giant, roaming predator cities

MARY POPPINS RETURNS - Release date December 21st. Fantasy. Mary Poppins returns decades later to help the Banks' siblings and their children.

BUMBLEBEE - Release date December 26th. A transformer (robot) Bumblebee hides in a junkyard and makes friends with a teenage girl. CG

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

THE WIZARD OF OZ play, 24th November - 13th January, Repertory Theatre. Tickets £10 - £39.50. Box Office 0121 236 4455 or www.birmingham-rep.co.uk

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY, 6th - 24th December. On Christmas Eve, 1946 five actors gather to make a live broadcast of the classic story. Old Joint Stock Theatre. £20 at www.oldjointstock.co.uk or 0121 200 0946.

WITH GREAT POWER: THE STAN LEE STORY, 10th December. Screening of documentary about Stan Lee. Mockingbird Theatre. £5. 8pm. Custard Factory, Digbeth. At www.mockingbirdcinema.com/ Tel: 0121 224 7456

SHOPPERS HAVEN FREE CHRISTMAS FILMS, 10th - 22nd December. Various films including JACK FROST, SANTA CLAUS, MIRACLE ON 34th STREET, FROZEN, MUPPETS CHRISTMAS CAROL, and THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS. Free. Mell Square, Solihull. <https://solihullbid.co.uk/events/shoppers-haven-free-christmas-outdoor-cinema/>

ONCE UPON A DEADPOOL, 11th December. PG15 version of DEADPOOL 2 with Fred Savage from THE PRINCESS BRIDE. Some of proceeds to charity. Mockingbird Theatre. £9.50. 8:15pm. Custard Factory, Digbeth. At www.mockingbirdcinema.com/ Tel: 0121 224 7456

OUTDOOR WINTER FILM FESTIVAL, 13th - 16th December. Various including GREMLINS (13th), ELF (14th), FROZEN (15th) IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (16th). Central Square. Free. Info: www.brindleyplace.com/event/brindleyplace-winter-film-festival/

CHRISTMAS FILMS, 14th - 24th December. Various including ELF (16th, 22nd, 24th), IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (14th - 24th) and GREMLINS (15th, 23rd). At the Electric Cinema. Tickets from £10.50. www.theelectric.co.uk or 0121 643 7879

CHRISTMAS FILMS, 21st -23rd December, Birmingham. Screenings of MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL (21st), NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS (22nd) & IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (22nd, 23rd). The Mac Centre. 8:30 pm. Price £9. www.macbirmingham.co.uk or 0121 446 3232

A CHRISTMAS CAROL BY CHARLES DICKENS, 23rd December. Recreation of Dicken's first public reading of the story at the original venue. Town Hall. £13 - £20. Book at Box Office (0121 780 4949) or www.thsh.co.uk

STAR WARS AND BEYOND, 29th December. London Concert Orchestra perform John Williams film scores. Symphony Hall. £13 - 45 at Box Office (0121 780 49490 or www.thsh.co.uk) *CG*

CONVENTIONS and EXHIBITIONS

REDEMPTION '19, 18th - 20th January 2019, Sheffield. At Royal Victoria Hotel. Guests of Honour tbc). Tickets £70 at <http://redemptioncon.org.uk>

PICOCON 36, 16th February, London. At Imperial College Union. Guests of Honour Andrew Bannister, Simon Morden, Gavin Smith, Lottie Bevan & Alexis Kennedy. Price £12. www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/

YTTERBIUM (Eastercon 2019), 19th - 22nd April, Heathrow. Guests of Honour: Frances Hardinge, Sydney Padua, John Scalzi & CD. At the Park Inn, Heathrow, London. Membership £80 at www.ytterbium.org.uk/

TOLKIEN 2019, 7th - 11th August 2019, Birmingham. 50th Year Anniversary of Tolkien Society, MacDonald Burlington Hotel (New Street). £95 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. 210 Euros. <https://dublin2019.com/>

NOVACON 49, 8th - 10th November, Nottingham. Guest of Honour is Mike Carey. The Park Inn, Nottingham. Tickets £49. Details at www.novacon.org.uk

FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE BSFG

January 11th - AGM and Book Auction

February 8th - SF author Gareth Powell

March 8th - Poet, Author and BSFG member, Chris Morgan

April 12th - tbc

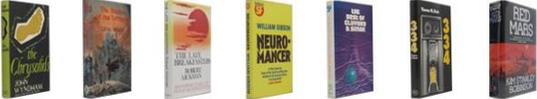
May 10th - SF author Daniel Godfrey

June 14th - Fantasy authors Jeannette Ng and Micah Yongo

July 12th - SF authors, Christopher Priest and Nina Allan

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Durdles Books is run by Ian & Lou Morley, BSFG members
Some expensive items but we have books to suit all budgets



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Science Fiction
Fantasy
Modern Firsts
Comics

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