



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

#### זה כנס? זה מסיבה? זה פיקניקון!

אגודה ישראלית למד"ב ולפנטסיה ומועדון סטארבייס 972, שמחים להזמין אתכם לפיקניק שבועות מיוחד שיערך ביום חמישי, 24.5.07, החל משעה 19:00 בפארק הירקון בתל אביב. באירוע תוכלו ליהנות מסיפורים מקוריים במעגל הסיפורים, תוכלו להצטרף בשירה או בניגון למעגל הפילקיייה עם פילקים מוכרים לצד פילקים חדשים, וכמובן תוכלו לסעוד להנאתכם ממיטב המאכלים (חלבי בלבד לכבוד שבועות). ההשתתפות בפיקניק כרוכה בתשלום של 30 ₪ לחברי אגודה ישראלית למד"ב ולפנטסיה ו/או מועדון סטארבייס 972 (40 ₪ ללא חברים) והרשמה מראש באתר, שיפתח במהלך השבוע השני של מאי: [www.picnicon.sf-f.org.il](http://www.picnicon.sf-f.org.il)

#### תוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

ימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות, חדר 2, בבניין ליד הבריכה. הפעילויות ללא תשלום.

20.5 - הקרנת הסדרה "Gargoyles"

27.5 - הקרנת פרקים נבחרים מהסדרה "החיים"

תא אנימה - ימי ג' בשעה 20:00 (אותו מקום)

15/5 - הקרנת פרקים נבחרים מהסדרה "Samurai Champloo"

29/5 - התחלת הקרנת הסדרה "Samurai 7"

מידע נוסף ניתן לקבל באתר התא (<http://sfir.tk/>) או בדוא"ל [sfir42@yahoo.com](mailto:sfir42@yahoo.com)

More Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

### Sara Beck Reviews Three Books by Diana Wynne Jones

***The Merlin Conspiracy*** by Diana Wynne Jones (2005), 480p.

***Conrad's Fate***, DWJ (2005), 400p.

***Aunt Maria***, DWJ (2003), 288p.

In the past few years I wrote for this respected publication on the books of Diana Wynne Jones (*CyberCozen*, January 2003). More books by this author have appeared since those reviews were published and here are brief updates.

Dianna Wynne Jones has not been idle. Since my review she has written two new **Chrestomanci** novels (*Conrad's Fate* and *The Pinhoe Egg*) and *The Merlin Conspiracy*, which is in the same universe and has some of the same characters as *Deep Secret* but is not really a sequel. As

I wrote before, most DWJ books are marketed for young people, but it can be hard to tell if a given book of hers is for children, teens or adults until some of each species have read it and argued over it. *Conrad's Fate* is clearly a kid's (9-13 years, maybe) book: it is a fairly straightforward story of a youngster in one of the Chrestomanci worlds learning to use magic, and is most notable for a good look at Chris Chant as a teenager. Cute for those who know the Chrestomanci world already, not recommended for a first-time reader. I haven't read *The*

haven't read *The Pinhoe Egg*, but the buzz is that it too is a true kid's book and shows Chris and Minnie in their early teens. *The Merlin Conspiracy*, on the other hand, is well on the adult and older teenager side of the scale and is first-rate, a worthy successor to *Deep Secret* (one of my favorite books ever). We see that the Magids of *Deep Secret* are not the only serious magic users around, and that they are not always in control of what goes on in their worlds. The conspiracy of the title takes over the magic of the Isle of Blest, which is the Britain-equivalent in a magic-rich world. The conspirators are a nasty and cold-blooded lot who want to be free to use the force of magic for their own power and without regard for the safety and stability of their land. They take over -- or think they have taken over -- the sources of magic and bind, or think they have bound, some powerful characters, including Gwyn ap Nud, the King of the Dead (in a very human rendition) and a Magid. They had, of course, no idea what they were doing and no idea what kinds of powers they were playing with. Against the conspiracy are Nick, a teenage boy last seen in *Deep Secret*, a teenage girl and young boy from Blest (the boy's awful mother is one of the conspiracy, fulfilling the law that in DWJ books the worst villains are always related to the good guys), a powerful non-Magid magician named Romanov, a deranged goat, the most annoying 9 year old girls in all fiction, a deranged goat and a talking elephant named Mini. There are funny

parts, very touchingly human parts (a moving scene where a young girl confronts her grandfather over some family history, only her grandfather happens to be King of the Dead), and a real sense of the history, legend and mythic power of the Isle of Blest/Britain. Highly recommended.

The book *Aunt Maria* was written before the first review but I only read it last year, so I comment on it here. *Aunt Maria* is officially for kids. I class it with Neal Gaiman's *Coraline*, which is also officially a children's book, as the scariest books I have read in a very long time. My daughter, a real DWJ fan, says that if she ever meets Ms. Jones in person the first questions she will ask are: is Aunt Maria based on a real person? Is she still alive? Where does she live, so I will be sure never to go there? The framework is classic: young mother and her two children visit the aunt of the children's deceased father. The aunt (Maria) is self-righteous, annoying, whining, manipulative, and beneath her poor-old-lady exterior, dreadfully power-hungry. Maybe you know someone like that? Well, the one you know, bad as she is, has probably never turned people into werewolves, buried them alive, removed their memories or turned them into zombies. Maria has done all that and more in her need for power, and done it all in the total conviction that she is always right and proper. Completely chilling.

### **Star Trek book review by Gary Roth:**

***Star Trek: The Return* by William Shatner, with Judith & Garfield Reeves-Stevens, 1996, 371 pages.**

Another *New York Times* bestseller! I theorize that Mr. Shatner comes up with the plot and that the other two co-authors fill in the details -- a team

effort that results in great reading entertainment! The planet Veridian III has been saved, assumedly from attack, though Kirk's *Enterprise* lies in ruins and

its captain has been buried on that world. The Romulan Empire and the Borg have formed an alliance against the Federation, and James T. Kirk becomes resurrected through Borg science and the scheme of a female Romulan commander. However, Kirk's brain contains an implant that programs him to kill Jean-Luc Picard, plus additional conditioning that makes him think that he was married to a Romulan and that Picard attacked his half-Romulan, half-human children!

This exciting novel opens with Kirk's death scene, wherein he and the "future" *Enterprise* captain exchange a few final friendly words. Then on to a fast-paced series of events culminating in Riker successfully fighting off a Romulan attack of small ships near Veridian III by resourceful use of manually-launched low yield photon torpedoes from Starfleet shuttles. Spock manages to extract himself from his Romulan-Vulcan reunification mission long enough to pay final respects to Kirk, and then decides to track down those culprits who unexpectedly beamed up Kirk's dead body from the burial plot. Not only did the Romulan commander Salatrak steal Kirk, but en route she decimated the transport Federation vessel *Farragut* via a cloaked, one-sided battle.

Meanwhile, Picard was being sent out on a special mission to damage the Borg. The captain had enabled the Borg collective access all of his Starfleet secrets while he was its member Locutus, and despite the fact that all of the Borg anatomy had been removed from him, he still felt that the collective was calling out to him to rejoin! Due to his ability to reconnect to the Borg, Picard was chosen to decoy the collective, even at the risk of losing him again. A highly-trained unit of a few security-warriors in modified armor is sent on a well-equipped shuttle-size

battleship, the *Monitor*. These fighters use phasers with multiple frequencies, and employ powerful grenades, too. In the ensuing fight, the security people all perish but enable Picard to continue with his scouting of the enemy from within its territory.

Soon thereafter, the new Kirk encounters and conquers several familiar figures in his quest to locate that dastardly Picard. The first victim is Worf, who had just managed to kill a local, vicious animal prey on his native Klingon. Kirk engages Worf in one-on-one combat, using ancient Klingon warrior technique and language! Similarly, Kirk tracks down Data and LaForge during planetary exploration on a frozen world, and quickly neutralizes them. However, when he tries to trip up Riker on Deep Space Nine, the good guys have a few tricks up their sleeve, and Data (with LaForge assisting) fells the "imposter" with a hand phaser set on stun.

In the meantime Spock does a great job of getting himself captured by underworld Romulans in an attempt to draw closer to those who stole Kirk. However, he gets more than he bargained for and is soon thereafter prepared on a surgical table to be turned into another member of the Borg, just like Picard was once. Surprisingly, though, the operation does not even get past making a single hole or cut -- it turns out that Spock already had an early form of Borg thought processes when he encountered and contacted *V'ger* (remember the first Star Trek movie?), and thus did need further indoctrination. This fact proves to be an advantage, as Spock gets help from the collective's members in obtaining a powerful, speedy Borg shuttlecraft at his disposal.

Eventually, Kirk's implant is surgically removed, thanks to a young

doctor working with the venerable physician "Bones" McCoy, who (at the age of 166 or so) is transported aboard by means of a separate, impromptu spaceship. Nonetheless, the Romulan-Borg programming sticks around and soon Picard and Kirk exchange blows on the holodeck recreation of (first the newer, then the older) *Enterprise*. Only when Spock performs a double/triple mind-meld with the two captains does Kirk revert to the side of our heroes.

By the way, distrust rears its ugly head in numerous places. Picard spots Spock aboard the Borg vessel, and Riker had his own suspicions about Spock's obsession with Kirk's carcass; Salatrak's subcommander and centurion continually cast doubt on her command decisions; Kirk's allegiance to the Romulan cause is suspect at various stages; Romulans and Borg plan to overcome each other as soon as they together defeat the Federation; a Romulan-turned-Borg has a moment in which his old Romulan self asserts itself long enough to tell Salatrak to abort her mission before it's too late, etc.

In the end, Kirk commands the souped-up *Monitor* and destroys the young Romulan captain and her ship by essentially ramming the two ships together. This in turn ruins the Romulan-Borg alliance, leaving Kirk and Picard to penetrate the Borg core and to explode it.

A nifty maneuver by Kirk results in Picard being beamed aboard safely to their ship while he himself dies (again) in the accompanying explosion. Kirk would have died anyway soon thereafter due to nanites that had been implanted and not treatable (at least, not in this book -- see my previous book reviews!).

The reader is treated to some great sci-fi concepts: the large Borg ships cannot be damaged by conventional weaponry because it's "like hitting a holograph" -- they are in constant flux and always changing their formation. While the typical Borg cube is mentioned, at times their vessels reform into a spear, which actually was used against the collective: two spears chased the *Monitor* from opposite directions, and at the last moment the pursued vessel performed a y-axis movement that caused the 2 spears to collide with each other! Another example -- a subspace tracer particle accompanied Kirk wherever he went, so that Salatrak could keep track of him and his progress. Unfortunately for her, the Starfleet personnel caught on to the Romulan particle sweeps and thus were able to overcome the cloaking device in locating her ship.

All in all, this action-packed story leaves the reader wishing for a sequel. Warning -- once you start reading, you'll have trouble putting the book down!

## DVD Review by Aharon Sheer

***Robot Stories* (2003), Directed by Greg Pak, Writing credits Greg Pak, 85 min.**

Jews in America have problems with their mothers. American Jewish mothers are over-involved with their children, dominating. Curiously, Israeli Jews do not seem to have such problems with their parents. The reason seems to be that Israeli society sees parental involvement with children to be normal and healthy. I

remember an American WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) telling me, "I have a very good relationship with my parents. I see them every year at Christmas." For the WASP, the ideal adult is independent, and has little or no contact with his parents who are pleased having things that way. For WASP adults

to see their adult child once a year – or to see their parents – is plenty, thank you. Since the Jewish mother wants more contact with her children, she is exceptional in America, a problem mother. This movie shows that Asian-Americans have similar “problems” with their mothers as Jewish-Americans do. The movie was written and directed by Asian-Americans, and problems between parents and children are a central issue.

**Robot Stories** is four short stories having to do with robots and parents and children. Three of the stories are science fiction. “My Robot Baby” is about a future in which permission for a couple to have a child depends on being able to successfully care for a robot baby. The robot baby cries, complains, and coos, needs to be cared for and handled properly. People who can’t handle that robot baby can’t get permission to have children.

“The Robot Fixer” tells the tragic story of a young man who has gone into a coma and does not respond to the world. His mother sits with him, talks to him, and tries to bring him out of his coma. She tries partly by bringing him numerous toy robots such as he loved when he was a child. Not science fiction, but something that could be real today, and painful.

“Robot Love” describes a future in which robot office workers, walking, talking humanoid robots, are being brought into offices perhaps to gradually

replace human workers. They work faster than humans, never need to sleep. Not surprisingly, the human office workers do not respond well to them, even tormenting them. And what happens when a male office robot sees a female office robot in an office across the street?

And finally, “Clay” tells the story of a future in which the contents of a person’s mind may be downloaded into a computer simulacrum. The hero, an elderly sculptor, has such a simulacrum of his wife, who died long ago. He can talk to her, and even enter a kind of trance state in which he feels like he is young again and interacting with his young wife. Since his sculpting is a source of income to his family, the sculptor’s son wants his father to download himself, so that his simulacrum can continue to work and create new sculpture, even after the old, sick sculptor will die. But the old man does not want to be preserved in a simulacrum, he wants to just die.

The stories, mostly acted by Asian-Americans, (including director / writer Greg Pak, who beautifully plays the office robot) are moving and thoughtful. But what they reminded me of were “dysfunctional” (in WASP terms) Jewish parent-child relationships; obviously Asian-Americans also don’t fit in to the ideal WASP world.

Recommended. I have the DVD in case anyone wants to see it.

*For Comments:* 13 Pinsker St., Rehovot 76308. Email: [asheer@netvision.net.il](mailto:asheer@netvision.net.il) Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225  
 Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulou  
 For mail delivery of *CyberCozen*, please donate 30 shekels per YEAR; For airmail to US \$15; If Aharon Sheer can hand-deliver it, 15 shekels. For **free email delivery** write to [asheer@netvision.net.il](mailto:asheer@netvision.net.il) (specify XP Word format or PDF format).  
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