

# 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-Vernon Brown, Secretary-Dave Hardy, Treasurer-Alan Woodford, Newsletter & Publicity-Martin Tudor,  
Ordinary Members-Anne Woodford & William McCabe, Novacon 30 & 31 Chair-Tony Berry.

**This month's meeting is on 12<sup>th</sup> May,  
7.45pm for 8pm, in the Lichfield Lounge,  
second floor, Britannia Hotel, New Street,  
(entrance in Union Passageway).  
Admittance: Non-Members £4, Members £3.  
Concessions for full-time students & unwaged.**

**This month's speaker is:**

**ANDY SALMON**

ANDY SALMON is a member of the Birmingham  
Astronomical Society and will deliver a talk entitled

"From Kazakhstan to the Stars"

(what Baikonur Cosmodrome is like to visit).

**Next month's speaker is:**

**JOHN JARROLD**

On 9<sup>th</sup> June JOHN JARROLD editor of Simon &  
Schuster's Earthlight imprint will speak to the Group.

**More details of meetings  
on the back cover.**

**This month's Speaker is: ANDY SALMON**

ANDY SALMON, a member of the Birmingham Astronomical Society, will deliver a talk entitled "From Kazakhstan to the Stars" (what Baikonur Cosmodrome is like to visit) - *MT*.

**Letter of Resignation from Yvonne Rowse**

2nd May 2000

Dear Brum Group

Sad though I feel, I have to resign as newsletter editor. Since taking a full-time job I'm finding I just don't have time for all the things I've got to do and rather than let the newsletter suffer from neglect I handing the job back to Martin.

I'd like to thank all of you who have regularly reviewed books and got the reviews back to me in time, Alan and Anne who have helped with envelopes/labels and particularly Martin who has been a tremendous help, written a good part of the newsletter himself, photocopied it, and despite having huge commitments has taken the job back willingly.

I won't be disappearing from the Brum Group and, when things calm down in my life, I hope to be able to contribute again to the group.

All the best

Yvonne

**Signing Sessions**

Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk Street. For confirmation and/or further details call 0121-643-1999. **13 May: John Harris** will be signing his new art book, *Mass* - *MT*.

## Forthcoming Events

**Until 13 MAY 2000: Dan Dare Anniversary Exhibition**, Whitstable Museum, Kent. Call 01227-276998 for further details.

**Until 1 JULY 2000: Dan Dare 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition**, Atkinson Art Gallery, Lord Street, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 1DB. Admission £2, call 01772-700874 or 0151-934-2111 for further details. [*See Vernon Brown's report below for extra information.*]

**12 MAY 2000: BSGF meeting at the Britannia**, ANDY SALMON will deliver a talk entitled "From Kazakhstan to the Stars" (what Baikonur Cosmodrome is like to visit).

**26-29 MAY: Plokta.Con**, small con at the Holiday Inn, Leicester. GoH Ken MacLeod. Further information from 3 York St, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH, UK, or [plokta.con@plokta.com](mailto:plokta.con@plokta.com).

**9 JUNE 2000: BSGF meeting at the Britannia**. Editor of Simon & Schuster's Earthlight imprint, JOHN JARROLD, will be speaking to the Group.

**14 JULY 2000: BSGF meeting at the Britannia**. ANDY LOUND from the Planetary Society will be speaking to the Group.

**8-10 SEPTEMBER: FantasyCon 24**, the annual convention of the British Fantasy Society at the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham. GoHs Storm Constantine, Stan Nicholls. Further information from 46 Oxford Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT, UK or <http://www.herebedragons.co.uk/bfs/files/fc200reg4.jpg>

**10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: NOVACON 30** at the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. Guest of Honour Chris Priest, Special Guest Rog Peyton, Guest Artist David A Hardy. Attending membership costs £28.00 until Easter 2000, after which it may rise again. Contact: Steve Lawson, Registrations, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ or <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n30/n30.html>

**29 DEC 2000-1 JAN 2001: Hogmanaycon**, Central Hotel, Glasgow. GoHs: Spider & Jeanne Robinson, Sydney Jordan, Archie Roy, Vince Docherty, Oscar Schwiglhofer. Membership £35.00, contact: c/o 26 Avonbank Road, Rutherglen, Glasgow, G73 2PA; [john@gelsalba.demon.co.uk](mailto:john@gelsalba.demon.co.uk); [www.members.tripod.co.uk/Chris\\_Boyce/conpage.htm](http://www.members.tripod.co.uk/Chris_Boyce/conpage.htm)

**13-16 APRIL 2001: Paragon**, the British National SF (Easter)Con at Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, with guests Michael Scott Rohan, Stephen Baxter, Lisanne Norman, and fan guests Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Membership now £35 Attending, £15 Supporting, £17.50 Junior (12-16) and £15 Child (5-11), Infants free. Contact Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Tel. 0114 281 1572. e-mail [steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk](mailto:steve.paragon@keepsake-web.co.uk)

## *The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group*

**29 MARCH-1 APRIL 2002: Helicon 2**, the British National SF (Easter)Con, at Hotel de France, Jersey. Guests tba. Membership £30 Attending, £15 Supporting/Junior. Contact 33 Meyrick Drive, Wash Common, Berks., RG14 6SY.

*Although details are correct to the best of my knowledge, I 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 me, Martin Tudor, (e-mail empties@breathemail.net). 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 - MT.*

## **The Ray Gibberd Fund**

Ray Gibberd has been an integral part of ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP for over 20 years. He has been a director for over five years.

At the end of 1998 he was diagnosed with a brain tumour and was operated on immediately. The tumour returned at the end of 1999 and another operation was performed in January. He is now extremely weak and has lost his short-term memory.

He now needs a course of chemotherapy that is only available from America, but the NHS will not fund it because of it's high cost - £1,600 per month for 6-8 months. His immediate family have put up the money for the first three months.

We at ANDROMEDA are starting 'The Ray Gibberd Fund' and we're looking at ways of raising further funds through raffles, auctions, etc.

What we need are donations of cash, books, proofs, first editions, artwork, manuscripts, etc - even remainder books that we can raffle by the bagload - in fact, \*anything\* we can sell, auction or raffle. With your generous support we know we can raise the money so badly needed.

All donations should be addressed to The Ray Gibberd Fund, c o Andromeda Bookshop, 2-5 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1LT.

There will be a Ray Gibberd Day at ANDROMEDA sometime late May or early June when we will be auctioning and raffling rare books, artwork, etc.  
\*Please send an s.a.e. if you want to be notified of this event.\*

Rog Peyton,  
Managing Director Andromeda Book Co Ltd,  
6th April 2000.

## **The Jophan Report #130 by Martin Tudor**

Brum Group honorary president Harry Harrison successfully underwent a quadruple bypass operation on 11 April – his daughter Moira reported that by the 12<sup>th</sup> he was already recovering well. Get well soon Harry!

At Mecon 2000 a sf convention at Queens University, Belfast, Paul Tomlinson and others interrupted a fake panel featuring Harry Harrison with a birthday cake to celebrate his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday (with candles) and the entire assembly sang an enthusiastic rendition of Happy Birthday. Harry was presented with a bottle of whiskey (what else?) and a card signed by just about everyone at the convention. Paul also presented Harry with a card from David Hardy and the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, and with a portrait which had been drawn by Bill Sanderson, who worked with Harry on the WEST OF EDEN books and others. Both David Hardy's card and Bill Sanderson's portrait in the '75<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration' section of at [www.harryharrison.com](http://www.harryharrison.com)

Harry's fellow honorary president, Brian Aldiss, will receive the prestigious Grand Master Award for 1999 at the Nebula Awards banquet to be held 21<sup>st</sup> May in New York City at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. (This is the accolade awarded by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, SFWA, in recognition of a lifetime of achievement in sf or fantasy writing. Congratulations Brian!

In PAPER SNARL #10 (the e-mail/online newsletter from Paper Tiger) Steve Jones passes on a polemic from Forrest J. Ackerman:

"Years ago, when I offered my entire collection FREE to the City of Los Angeles and was seen on TV shaking hands with the Mayor thanking me for this generous gesture, five years went by and even with the clout of City Hall all they got were "Dear John" letters from Spielberg & Lucas who in effect said yes, I was a nice guy and they would vote for me for Mayor . . . but they never came thru with financing for the Museum.

**Corflu and Eastercon by Yvonne Rowse**

Corflu! What a wonderful convention. All the familiar faces and a lot more names that are familiar from fanzines. Yes, this was the Corflu with a huge number of English fans in attendance, as many as there were actual attendees last year. It was very much like a Novacon with an international feel. Over there the Plokta cabal, over here Maureen Speller and Paul Kincaid and there in the bad girls' (smoking) room, Linda Kraweke, Debbi Kerr, Alison Freebairn, Martin Smith and me.

I suppose there was a programme. I know people were doing the tired old discussion about whether TAFI should be buried and forgotten. I avoided it though. The only programme items I went to were the banquet and the softball game.

Ken Forman had been chosen (by lot) to be Guest of Honour and gave an entertaining speech at the banquet followed by a tango display with his wife. Geri Sullivan was voted last year's president of the Fan Writers of America.

I didn't play in the softball game, being deliberately late. Visions of waiting to be chosen for Rounders at school fill me with horror even now. No matter how much people protest that it doesn't matter I will not willingly put myself in a position where I can drop another ball and let the opposing side win.

My main memories of Corflu are breakfast at the Jitterbug Cafe, going dancing with Jerry Kaufman and a selection of fannish women at the local gay club and sitting up late talking and talking. I had a wonderful time and now I'm saving up to go to Rhode Island for next year's Corflu. Unlike Corflu, this year's Eastercon was much lacking in familiar faces. Not only were a lot of the usual fannish faces missing but there seemed to be far fewer authors than usual. (I was glad to see Alan, Anne, Dave Cox, Dave Hardy, Pauline and Rog there anyway, even if Martin and Tony didn't show up.) Some of this may well have been due to the difficulty finding people because of the far-flung bars and the fact that there didn't seem to be a fan lounge. It wasn't quite as bad as the last Manchester Eastercon where you could spend the entire weekend missing friends but it was still difficult. In the end the central meeting place seemed to be the Dealers' Room.

## *The Newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group*

The Central is quite a good convention hotel but for a con the size of Novacon, not an Eastercon. Never mind though. After a struggle to settle in and find friends on Friday, things got better.

To say the programme was light was an understatement. It was almost invisible. I went to see Ian Sorenson, Phil Plumbly and Jackie McRoberts in 'A Fistful of Hobbits' on Friday night and I was enchanted (and deafened) by the John Salthouse flash and bang lecture on exothermic chemistry but that was it. I wanted to go to both the Art Auction and the Guy Gavriel Kaye speech but missed both. The Art Auction I missed because I got there ten minutes late and there was nowhere to sit, it was cramped and standing in the doorway got in the way so I went away again without bidding for any of the pictures I liked (the Dave Hardy comet for example). I missed the GoH speech because after standing or sitting on the floor for most of the con we finally found some comfortable seats and we weren't about to lose them for a programme item. Frivolous? Not when you realise how few seats there seemed to be available in the hotel.

I enjoyed Eastercon this year despite the organisation rather than because of it. I'm beginning to think I might give up Eastercons altogether and just go to Novacon and Corflu and/or Ploktacon or the equivalent. Still, I'm paid up for the next on and it's easy to get to, having moved to Hinkley from Blackpool, so I'll give it one more try.

*[Corflu is an informal fanzine fan's convention generally held in the USA. This year it was held in Seattle over the weekend 3-5 March. Eastercon is the British National SF Convention this year it was called 2Kon and held at the Central Hotel, Glasgow over the weekend 21-24 April - MT.]*

## **Book Reviews**

**Lord of the Isles by David Drake**

**Orion, 625pp, pb, £6.99**

**Reviewed by Chris Chivers**

**Star Rating \*\*\*\***

David Drake has made the switch from straight Science Fiction to fantasy with remarkable ease. In this the first book of a trilogy? Quadrology? He has set the four main characters in a cosmic chess game, which takes them on a journey through a number a different planes of reality. Along with Tenoctris a female wizard, who has been moved a thousand years into the future, Garric or-Reise and his sister Sharina and his friend Cashel and his

Now that I'm thousands of dollars behind the hate-ball with legal fees for a forthcoming jury trial, Joe Dante, John Landis, Rich Correll, a collector/fan to the tune of \$4000 and Hugh Hefner (!) with a five-figure cheque (bless him) have contributed to my legal defence fund. I still need thousands of dollars, even offering from 4% to 10% for loans. Anyone who can help, even with as little as \$5, will receive my blessings, for whatever they're worth.

"I've been Dr Acula since 1939 but even that pun-name is being pirated from me. Anyone having a letter from me calling myself Dr Acula or seeing me calling myself that in some fanzine or prozine, I'd appreciate a xopy (Xerox copy). Frustrated Forry, approaching 84 and hoping to last another 17 years and become the Geo. Burns of the fantasy field and celebrate my 100th birthday with thousands of you fans."

*(Forrest J. Ackerman, 2495 Glendower Ave, Hollywood, CA 90027-1110, USA)*

Online bookstore BOL have published the results of their Penguin Modern Classics poll in which they asked visitors to their site to vote for their favourite book. The Top Ten Titles, as voted for by BOL visitors:

- 1 *The Lord of the Rings* JRR Tolkien
- 2 *1984* George Orwell
- 3 *To Kill A Mockingbird* Harper Lee
- 4 *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen
- 5 *Catch 22* Joseph Heller
- 6 *The Hobbit* JRR Tolkien
- 7 *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* Louis de Bernieres
- 8 *Wuthering Heights* Emily Bronte
- 9 *The Catcher in the Rye* JD Salinger
- 10 *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte

A full list of the Top 100 Titles can be viewed at [www.bol.com](http://www.bol.com)

## **Dan Dare at Fifty by Vernon Brown**

April 14<sup>th</sup> this year saw the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first issue of what is arguably the best comic ever seen in this country, THE EAGLE which introduced a character who has lived on long after the comic itself folded in 1969 – Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future.

To celebrate the occasion two separate Dan Dare exhibitions were mounted and Pat and I managed to visit both over Easter. Unfortunately the one at



Whitstable Museum in Kent is nearing the end of its run – it closes on 13<sup>th</sup> May – but if you do happen to be around the area it is well worth a visit (ring 01227-276998 for details) particularly for the original EAGLE dummy showing Dan Dare as Chaplain of the Interplanet Patrol.

The other exhibition at Atkinson Art Gallery, Southport, Merseyside, is much bigger. Like Whitstable it has lots of original artwork, comics, games, toys and ephemera but it also has models of spacecraft and satellites depicted in EAGLE, busts and models of main characters, displays of all sorts there's even a video of an interview with Frank Hampson. Perhaps the most striking item of all is the life-size coloured bust of Dan Dare himself, which stands just inside the exhibition room, raising those famous quirked eyebrows to greet the visitor.

But that's not all Southport currently has to offer. Just up the road from the Gallery is an arcade with a recently unveiled permanent bronze bust of Dan Dare at its entrance, cast from the same mould as the one in the exhibition. A short walk away in Mornington Road is Southport College where Frank Hampson was a student. A plaque and a small display of his work has just been opened in the library, so recently that the College Receptionist didn't know about it but I have since been assured that it is there. And a couple of miles away in Churchtown is The Bakery, a lean-to hut used from the beginning by THE EAGLE artists as a studio which has also just been graced with a commemorative plaque; there's also a notice about EAGLE material in the local museum but it is on loan to Atkinsons at the moment.

All in all Southport makes an excellent day out and if the rest of the family aren't fans there's plenty to do elsewhere in the town while you indulge yourself. A Supersaver return train ticket costs £21.50 from Wolverhampton to Southport inclusive (train to Liverpool Lime Street, tube to Liverpool Central, train to Southport), total time under three hours. At Southport turn right out of the station, then first left down to Lord Street, then left until you reach the Information Bureau, which is by the Gallery. Admission to the Exhibition is £2.00. Open Mon-Sat 10-5, Sun 2-5 until 1<sup>st</sup> July, but telephone first 01772-700874 or 0151-934-2111. On the other side of Lord Street is the Scarisbrick Hotel whose Barons Bar serves excellent barm cakes (aka baps, bunsor cobs) and real beer. Ask at the I.B. where to catch the number 8 or 9 bus to Botanic Road Churchtown, 80p single. The Bakery is next to Graham Eyes Butchers (recommended) just up from the United Reform Church.

If you would like more information see me at the Group meeting or drop me a line. [*Address on back cover - MT.*]

sister Ilna are forced to leave Barca's Hamlet on the Island of Haft. As they leave the only home they have known for the outside world, they are initially pawns on a chessboard, in a cosmic game played by unseen players. But unlike pawns they come to realise slowly that they have more powers than anybody realises.

As an introduction to an epic fantasy, *Lord of the Isles*, sets a cracking pace with a number of different strands well woven together. The characters are somewhat familiar in the fantasy mould, but even for all that they set the stage for the adventures that come their way. With some of the other principle characters such as Nonnus a solitary figure also from Barca's Hamlet, the treacherous Queen and the Hooded One an evil wizard, they pull the cosmic powers that rule the destinies of the islands around the inland sea together in a tale of mystery and intrigue. *Lord of the Isles* is a well-crafted book, which does not lose its way in telling an epic tale. There is plenty of detail without getting bogged down and the story moves with a nicely feel of timing.

This is definitely one for all fantasy readers, with the promise of more to come in the following books.

**Second Variety by Philip K Dick**  
**Millennium, 395pp, £7.99,**  
**Reviewed by William McCabe.**

Another collection of short stories from the complete collection (Volume 2). It is all good solid stuff with all of PKD's usual tricks - the heavy sense of irony, the twist at the end of the tail... - but there's nothing that really stands out here. In some ways it loses from the lack of oddities as in the first and third volumes but if you can take this sort of thing and still be constantly surprised then that should not be a problem. It's all good stuff from one of the best writers of the genre but it can start to feel a little predictable after a while.

**REVELATION SPACE by Alastair Reynolds**  
**Victor Gollancz, 476pp, £17.99 h/b, £10.99 trade p/b**  
**Reviewed by Michael Jones**  
**Star rating \*\*\*\*\***

It begins with archaeologist Dr Dan Sylveste and his fascination with a long dead alien race the Amarantin, the one-time inhabitants of the planet

Resurgam. He is about to discover something that could change the course of history but before he can act he is captured when a coup sweeps across the planet. Meanwhile a huge and heavily armed ship crewed by militaristic cyborgs is bearing down on Resurgam having spent a lifetime at sublight speed crossing space to enlist his late father's help. Sylveste, or, more accurately, the software programme he carries in his head containing his father's knowledge, is the only one who can save their metamorphosing Captain. On its arrival the ship takes on a replacement crewmember that is actually placed to serve the interests of a third, unknown group. None of those involved can anticipate the cataclysm that will result when they meet, a cataclysm that will sweep through space and could determine the ultimate fate of humanity.

That summary can do no more than provide an introductory taster to this massive and immensely complicated book. It is not one to read casually: historical events and background concepts put in brief initial appearances only to recur later when their importance becomes clearer and the author also employs a technique of stating that significant explanatory discussions have taken place between characters but without actually telling the reader what was said. This all helps to keep one turning the pages - it is like an intricate puzzle or detective mystery with the ending in doubt until, well, the end. About a third of the way through I had felt that everything seemed to be coming together but then it became apparent that the story was actually about something completely different from what I had thought. After another third I believed I could see where it was going, but there was still a great deal left to be worked out and explained. When I did reach the end I found that it was not only beyond anything I could have imagined but was also a step further than anything any other writer in my experience has done.

Bursting with advanced sf ideas and mind-blowing concepts, this is the sort of book that only comes along at rare intervals. Author Reynolds is an astronomer currently working at the European Space Agency and he puts his scientific expertise to brilliant use, not to mention what I suspect is a wide experience of reading the best in science fiction. After a number of short stories this is his first published novel and there is already at least one sequel in the pipeline.

Work some overtime, cut down on the drink, take out a loan, do whatever you have to do to get the dosh, but **BUY THIS BOOK.**

Forever Free by Joe Haldeman  
Victor Gollancz, 277pp, hb, £16.99  
Reviewed by Chris Chivers  
Star Rating \*\*

In this the long awaited finale to *The Forever War* and its sequel *Forever Peace* Joe Haldeman has once again stated that he is in the forefront of Science Fiction writers.

The story continues with the veterans of the Human Tauran war living on a planet called MF (Middle Finger). A planet that seemed to have no geological history, and that was in a part of space that had been inhabited by an earlier race that the Taurans simply referred to as the Bloor "the lost". The veterans of the Human Tauran war have stayed still due to the time differentials associated with warp ships, while the human race back home has evolved into a collective mind and simply used the term Man for themselves rather than Human for the non-collective mind "Vets". Man is keeping an eye on the "Vets" as they are useful as a genetic backup if anything goes wrong with the genetic makeup of the evolved Man. A number of "Vets" decide that enough is enough and they are no longer willing to act as a genetic base line for the human race. They decide to steal a mothballed starship and head 40,000 light years into unknown space to create a new life for themselves and their families so that they will be away from Man and the Taurans. The consequences of their actions to themselves and the other races is something that no one could foresee but is revealed as the story unfolds.

*Forever Free* is an absorbing finale to the other two books and Joe Haldeman is a craftsman at his trade. The plot line unfolds with several twist and turns and the reader is drawn in to feeling a great deal of sympathy for the out of place veterans from the Human Tauran war. Their struggles to get out from under and not to be dominated by what they see, as the cold blooded evolution of the human animal strikes a chord with the reader. The first 200 pages of the book deals with an all to familiar problem of people returning to normal life after fighting in a major conflict and with the problems of the "Vets" just trying to be themselves when the society that they left has changed so dramatically. The only sour note in the whole story was the final conclusion that seemed to be a let down after such a good build up through the bulk of the book, but *Forever Free* will I'm sure be well received by those who love Joe Haldeman's work.

VAST by Linda Nagata

**Victor Gollancz, 359pp, £16.99 h/b,**

**Reviewed by Michael Jones**

**Star rating \*\***

I had a real struggle with this - I found myself constantly looking for something else to do instead of picking it up and reading some more of it and I have rarely been so glad to get to the end of a book as I was with this one.

The basis of it sounded most appealing, with a crew of humans aboard a semi-organic spaceship fleeing the destruction of their world, with an automated alien destroyer in hot pursuit. For decades they seek either to fight off their pursuer or to make contact with the object of subverting it so that they can make good their escape. At the same time they aim to penetrate the part of space from which the enemy originated millions of years ago, in the hope of finding out how to put a stop to the endless destruction of all life in the universe.

(Yes, I am familiar with Fred Saberhagen's Berserker series.)

The trouble with VAST is that it is just too intricate. The crew are a highly advanced form of humanity and they live and operate in a confusing mish-mash of intelligent viruses, nanotech and computer interfacing as they restructure their ship, re-grow their bodies and split off virtual personae as and when the need seems to arise. Half the time I found it almost impossible to follow who was doing what, and why, and it was perhaps because of this that I could not discover any dramatic tension, any excitement, to keep me interested. Maybe this was simply a failing on my part and a better reader than me might get more out of it than I did, because there is definitely a high level of inventive writing in there. However, I must speak as I find and what I found was boring.

Also, there were tantalising hints that this was a sequel to at least one previous volume, with the possibility of more to come. On other occasions like this I have been interested enough to seek out the rest of the series, but not this time thank you.

**Time and the Gods by Lord Dunsany**

**Millennium, 584pp, £6.99,**

**Reviewed by William McCabe.**

This is the second in the series of "Fantasy Masterworks" (although there is no note of what number one was).

This is in fact a collection of 6 books of short stories published early in the last century (20th, that is). These vary between the mythological style of translated Greek and Roman myth and the traveller's tale but all of it seems to be original. This is one for those that think the modern fantasy writers are imaginative or inventive. There is not a great deal of detail here and you won't find any real depth to the characters but the story-telling has style and each story fits into it's allotted genre.

**Queen of Demons by David Drake**  
**Millennium Fantasy, 662pp, £6.99, pb,**  
**Reviewed by Chris Chivers**  
**Star Rating \*\*\*\*\***

*Queen of Demons* continues the story of Garric, Sharina, Cashel, Ilna and the sorceress Tenoctris, started in the first book in the series *Lord of the Isles*. After the defeat of the ancient sorcerer the Hooded One in a great battle the game should have been won, but the cosmic chess game continues. Garric, who know knows that he is from the ancient bloodline of King Lorcan who hid the powerful Throne of Malkar, which is the prize that the players of the game want. King Carus the last of the rulers of all of the isles, before they split into warring kingdoms, and who's ghost guides Garric towards re-uniting the isles into one coherent whole, but Garric has a long road to travel before this can pass. His friends Cashel and Ilna who are halflings also have powers that others want, and his sister Sharina are forced into different paths travelling through alternate realities before they are reunited. But in the background lurk the ever present forces of darkness that still want to use the main players in the saga as pawns in their own game.

With the second book in David Drake's epic fantasy, *Lord of the Isles*, the *Queen of Demons* manages to keep the pace set in the first novel going, without the usual drop off the second novels in a trilogy sometimes suffer from. Even though the plot line is somewhat predictable the characterisations do not suffer. The adversities that the main characters have to deal with are dealt with in a competent manner, along with several novel twists on the fantasy theme. David Drake is definitely making a mark for himself in the Fantasy field and he has moved himself up a notch from his straight Science Fiction novels.

A must for the followers of the first novel, with the hope that the third book is just as good.

**8<sup>th</sup> December Meeting – Skittles Evening  
by Vernon Brown**

For several years the Christmas Meeting has taken the form of a skittle evening with a great time being had by all. Trouble was, because the place was way out of town we had to hire a coach to get there, which made it difficult for some members to attend.

However, this year we have found somewhere much more convenient – the Selly Park Tavern in Pershore Road, just past BBC Pebble Mill and the Nature Centre, a couple of miles from the city centre. It's served by several buses, the most convenient of which are the 45 and 47 that run from the Rotunda and stop outside the Tavern, last bus back being after midnight.

The skittle alley itself is separate from the main building, has its own bar and we have it to ourselves all evening until 11.30pm (bar closes 11pm). There will be a variety of skittle based games (no previous experience required), prizes and a hot bar-type meal (menu available later) all included in the price of £10 per ticket, available at Group meetings or by post (cheques to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group") from Alan Woodford, The Treasurer, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY9 7XN.

**BSFG Web Site**

*If you have a moment to spare in front of your browser why not turn it to William McCabe's BSFG web site at <http://www.bsfg.freesevers.com>. Comments, suggestions and any help will be welcomed by William who can be contacted by e-mail at [wam@wamccabe.freesever.co.uk](mailto:wam@wamccabe.freesever.co.uk) - MT.*

***Needed: Reports on Brum Group Meetings***

***Have you enjoyed a recent meeting? Why not write 100-250 words about it for the newsletter? Contact Martin Tudor for details! – MT.***

## Brum Group Dates for your Diary

- 12 MAY 2000: ANDY SALMON - "From Kazakhstan to the Stars"  
9 JUNE 2000: JOHN JARROLD, editor from Simon & Schuster  
14 JULY 2000: ANDY LOUND from the Planetary Society.  
11 AUGUST 2000: To be announced.  
8 SEPTEMBER 2000: CHRIS MORGAN.  
13 OCTOBER 2000: To be announced.  
10-12 NOVEMBER 2000: Special Meeting at Novacon 30.  
8 DECEMBER 2000: SKITTLES EVENING at the Selly Park Tavern.  
12 JANUARY 2000: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

## Brum Group Meeting Information

The Brum Group meets from 7.45pm for 8pm in the Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, (entrance in Union Passageway), on the second Friday of each month (unless otherwise notified). We usually have a Speaker 8-9pm followed by an informal meeting until 10.30pm. Drinks may be purchased from Harvey's Bar on the Mezzanine and taken to our meeting room, usually the Lichfield on the second floor. Admission discounts are at the discretion of the committee and will depend on satisfactory proof of status being produced.

## Committee and Contacts

**Group Chairman:** Vernon Brown, 106 Green Lanes, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B73 5JH. **Membership** (which includes 12 copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to formal meetings) is £16.00 per person, or £21.00 for two at the same address. Cheques to "The Birmingham Science Fiction Group" and sent to: The Treasurer, Alan Woodford, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN (e-mail enquiries [bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk](mailto:bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk)) **Newsletter:** Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail to [empties@breathemail.net](mailto:empties@breathemail.net)) **Web:** [www.bsfg.freeservers.com](http://www.bsfg.freeservers.com)

## Colophon

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