

June 1998

Issue 321

## BRUM GROUP NEWS

Price: FREE

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The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group  
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

Group Chair - Tony Morton, Secretary - Anne Woodford, Treasurer - Alan Woodford, Publicity Officer - Rog Peyton, Ordinary Member - Yvonne Rowse, Newsletter Editor & Novacon 28 Chair - Martin Tudor, Novacon 29 Chair - Carol Morton.

# David A. Hardy

**will address the BSFG on Friday 12th June 1998\*, from 7.45pm, in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, (entrance in Union Passageway).**

**Admittance: Members £2.50 (£2.00 Unwaged), Non-Members £3.50 (£3.00 Unwaged). (Unwaged discounts are at the discretion of the Committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.) (\*VB: the second Friday of the month.)**

Dave Hardy has stepped in at short notice for this month's meeting, and will be giving the illustrated slide talk which he gave as Guest of Honour at Albacon in 1996 and Armadacon in '97. This is a different talk from the one on space art which he has given to the Group more than once over the years, and is a much more personal record of his life and work as an artist - plus a few surprises?

Dave illustrated his first book, for Patrick Moore, in 1954, and has been a member of the Brum Group since 1973, when he returned to his home town from Norfolk. He has held every Committee Post except Treasurer (which he says he never will being hopeless with figures), and has been Chairman four times - three years consecutively. He also produced the BRUM GROUP NEWS for four years, and in fact was responsible for its present title, and for bringing it into the digital age by producing it on computer. He now produces most of his art on an AppleMac. Dave has written and illustrated seven of his own non-fiction books since 1974, including the acclaimed VISIONS OF SPACE; ARTISTS JOURNEY THROUGH THE COSMOS (Dragon's World, 1989/1990).

The BSFG meets from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the 2nd Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). The annual subscription rates (which include 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) are £15 per person, or £20 for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. should be made payable to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: Alan Woodford, Treasurer, 81 Harrold Road, Rowley Regis, Warley, B65 0RL. (e-mail enquiries via bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk). Book reviews, review copies and other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to: Martin Tudor, Newsletter Editor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

## Colophon

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*Many thanks to: ALAN & ANNE WOODFORD for producing the address labels; the reviewers for their book reviews; STEPHEN BAXTER and STAN ELING for their lists; YVONNE ROWSE for her con report; DAVE HARDY for the biog; STEVE GREEN for his column; thanks also to WHAT'S ON, the Andromeda web page, the BBC and the EXPRESS & STAR for the news in the Jophan Report and Events Listing.*

*The following column was first submitted two months ago, missing the deadline by mere hours, and was held over from last month because of lack of space. However, as the information is still of interest, here it is:*

## The Roscoe Report #3 by Steve Green

Titanic director James Cameron, possibly the first captain ever to go up with a sinking ship, is now simultaneously linked with both the proposed remake of Planet of the Apes (Oliver North having apparently lost interest) and the long-mooted Spiderman movie (a pet project of Cameron's which was already old news when I discussed it with Marvel maestro Stan Lee seven years ago).

To confuse matters even further, Arnold Schwarzenegger - long floated at Charlton Heston's successor in Planet - is now tied to the \$100m millennial supernatural thriller End of Days, following the collapse of plans for him to star in yet another version of Richard Matheson's I Am Legend (most recently filmed as The Omega Man, with that chap Heston again - wonder who owns the remake rights to Ben-Hur and The Ten Commandments).

Arnie, of course, was probably the only person to escape last year's Batman and Robin with a smile, having pocketed \$25m for his guest appearance. The good news for us, however, is that the movie's lack-lustre box office performance - far more important to the beancounters at Warner Brothers than such piffing

considerations as a decent screenplay or well-paced direction - has prompted a massive re-think over the inevitable fifth instalment.

Enter Paul Dini, strolling across the WB lot from the studio's animation department, where's he's scripted many of the best episodes in the far superior spin-off series. Exit both Batgirl and the current incarnation of Robin, two of the more irritating live-action characters. Let's just hope the producers don't chicken out when they realise fewer superheroes means fewer dolls and models to sell (after all, merchandising is the real driving force behind these projects), just like they pulled the plug on Kevin [Chasing Amy] Smith's darker take on the new Superman franchise.

Meanwhile, Warner's plans to cash in on Babylon 5's growing popularity with a sixth season has been given a royal thumbs-down - by its creator/producer, J Michael Straczynski.

He's justifiably still smarting over the studio's initial refusal to green-light a fifth and final season, forcing him to disastrous truncate his five-year story arc; by the time Straczynski had the go-ahead for year five, there were scarcely enough loose ends left to make it worth the effort. That, plus the reluctance of several cast members to renew their five-year contracts, should thankfully drop the curtain on the main

series before fans begin demanding a mercy killing. Now there's a novelty.

### **The Roscoe Report #3.5 by Steve Green**

Channel 5 pop show presenter and part-time Lara Croft double Rhona Mitra has slammed plans for safety-pin model Liz Hurley as "too old" to play the acrobatic archaeologist in the TOMB RAIDER movie. No word yet on whether Liz will return in Mike Myers' mooted AUSTIN POWERS sequel.

Way overdue, Will Riker and Deanna Troi reportedly get to dance the horizontal polka in STAR TREK IX, which aims to break the "odd numbers are shit" tradition of its predecessors.

CULT TV, which this month offers "The Fifty Greatest TV Moments of All Time", is itself on borrowed time: the newly-installed editor tells me Future (which also publishes SFX) has already chosen a mercy killing.

### **Intuition, Eastercon 1998 a report by Yvonne Rowse**

Lets get the clichés of con-reports out of the way. Most peoples' journeys to the convention were hellish. The decent beer ran out but despite that I

managed to drink too much. I had to brave the snow to find a cash machine because I'd spent my entire budget on beer and books.

OK. That's stuff standard to all conventions. What was different?

This was my first split site convention. I hadn't realised quite how much the setting moulds the nature of the convention. Having two hotels, both with lifts, results in something like a farce without the frilly nighties. You glimpsed the person you were chasing through the closing doors of the down lift as you stepped out of the up lift then you had to wait for half an hour for the next down lift or step from the carpeted areas into the 'staff only' rough concrete stairwell and stagger down through hoards of white faced lift-phobic fans wheezing upward only to find no sign of your friend when you finally reached the ground floor. (My computer doesn't like the length of that sentence. I'm going to switch spellchecker off if it doesn't stop criticising.)

Of the programme items (I went to 17. I know, I'm a sad, shy woman) a few stood out.

Anything Iain Banks was in was worth going to, even when Iain Banks' hangover was playing the part of Iain Banks.

'Sex in the New Millennium' was very similar to 'A Life of Violence'. Each had a fairly small audience of uncomfortable looking people fronted by totally relaxed panellists. Both panels decided that allowing the reader to fill in the details was the most effective method, however Tanya Brown didn't hesitate to discuss a Poppy Z Brite torture scene. At that point I left and went to the toilet. I assume the person vomiting in the next cubicle had been to the same item. I left the Sex talk early too. I thought that maybe the BSFA AGM might be more interesting. I really am a sad shy woman. I wasn't joking.

Is Mike Siddall a friend of Martin Tudor? I've seldom seen Martin look so uncomfortable. Mike dragged a list of all Martin's disasters from him and held them up for our amusement. Of course, if this was a tactic to make us feel sorry for Martin and buy him lots of beer it probably worked.

Martin needs to take elocution lessons from his daughter Héloïse. Héloïse speaks clearly and puts her points across succinctly. Martin mumbles. I'm starting to sound like my mother. She's one of those people who sits at the back and sternly instructs people to 'speak up'.

Connie Willis, Ian McDonald and Martin Tudor were interesting and friendly guests. Connie was

particularly good on panels. I love people with strong opinions and Connie's opinions are very muscular! Ian, at times, seemed almost as nervous as Martin but was much poorer at pushing his publications. Martin made us all buy Taff reports but I didn't manage to buy a book by Ian. By the time I got my extra money the dealers were down to hardback copies.

Altogether, it was a good convention. The programme items were interesting, the beer was ok, the guests were great. I caught up with the gossip of friends made last year, I talked (eventually) to Ken MacLeod, I was entertained by Héloïse (what a charming child) and when all else failed I discussed the splendid decoration of the Britannia. I don't know what they talked about in the Piccadilly. SF maybe.

## Letters

**A. V. Clarke,**  
(Murray Falconer Ward, Kings  
College Hospital, Denmark Hill,  
London, SE5.)

Amongst the 'Get Well' cards and gifts I've had from generous fans (over 2000 pages of SF waiting to be read!), were four booklets from Sharon Lee and Steve Miller in the States. Aside from seeing them at a British con some time ago I'd had no contact with them, yet they sent me these booklets that

they write and a nice letter. Great people.

In this letter, Steve wrote the following:

"By the way, do you know Vernon Brown? I ask because I found a small yellow card in my possession a few weeks ago saying: 'Interested in SF? Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets 3rd Friday of each month Imperial Centre Hotel, Birmingham. Why not join us? 8.00pm'"

"On the back of the card is Vernon Brown's address at Aston University.... Any idea how old this may be? I wonder if I got it at Suncon? Could he have been one of the poor overseas fans who got stuffed into the back of my old Vega (with artshow hangings sharing the seat!) on the run between Orlando and Miami? We drove most of the night in the rain, and since Florida's highways are marvellously flat there was some small bit of hydroplaning going on. I'm told one of the fans later remarked that he'd never flown quite so low over water before.... Anyway, any hints as to more of Vernon's identity would be welcome!"

Thus Steve Miller. I'm away from my files, but I think Suncon was years'n'years ago. Can you help on this query, please? If Vernon is still around and would like to contact Steve direct, the address is: Steve Miller, PO Box 179, Unity, ME04988-0179, USA.

*[Yes, Vernon is still very much around and I'm sure he'll reply! As for Suncon, it was held in 1977 and I'm pretty sure the BSFG's very own Pete Weston attended - to bid for the 1979 Worldcon (Seacon '79, which he chaired). Could Pete have been one of those "poor fans"?)*

### Signing Sessions

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121 643 1999. (All at NOON unless otherwise stated):

**JUNE 13: ANNE MCCAFFREY** (FREEDOM'S CHALLENGE and MASTERHARPER OF PERN and special 30th anniversary edition of DRAGONFLIGHT).

**JUNE 20: RAYMOND E FEIST** (SHARDS OF A BROKEN CROWN); **ROBERT RANKIN** (DOWN TO THE VOODOO HANDBAG and THE BRENTFORD CHAINSTORE MASSACRE).

**JUNE 27: COLIN GREENLAND** (MOTHER OF PLENTY).

**JULY: MICHAEL MARSHALL SMITH** ONE OF US.

### Forthcoming Events

**12 JUNE 1998: DAVID A HARDY** will address the BSFG, from 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of

the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway).

**27 July-1st August 1998: DRACULA - FANGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE**, new rock musical, 7.30pm, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham. Tickets £8.50-£12.50, call 0121 643 1231.

**29 July-1st August 1998: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE**, 2.30pm and 7.30pm Solihull Library Theatre. Tickets £5, call 0121 704 6962.

**21-24 August 1998: THE WRAP PARTY** to celebrate the conclusion of **BABYLON 5**, the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London. Confirmed guests include: J Michael Straczynski, Harlan Ellison, Dr Jack Cohen, John Ridgeway, Bryan Talbot, Adam "Mojo" Lebowitz, John Matthews. Attending £75.00 (£80.00 on the door), to The Wrap Party, PO Box 505, Reading, RG1 7QZ.

**11 SEPTEMBER 1998: PAT CADIGAN** will address the BSFG on the publication of her latest work **TEA FROM AN EMPTY CUP**. From 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway). *[To be Confirmed.]*

**11-13 SEPTEMBER 1998: FANTASYCON 22**, the convention of the British Fantasy Society. At the

Albany Hotel, Birmingham, Guest of Honour Freda Warrington, Jane Yolen and Master of Ceremonies Ramsey Campbell. Attending £50.00 (£40.00 to BFS members). Contact: 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT (<http://www.djb.u-net.com>).

**9 OCTOBER 1998: PETER F HAMILTON** will address the BSFG on the publication of his short story collection, **A SECOND CHANCE AT EDEN**, and the paperback of **THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST**. From 7.45pm in the Lichfield Lounge, 2nd floor of the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway). *[To be Confirmed.]*

**7-8 November 1998: Memorabilia**, "Europe's largest SF, film, cult TV, pop and comic collectors fair". Hall 17, NEC. For further information call Made in Heaven 01899 221622 or tickets from box office on 0121 767 4555.

**13-15 NOVEMBER 1998: NOVACON 28**, at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Paul J McAuley. Attending membership costs £32.00 until 1st November, after which time memberships may be paid for on the door at the rate of £35.00. Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS,

(For further information check out <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n28/n28.html>).

**2-5 April 1999: RECONVENE**, 50th National British Convention, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. GoHs: Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon. Attending £25.00 to Reconvene, 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

**27 December 1999 - 2 January 2000: MILLENNIUM**. Venue to be announced, but definitely in Northern Europe (probably a BeNeLux country or UK), £3.00 (£10.00) per year, to be deducted from eventual membership fee. Contact: Malcolm Reid, 186 Casewick Road, West Norwood, London, SE27 0SZ.

*Although details are correct to the best of our knowledge, we advise readers to contact organisers prior to travelling. Always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope when writing to any of the above contact addresses. Please mention the BRUM GROUP NEWS when replying to listings or advertisements.*

*If you know of any events which you think may be of interest to members of the BSFG please send details to the Editor (e-mail [martin@empties.demon.co.uk](mailto:martin@empties.demon.co.uk)).*

*If you have attended any events or seen any films or videos that you would like to recommend to other members (or warn them about) please*

*feel free to write a report or review and send it to the editorial address.*

**The Jophan Report #115  
by Martin Tudor**

Nominations opened, on 1st May, for the 1999 North America to Europe TAFF race. The winner will attend Reconvene, the 50th National British SF Convention (Eastercon) 2-5th April at the Britannia Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool.

Prospective North American candidates should ensure that signed nominations (two from Europe and three from North America) reach the Administrators by midnight on 25th July 1998, along with their 100-word platform and £10/\$20 bond. Bond cheques should be made out in the name of the administrator they are sent to. TAFF also gratefully accepts freely given donations of money or auction goods - such donations have sustained it for over 40 years.

The European Administrator is Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, England. North American Administrator is Ulrika O'Brien, 123 Melody Lane, #c, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, USA.

Copies of Martin Tudor's completed 1996 TAFF Trip Report are available

from the editorial address or from Martin at the BSFG meeting price just £5.00 - proceeds to TAFF.

Steve Green has asked that I remind people that the Black Lodge still meet informally on the first Tuesday of each month. Currently they meet in the bar of the MAC, but other venues are being considered. Call Steve on 0121-706-0108 for details and to request a copy of the Lodge's newsletter THE REGISTER.

Publisher Pulp Fictions have launched a competition in their search for new and exciting talent. If you have a thrilling tale send a sample of not more than 5000 words by 31st January 1999. Alternatively send artwork featuring vistas of alien landscapes on transparencies by the same date.

Synopsis or sample chapters with double line spacing, or transparencies should be mailed to Pulp Fictions, PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex, BN26 6NW. (Enclose sae if you wish your work returned.) Winners will receive an exclusive commission and a holiday for two at a recommended pulp destination. Runners up (second and third places) will receive complimentary copies of Pulp Fictions for two years and one year respectively.



**Book Reviews**

**Life During Wartime by Lucius Shepard, Millennium, 438pp, pb, £5.99,**

**Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.**

There is no doubt that Lucius Shepard is a skilled writer. The problem with this book is the subject, having an intimate knowledge of the Vietnam War would probably be an advantage, especially from an American viewpoint. LIFE DURING WAR-TIME is set in a near future where US forces are engaged in a conflict in Guatemala. The fighting itself is not a lot different from present-day jungle warfare. David Mingolla is just another soldier. We meet him at the start of an R and R trip to a safe Guatemalan town. Here, he meets Debora to whom he is sexually attracted, but who he suspects is a spy. As a result of the events of this R and R, Mingolla joins the Psi-corps. Latent psi powers are enhanced by a cocktail of drugs and when ready, Mingolla is sent out to kill. Debora is one of those he is sent to find.

As the book unfolds, it is clear that there is a world-wide conspiracy, but not from the obvious direction. The source of it is historical and well hidden and Mingolla realises that unless a peace is achieved, the war in Guatemala is likely to be unending. This aspect of the plot has resonances with the Irish Situation, though this

may be unintentional, the story unfolds very slowly and unless you enjoy war books it may come across as a little tedious.

**The Stone Canal by Ken MacLeod Legend, 322pp, pb, £5.99**

**Star Rating \*\*\*\* \*/2**

**Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse.**

I enjoyed this book very much. It begins with Jon Wilde, anarchist, waking in the desert on New Mars, remembering his death. After a brief chat with a human equivalent robot, (who turns out to be Jon Wilde as well) he heads for the nearest bar. A man after my own heart.

The chapters alternate between the events on New Mars in the future and the autobiography of Jon Wilde starting in the seventies. At the centre of the book is the story of the political and sexual rivalry between Jon Wilde and Dave Reid, the boss on New Mars, erstwhile lefty student.

I found the recent past to near future thread was particularly good. MacLeod's depiction of student society in the seventies was lovely. I remember the intense political discussions, the Union bar, and the discos. I liked the accents too.

The more distant future thread was full of intriguing hints and puzzles, which gradually expanded into an

understanding of the society. The protagonists include the human equivalent robot; a man's consciousness in a machine body, a gynoid; a human clone containing a machine mind and a boy stuck permanently as a child because the hormone changes of puberty would trigger a fatal illness. I laughed out loud when I read the discussion of penalties for murder. The penalty depends on the victim's losses. "Emotional distress, loss of life-experience, earnings, loss of society for those close to them – add all that up and multiply it by down time." Very pragmatic.

I very much liked Dee Modal, a sex gynoid belonging to Dave Reid, with the body of Annette, Jon Wilde's wife. Originally she had a machine personality made of Systems, Stores, Sex, Secretary and Self. As the book begins she has uploaded Spy, Soldier, Surgeon and possibly others. These mind-tools kick in as required. I'd like one for myself called Mother.

Towards the end I lost the thread a little. I'm not really clear why the fast folk, smart machines, were such a threat but the book steamed on to a satisfying conclusion.

This is a book full of subtlety and wit but easy, in fact compulsive readability. It's a book that made me

think and a book I enjoyed. I have already begun re-reading it. It is well worth it.

**The Making of Starship Troopers**  
by Paul M Sammon,  
Little, Brown, 152pp, pb, £9.99,  
Star Rating \*\*\*\*  
Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The story of the making of the film begins with scriptwriter Ed Neumeier telling producer Jon Davison (a long-time SF fan) that he wanted to do an outer space war movie about humans killing giant insects. "You mean like Starship Troopers?" was the reply. Thus is revealed a major reason for the shift in emphasis away from the book version, in which the "bugs" appear only peripherally, to the film version in which they play a very major role. It is probably true to say that the movie pays little more than lip-service to the book whose title it has adopted: indeed, the point is made quite explicitly that the film would be more correctly described as an interpretation of Heinlein's original.

Having said that, it is also made clear that there was a serious effort to produce a good and well-made film. A dramatic presentation imposes a different set of parameters from those which rule the construction of a book and re-reading the original novel makes it clear why major plot elements had to be re-worked. Much

of the story would have been too slow-moving to make a good film if it had been followed more closely and some of the characters needed to be changed in order to heighten the drama of inter-personal relationships and introduce some essential love interest. Also, the drop capsules and the powered armour used by the Mobile Infantry were ruled out of the film on cost grounds, notwithstanding a budget sufficient to pay for groundbreaking new developments in the field of computer-generated special effects.

All this and more is covered by this thorough, profusely illustrated and well-written book, which tells the whole story of the making of the film from beginning to end. It is probably the best of its kind I have read and when I do see the film (which I regret to say I have not yet managed) I will be much less disposed to complain when faced with seeming departures from the original because I will better understand why the changes were made. I would recommend it to anyone interested in SF films in general as well as this particular one.

**Fog Heart** by Thomas Tessier,  
Vista, 319pp, pb, £5.99,  
Star Rating \*\*\*\*  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is the first novel for seven years from one of America's more original horror writers. Tessier's profile is

lower than it deserves to be because he is relatively unprolific (just eight novels and one collection in almost 20 years) and because he never repeats himself, preferring to use different themes and approaches for each of his works. Hence PHANTOM (1982) was as good a tale of subtle haunting as you'll find anywhere, while SECRET STRANGERS (1990) was perhaps the most exciting and surprising dark thriller I've ever read.

With FOG HEART he is back with the supernatural. The story centres around two sisters in their early twenties: Oona, who is genuinely psychic and clairvoyant, able to communicate with the dead and pluck secrets from the living yet scarcely able to cope with life, and Roz, who is her business manager and carer. They are of Scottish extraction, living in Connecticut. Among their clients are Carrie, who keeps seeing her dead father but cannot understand his message, and Jan, whose baby died terribly ten years before and who cannot shake off the shadow of the event. Carrie's husband is Oliver, an English businessman now domiciled in New York; he is a control freak who has affairs and enjoys strangling people. Jan's husband is Charley, a fake Irishman whose alcoholism is beginning to interfere with his college lecturing.

Over the course of several visits by the couples, in pairs and as a four-

some, Oona extracts the answers to some of their problems. But she also discovers Oliver's secrets. In fact, many skeletons are pulled out of their cupboards, not least concerning the origins of Oona and Roz. For the most part, Oona's revelations are framed in language that is difficult to interpret, making it easy for the husbands to be sceptical and for the reader to be tempted to skip passages.

Apart from the sad and, eventually, terrifying events which form the plot, this is a novel about scepticism turning to belief and about very odd characters who are unable to love those who love them. It is a clever and subtle book, brilliant in parts; a demanding read though not always a rewarding one.

**Where the Children Cry by Jenny Jones, Gollancz, 384pp, hb, £16.99,  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.**

Since Jenny Jones moved away from traditional fantasy, her writing has become more interesting. As she no longer has to convince the reader that her landscapes and societies are real, she can spend more time developing character. In this novel, the main character is the city of York. Joss Fletcher is sent back to York by the company he works for and he is forced to relive some painful childhood memories. He also discovers that three of his childhood friends are also in the city. The coincidence, and the

fact that his wife is Jewish, starts a chain of events which have resonances with the past. In 1190, Jews were massacred in York. The only non-Jew to die during the events of that March, still haunts the city, looking for revenge. The only Jew at Joss's school was bullied and died in strange circumstances. The way that these events are linked to the characters present lives makes an intriguing tale.

In essence, this is a horror novel though the horrific elements are relatively low key. The emphasis is more on the way that childhood events shape our lives and the appalling effect bullying can have on individuals. Even if you don't normally read horror, give this one a go.

**Minor Arcana by Diana Wynne Jones, Vista, 287pp, pb, £5.99,  
Star Rating \*\*\*\*  
Reviewed by Yvonne Rowse.**

I've read quite a bit of Diana Wynne Jones's children's fiction. I've found it to be imaginative, well written and full of real characters.

This book contains six short stories and a novella. It is aimed at adults. The (unusually) accurate blurb describes 'The Master' as "a precognitive dream which turns to a nightmare." This was the story I liked least, I have enough trouble with my

own nightmares to want to cope with someone else's, and it's still good.

'nad and Dan and Quaffy', about "a writer battling for supremacy over her computer keyboard" made me both laugh and sympathise. Her computer doesn't just underline everything with squiggly red and green lines though.

'What the Cat Told Me' is a good fantasy story, especially if you like cats (not much) and 'Dragon Reserve, Home Eight' is a good persecuted-psi SF story, especially if you like dragons (quite a lot).

The last three stories I found to be outstanding. 'The Girl Who Loved the Sun' is a beautifully written fairy story. The descriptions, particularly of Phega's transformation into a tree, are lovely. Her buds unfurled "with myriad shrill agonies, like teeth cutting".

I struggled initially with 'The True State of Affairs'. It's quite a slow moving story but as I read more the depth made the pace unimportant. It seems to be set in an alternative reality where the geography of Britain is the same but the political and religious situations are much different. The narrator is an imprisoned woman from our own world. That a society can be explored and rendered meaningful from such a restricted viewpoint is an indication of Jones' prowess as a

storyteller. I felt a deep sympathy for the woman, for her emotions, her disappointments and regret about the almost inevitable ending.

'The Sage of Theare' is my favourite story in the book. It's clever, witty and, again, beautifully written. It's about "a child born to an ordered world, preordained to spread dissolution." I liked 'the invisible dragons that lived in the rivers (and) had their invisible lines of demarcation'. I liked the difficulty a child of a god would have in preaching disbelief in the gods, especially once he'd met his father. I liked this story so much that I shall search out her Chrestomanci books.

Finally, I'd like to give an award to the blurb writer. He or she managed to give concise and interesting information about all the stories in the book with only one small error. This is almost unheard of!

\* \* \* \* \*

*The "Star Ratings" are:*

- \* = Utter dross.
- \*\* = Not totally unbearable.
- \*\*\* = Worth risking it.
- \*\*\*\* = Pretty damn good.
- \*\*\*\*\* = BUY IT!

### Also Received

FOUR AND TWENTY  
BLACKBIRDS, Mercedes Lackey  
(Voyager, £5.99); VACUUM

DIAGRAMS, Stephen Baxter (Voyager, £6.99); THE CROW: QUOTH THE CROW, David Bischoff (Voyager, £5.99); CLOUD OVER WATER, Alison Spedding (Voyager, £5.99); THE UNEXPLAINED ed. Ric Alexander (Orion, £17.99); THE PATHLESS WAY, Adam Nicholls (Orion, £5.99); THE WAR OF THE LORDS VEIL, Adam Nicholls (Orion, £5.99); THE PALADIN, Adam Nicholls (Orion, £5.99); MILLENNIUM: GEHENNA, Lewis Gannett (HarperCollins, £5.99).

### The Rules

*Please remember that reviews of books should reach Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (or by e-mail at martin@empties.demon.co.uk), within ONE MONTH of your taking the book.*

*All contributions are preferred on 3.5 inch disks in Works, Word, RTF or Text format.*

*Please note that in future no one who owes THREE or more reviews will be allowed to have further review copies and no more than three review copies may be taken at one time.*

### The List of Shame

*A number of people still owe reviews, please ensure that these, along with reviews of books picked up at the last two meetings are mailed to Martin Tudor by this month's meeting. The following list includes the name of the person, the title and author of the book and in brackets the month when the book was picked up for review:*

**Robert Jones:** TIMESCAPE by Gregory Benford (2/97).

**Steve Jones & Friends:** THE RUINS OF AMBRAI by Melanie Rawn (3/97); MAGNIFICAT by Julian May (3/97); THE REALITY

DYSFUNCTION by Peter F Hamilton (3/97); THE SANDMAN BOOK OF DREAMS ed Neil Gaiman & Ed

Kramer (4/97); MILLENNIUM ed Douglas E Winter (6/97); THE

DISCWORD COMPANION by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Brigg (6/97); BABYLON 5: TO DREAM IN THE CITY OF THE SORROWS by

Kathryn M Drennan (7/97); THE FIFTH SACRED THING by Starhawk (9/97); THE PAVILLION OF

FROZEN WOMEN by S P Somtow (9/97); WALKING TO MERCURY

by Starhawk (10/97); JOVAH'S ANGEL by Sharon Shinn (10/97);

3001: THE FINAL ODYSSEY by Arthur C Clarke (11/97).

**Adrian Middleton:** ALIEN: RESURRECTION by A C Crispin (11/97); SERVANT OF THE BONES by Anne Rice (11/97).

**Carol Morton:** SORCERIES ed. Katherine Kerr (2/97); RAGE OF A DEMON KING by Raymond E Feist (3/97); SORCERERS OF MAJIPOOR by Robert Silverberg (3/97); THE SEER KING by Chris Bunch (10/97); JACK FAUST by Michael Swanwick (10/97); MAGISTER by Jonathan Wylie (12/97).

**Tony Morton:** BARNACLE BILL THE SPACER AND OTHER STORIES by Lucius Shepard (3/98); TRACES by Stephen Baxter (4/98).

**Yvonne Rowse:** GREEN EYES by Lucius Shepard (3/98).

**George Terner c/o Dave Cox:** MILLENNIUM: THE UNOFFICIAL COMPANION, VOLUME 2 by N E Gense (1/98).

Howard Waldrop, "Ugly Chickens"  
Robert Sheckley, "Ask a Foolish Question"  
Terry Bisson, "Hole in the Hole"  
Robert Heinlein, "All You Zombies"  
P K Dick, "War Veteran"  
Ray Bradbury, "The Pedestrian"  
K S Robinson, "Green Mars".

**Stan Eling:**

"Hyperpelosity", L Sprague de Camp  
"Air Raid", John Varley  
"Second Chance", John Varley  
"Sail On! Sail On!", Philip Jose Farmer  
"The Monster", A E van Vogt  
"Flowers For Algernon", Daniel Keyes  
"A Subway Named Mobius", A J Deutsch  
"Omnilingual", H Beam Piper  
"A Beast For Norn", George R R Martin  
"An Infinite Summer", Chris Priest  
"The Snowball Effect", Katherine Macheau.

**Great SF Stories**

*At the February meeting Tony Morton invited guest speaker Stephen Baxter and all members of the Group to submit their list of Great SF Stories. The first two lists to be received appear below - please send yours!*

**Stephen Baxter:**

Ian Macleod, "Snodgrass"  
Bob Shaw, "Light of Other Days"  
AC Clarke, "The Star"  
Philip Latham, "The Xi Effect"  
James Blish, "Surface Tension"  
Larry Niven, "Inconstant Moon"  
Isaac Asimov, "Eyes Do More Than See"

*Lists should be no longer than a dozen or so titles and mailed to Martin Tudor, Brum Group News, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1 HX, or e-mailed to martin@empties.demon.co.uk.*

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- **Excellent writing skills**, with at least two years' experience of working on (and writing for) consumer magazines.
- Experience of **commissioning and subbing**.
- A keen sense of **humour**.
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