

Dark Matter Chronicles

Issue 2.7
ISSN 1524-671X

June 10, 2000

www.eggplant-productions.com/darkmatter

SciFi Archive

Reviewed by J.G. Stinson

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Publication Information

According to the site documentation, someone named Lee Skidmore first uploaded this site in 1996. From what's available, Mr./Ms. Skidmore set up the site to display personally written fiction and poetry and printed matter for sale, as well as some general SF information. Readers should note that not all the information here is current; the latest update anywhere on the site appears to be May 1999.

The site is basic in design and easy to navigate. It appears to have been constructed as a personal website, with a few additions to give it a connection to SF in general.

The site index lists the Contents as: Future Novel, Books, Magazines, Artists, InStar Info, Storm Board, Airlok19, Awards, and Latest New Author.

Future Novel contains what appears to be a complete electronic novel called Lev.UP. Page one of this book comes with musical accompaniment. Skidmore also includes hyperlinks to terms in the text! What a concept!

Obviously, a lot of time and effort went into this book and this site.

The novel starts off quite well, in a Gibsonian fashion, with a lot of interesting terms and a man on the run. Some writing errors are evident, but they're the kind that are easily fixed by a competent copy editor.

Books and Magazines are Skidmore's for-sale list, which hasn't been completely updated in about a year, according to a random sampling of the listings. But it looks like an extensive collection. Magazines has more in the way of older pubs like Astounding, and will probably interest collectors more than the general reader.

Artists contains Skidmore's index of books, magazines and artworks searchable by artist name.

InStar Info, StormBoard and Airlok19 all appear connected to Skidmore's novel.

InStar Info concerns a planetoid made of garbage, around which Skidmore builds a tale of space-opera daring and bold adventure. The scientifically adept might find flaws here, but it sure sounded good to me.

A StormBoard is a form of transportation specifically used to participate in riding tornados as a sport. The science, again, might not be built on a solid foundation, but then again, this is science fiction. It reads well, and Skidmore has a confident writing style.

Airlok19 is a sort of revolving-door game, where pressing the indicated red button takes the visitor nowhere until around the fifth try, when another frame is engaged that leads to other pages with even more information. Maze lovers will have fun here. There's a lot of detail here, impressive for its mere existence, not to mention its logicity.

Awards is a compilation of all the awards handed out for SF works and who won which one

For over 30 years, J.G. Stinson has been reading science fiction, fantasy and horror, and lays the blame for it on Andre Norton and Alfred Bester. Her other recent reviews can be found in [Electric Wine](#) and [The Market List](#). Don't say we didn't warn you.

in any given year. Again, it's not entirely up to date.

Latest New Author concerns Michael Allen Kent, and this is basically an ad for Kent's book, *The Great Earth Experiment*, which appears to be about LGMs and their alien conquest plans. That's *Little Gray Men*, by the way . . . you know, the ones with the big black eyes?

Skidmore claims there are over 600 pages at this site. Considering the wealth of detail evident in the first chapter of his novel, I'd say that's no lie. If you've got an afternoon to goof off, this looks like a good place

to spend it and actually feel like you've accomplished something.

Meat Bag

By James R. Stratton

This story © 2000, James R. Stratton

Noise! Raucous, giddy, frightening, clamoring noise pulled BoyTen's mind six different ways. He couldn't think, couldn't see, couldn't smell, it was so overwhelming. He stumbled along the street buffeted by the crowd as his bare feet slapped the wet pavement. His head barely reached the waists of all these big people, so his view was blocked by the fleshy forest of bodies. Behind him a trail of angry shouts marked his passage. Seeking asylum, BoyTen's gaze darted about but only found more people, more noise and more bewildering sights. The big people loomed over him, walking and talking and generally acting like he wasn't there. An opening, dark and unpeopled, appeared between a huge man dressed in bright holiday colors and a gleaming silver cart pushed by a sad, withered woman. The boy leapt through, startling the woman, and scrambled on all fours into the dark and quiet. Sighing, he crawled into the space between two dumpsters smearing smelly filth on the legs of his oversized green overalls. He hugged his knees to his chest and pulled down his knit cap to cover the blue marks on his forehead.



"Got you, ya little bastard!" said a man with a face the color of a looming thunderstorm. "You

knock over my table, you break my goods, you pay!"

"I'm a good boy, a very good boy," he murmured softly. "But I done a bad thing." He rocked slowly as his gaze darted about, trying to encompass this place. "KeeperJohn, I'm sorry. I wanna come home. Come find me."

But how could that happen? He's gotten so turned around on the street that he'd lost track of his turns and twists. How would KeeperJohn, or even ChiefKeeperSimon, unravel the trail if he could not? He himself was lost and he'd treaded the path with his own feet!

As his breath slowed and his heart beat quieted, BoyTen worried at the puzzle. Try to remember the path back? He grunted and grimaced as he tried to force his brain to remember. But the chaos of his passage overwhelmed him. Follow

his own tracks? Maybe, but there was no dirt to hold his foot prints. He clutched his knees tightly as his eyes burned with tears. There had to be a way!

He sat up and sniffed deeply. Yes! He clasped his hands and sniffed again. The air was rich with exotic scents he'd never smelled before. But laced in and through them was his own familiar musk. Normally he ignored it, but not today!

BoyTen climbed to his feet and padded slowly down the dark alley. If he could follow his own scent-trail back the way he'd come, he might find his way. Hot tears blurred his vision again as a sob burst up from his belly. He needed to be home so bad! He missed his pen, the compound with its climbing structures, his fellow boys and girls. Oh, this crowded, dirty, noisy place was terrible!

BoyTen pinched himself. Not now! He would need to be calm if he had any hope. Breathing deeply as he'd been taught, BoyTen stilled his mind and heart. He exhaled forcefully and wiped his nose on his sleeve. Sniffing lightly, he smiled. Yes, it was there.

Padding to the entrance, BoyTen stared wide-eyed from the shadows at the swirling crowd. His trail turned to the right, back the way he'd come. He hugged his sides and took a cleansing breath. Inhaling deeply, he slipped in between two men striding along and marched with them in the human canyon they formed. He sucked air into his nose as he walked. Good, a left here, and straight ahead.

He walked a good long way, turning left and right, and only lost the scent once. A quick backtrack got him back on the trail. With his eyes half-closed, he ignored everything but threading his way through the sea of smells. The further he came, the fainter his scent grew. It was spreading in the air and drowning in the sea of other smells. Suddenly a hand grasped his shoulder, jerking him around.

"Got you, ya little bastard!" said a man with a face the color of a looming thunderstorm. "You knock over my table, you break my goods, you pay!"

BoyTen squirmed and pulled, but the loose coverall had too much slack. The man twisted his one hand around to gather more cloth, and punched the boy on the side of his head so his knees buckled.

"Stop it! Hold still," the man shouted. "You wait for the police." He smacked BoyTen again so the boy saw sparkling lights dance before him. A cold breath on his scalp warned him he'd lost his cap. It lay just beyond his feet. But as soon as twitched toward it, the man hoisted BoyTen up and thumped him on the side of the head so that everything blanked out for a moment. He returned to gasps and shouts as he spun helpless in the man's hand.

"Look! He has blue numbers on his forehead."

"It's the meat bag! He was on the video this morning. Hold him. There's big money out for him."

"Yeah, grab him. Someone call the cops. We need to turn him in."

Several of the big ones closed in to pull and paw at him until BoyTen thought he would go insane. KeeperJohn had taught him to always mind the big keeper folk, but this was too much!

He shrieked so that his lungs and throat burned, and exploded into motion. Biting, clawing, kicking and butting, he cleared a space around himself. Several of the big ones clutched bitten hands or bloody nail-scratched faces. He spun on his heel and screamed his outrage at them so they swayed back, then bounded forward. A fat woman with dark hair fell over in her haste to get away, and the boy stomped across her belly and bust. His bare feet barely touched the pavement as he hurtled left, then right, then under, then over. The pounding feet and angry shouts faded quickly, until he was sure they'd lost him. Soon he huddled alone in a courtyard surrounded by tall brick buildings.

As he panted, BoyTen's eyes froze and a sob hiccupped through his clenched teeth. He's lost them, sure, but he'd also lost his original scent trail! Worse, he couldn't backtrack to pick it up again. These big people were mean. They'd grab him if he went back. So he was truly lost now, with no hope of finding his way home. Shivering, BoyTen dropped to the ground and wailed. The buildings around him echoed the mournful sounds back until the courtyard rang with his sobs.

"Boy? Are you hurt?"

The soft, quavering voice jolted him to his feet. He spun and crouched, his jaw jutting with teeth bared, his hands raised with fingers bent to claw. Growling, he glared defiance at the woman standing in the doorway nearest to him. She was thin, so her wrinkled skin hung loose from her cheeks and neck. She was pale, so even her hair was the fluffy color of clouds in a blue sky. And frail! BoyTen had no doubt she would shatter into a dozen pieces if he touched her trembling frame. She was unlike any big person he'd ever met.

She breathed deeply and called out again. "Boy, are you okay? You needn't worry. I won't hurt you."



BoyTen's eyes froze and a sob hiccupped through his clenched teeth. These

big people were mean.

He rubbed his nose on his sleeve and gulped. "Um, I'm lost. I was trying to go home, but a bunch a people grabbed me and hit me."

She frowned and glanced at the blue marks on his head. "You can come inside if you want. I've got apples and bananas, and some cookies I was baking for my grandson. Come on," she said and held out her hand like KeeperSue.

The boy poised for flight, but realized he was too alone and scared to run. Run where? The yearning to be someplace safe with a friendly person ached within him. Slowly, he crept forward and took her hand. It was softer than any hand he'd ever held, and she smelled wonderfully of clean and quiet. At the same time, his stomach knotted painfully as odors wafted through the open door behind her. Yes, cookies and fruit like she said, but also bread and meat and fish and veggies, older smells from other days but all good. He shrank up against her side as he entered the house wide-eyed. The food-smell wrenched his throat in the close space until he whined. He grabbed an apple and banana from a bowl as soon as she sat him at the small table in the corner. She laughed as he rammed first one then the other into his mouth until he cheeks bulged with the gooey fruit mess. Gulping forcefully, he cried aloud as his stomach shuddered with pleasure.

The woman set a cup of milk and plate of cookies in front of him and sat. "I think I know where you belong. Would you like me to call your friends so they can take you home?"

BoyTen slurped the milk and shoved a wonderfully warm sweet cookie into his mouth. "Yeth," he mumbled and picked up another cookie. She nodded and walked to a black phone thing by the door. She dialed several times, and murmured at length into it. Smiling she turned back as he sat clutching the last cookie.

"They'll be here soon," she said. "Are you full now? You look tired. Would you like to lie down until they get here?"

His stomach bulged and his eyes were hot and heavy. He nodded and took her hand. She led him to the next room. There was a big couch there like the one in KeeperDoc's office, but lots softer. He curled up on it and the lady began to sing softly. KeeperSue sometimes sang, but not this song. It was about all kinds of silly things like babies and cradles and trees. He giggled several times at it even as waves of sleepiness washed over him. Soon he was afloat with a dreamy lassitude. He felt her pat his cheek as he drifted off and smiled.

When he awoke, he realized a long time had passed from the way the light came in the window. BoyTen jerked his head up and turned to face the voices. There was the nice lady's soft quavery one, but whose was that deep booming voice? He smiled as his heart thumped. KeeperJohn! He kicked to get clear of the blanket that covered him but just got hopelessly tangled. Rolling, he thumped onto the floor, cutting off the voices. He grabbed the blanket with both hands and peeled it away as KeeperJohn filled the doorway.

"Hey, champ! I am so glad to see you," the man said and walked over. The boy smiled, but his chin was quivering even as he did. Oh, he hated it when he blubbered and that just made it worse. Tears welled, and the boy clutched the man's heavy green coveralls.

"I've been such a bad boy. I snucked out the gate when KeeperBill left and took his hat and clothes, but now I lost his hat and I got a lot of people mad at me . . . "

"It's okay, sport. It's all over. I'm not mad." KeeperJohn rubbed the boy's back and said this over and over until the tears stopped. Kneeling down, he looked the boy in the eye. "It wasn't your fault. KeeperBill should have been more careful. You won't have to worry about him making that mistake again. You ready to go home?"

BoyTen found himself panting at the thought. The compound, the other boys and girls, his pen! Oh, he couldn't wait. "Yes! Now, please."

"I'll just be a minute. I have to finish talking to Mrs. McCarty first."

He stood with the boy in his arms. "I really can't tell you how grateful Universal Medical Supplies is for your assistance, ma'am. This little fellow is worth a small fortune to us and his owner."



BoyTen found himself panting at the thought. The compound, the other boys and girls, his pen! Oh, he couldn't wait.

The old woman frowned. "They had his picture posted at the store but the manager there called him a meat bag. I didn't understand that."

KeeperJohn frowned and snorted like he did when he was angry. BoyTen clutched tighter. "That's a nasty word I don't approve of. This young fellow is a donor-clone. One of Universal's clients paid a lot of money for us to grow a clone from his own tissues for use as an organ donor."

"But they're going to take his heart and liver and such someday, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes. His owner has contracted for the normal array of transplants; organs, corneas, endocrine glands and marrow. But this little guy's lucky. His owner also asked for a full skin transplant, and he isn't close to big enough. We'll be starting hormone therapy soon to force him to stretch out, but he still has a couple of years."

"Oh dear," she sighed with a tremor in her voice.

"Don't worry, ma'am. He'll live a wonderful life full of fun and happiness, until one night he'll go to sleep. And that will be it."

BoyTen clutched tightly. There was so much he didn't understand! And the tone of KeeperJohn's voice was scary, just like when he was mad at you.

"Besides that's not something you need to worry about. And you are entitled to a sizable reward for calling us. You'll be getting a call from the main office today. Please don't talk to any media people before then. Universal will be willing to compensate you very well for your discretion."

The old woman smiled at last, and BoyTen smiled back. KeeperJohn tousled the boy's hair and said, "You ready to go home?"

BoyTen nodded vigorously, and pushed the big man's chin around until he faced the door. KeeperJohn laughed and walked to the front hall. "Bye!" the boy called over the KeeperJohn's shoulder and waved to the nice lady as they went out the door.

Jim Stratton is a government lawyer specializing in the field of child abuse prosecutions, and lives with his wife and family in a rural area of southern Delaware. He's been an avid fan of speculative fiction all his life, has been writing short stories and novels for 5-10 years, and has been a reviewer for *Tangent* and *Tangent Online* for the last several years. Publication of this story in *Dark Matter Chronicles* is his first published fiction.

Fables

Reviewed by Rie Sheridan

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I spent several fascinating hours at the [Fables](#) site, and considered it time well spent. The layout is simple, elegant, and easy to navigate. All the links that I found were in working order, though I do wish that they would link their new e-publishing site "Silver Lake Publishing" back to the main site. However, it could be that this was a conscious choice to keep the two separated as the only link to the publishing site is through the "Town Crier" announcement of its formation.

Currently, there are few graphics on the site, but the ones they have are very nicely done. The choice of gray scale line drawings works well with the brown side bar and coppery links. My only quibble with the look of the site is that the typeface chosen for the side bar is a little too flowery for quick scan. It took me a minute to decipher some of the section titles.

No plug ins are necessary to enjoy the site, but if you have Real Audio Player, several of the stories are available to listen to as well as read. As my sound card is currently AWOL, I can't testify to the workability of this particular aspect. I do know that they have a download link in case you need the plug in, and I found that a plus feature.

The load in is quick, and the switches from area to area are timely and smooth. I was particularly impressed that each story in the "Great Hall" contained a link to a biography page and email address for the writer. The content has a good readability level as far as typeface and font size. As for the stories themselves, while all that I read were very professional in their presentation, with no obvious grammatical errors, I thought that the majority could have benefited from a little more judicious editing. My favorite story among the six that I read (out of

eleven entries) was K. Bird Lincoln's tale of a Japanese girl who falls in love with a garden spirit, "Red Plum Blossoms." The story was lyrical, and evocative. She had a wonderful grasp of the culture she was writing in, and my only faults with her story were minor questions of style. (I think the quoted poetry should have been quotes within quotes, but it didn't affect the readability.)

"Just Right" was a tongue-in-cheek look at the Three Bears by Stephen D. Rogers, and I thought it was delightful, but could have sustained some more detail without losing its tight focus.

"Dragonslayer" had to overcome the fact that I write fantasy to impress me. At first, Bent Lorentzen accomplished this. The story had a sumptuous beginning, with a lot of detail, and rich language. However, it bogged down of its own weight in the middle, and the details began to get in the way. The descriptions of the dogs are specific examples of this. I felt that the plot fell apart at the end. I was left with a sense of unfulfilled promise.

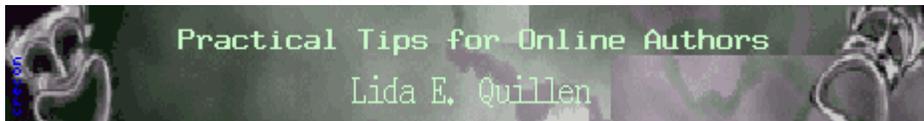
"Don't Miss Me" by Terry Bramlett was a ghost story with potential, but again, it seemed that there could have been a lot more details. The horror that the protagonist was supposed to be suffering needed to be punched up more. I didn't see why he would change his mind after the ghost's appearance—it wasn't that threatening.

"Giacomo's Revenge" by H. Turnip Smith couldn't really decide what type of story it was. It started out sounding like one time period, and then jumped to another . . . which was okay, but then it went from realism into fantasy and the blending was not very smooth. I found myself worrying more about feasibility of the action than the characters, and by the end of the story, I was just waiting to finish.

The final story that I read, "Days of Blood and Fire" by Jason Brannon was well written, but extremely disturbing. I don't really know how to describe it. It is a study of madness, or is it? The protagonist is not particularly likeable, and yet, he is compelling. It is definitely not a story for the squeamish or the deeply religious.

Overall, despite personal preferences, I found all the stories readable, and lacking in the obvious errors that so often plague a website. I highly recommend a visit. I plan to return often. Too bad they are closed to submissions until September!

Rie Sheridan has been writing fantasy since she was nine. She has a BFA in Theater Arts and a BA in Asian Studies, spent some time teaching English, produced ten issues of a Doctor Who fanzine, had two professionally published poems and won publication in the HalfPrice Books "Say Goodnight to Illiteracy" anthology of 1998.



In *Practical Tips for Online Authors* you'll find listings of writers' groups for support and critiques, you'll learn how to submit stories to ezines in order to polish your craft, send submissions via email and locate an epublisher for your first novel. After your book is published, you can obtain cyber reviews, take advantage of online promotion and find places that will sell your book for you. Info on how to do all this and more is included in these pages.

For published authors, *Practical Tips* . . . also covers more advanced publishing methods such as how to create an email newsletter or on-line magazine, how to build your own author web site from the ground up and how to self-publish your novels.

<http://www.twilighttimesbooks.com/feature.html>

The 11th Hour

Reviewed by Torrey Daily Simms

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It is with a certain amount of expectation that I check my e-mail the eleventh of each month because I know the announcement for the latest edition of [The 11th Hour](#) will be in there somewhere. There is just something special about [The 11th Hour](#). Its layout is clean, easy to navigate. Its features cover a wide range of genre topics. There are reviews of current genre TV shows, movies, videos, books, and even comics. The daily news tidbits keep you up to date on the latest Anakin rumor or ill-advised remake coming out of Hollywood. Maybe even news about Clive Barker working with Disney.

What's special about that? There are other sites out there that do the same thing. Yahoo describes it as horror/sci-fi entertainment magazine for chicks. That is what makes [The 11th Hour](#) something out of the ordinary. The enthusiasm leaps off the page at you, infecting you, making you want to read more because of this different angle and attitude. An example of this can be found in their recent review of *Gladiator*. "Women like a good, bloody story well told as much as anyone." No tissues for this bunch.

One of the nicer touches of both the features and regular sections of this web-magazine, is the humor, or more often sarcasm, injected into every piece, whether editorial, essay or interview. The women who bring you [The 11th Hour](#) aren't just content to give you information laced with humor. You also get a liberal dose of opinions. Impartial journalists they are not. You can feel the pain as they try to analyze just what happened to the X-Files. These are fans betrayed. Their biased dislike of Roswell made each episode review a delight to read because they do not hold back. The humor doesn't take away from the information or ideas contained within. It just makes the reading such a pleasure. While none of them have yet to tackle fiction, their flights of fancy spark enough ideas to take the reader in interesting new directions.

In past issues they have done in-depth looks at genre television series that their readers might be missing because of the shabby promotion that most horror and science fiction television receive. The episode breakdown for *Farscape* was informative but not over burdened with detail. It focused on the aspects of the show that moved the stories and characters along. I'm now a die-hard *Now and Again* fan because of the persuasive piece, "For the First Time. Our guide to *Now and Again*, the best show you're not watching." Clearly my conversion was too late to save the series.

Torrey Daily Simms began as an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy until she suffered from elf burnout about a decade ago. This, in conjunction with the demands of real life, eventually led her to start main-lining horror and dark fantasy. Webmaster in her spare time, she really appreciates sites that are easy to navigate.

I should warn new readers, that the staff of [The 11th Hour](#) are devoted *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* fans, in particular James Marster's who plays the vampire Spike. Each episode to date has included an article on the creators and writers of *Buffy* and *Angel*. Regardless, the interviews are well done and informative, so much is forgiven.

[The 11th Hour](#) just put out its twelfth issue this May. It continues to grow and expand, with new features making an appearance on a regular basis. The News makes it worth a daily visit to the site but the regular reviews and features make this genre web magazine a pleasure to read from eleventh to the eleventh.

Dreamstone is a small art publisher and distributor dedicated to speculative art (science fiction, fantasy, space and horror). We are always seeking new artist for both publication and distribution. Submit your details via artist@dreamstone.com.au after taking a browse round the site at www.dreamstone.com.au.

URLs

SciFi Archive Review - <http://www.scifiarchive.com>

Fables - <http://www.fables.org/>

The 11th Hour - <http://www.the11thhour.com/archives/052000/index.html>

Publication Info

Unless otherwise noted all contents of this publication are copyright **Dark Matter Chronicles** PO Box 2248, Schiller Park, IL 60176. **Dark Matter Chronicles** is an [Eggplant Productions Publication](#) and published twice a month. All questions or comments should be e-mailed to Raechel Henderson at darkmatter@eggplant-productions.com

Some images used herein were obtained by IMSI's MasterClips/MasterPhotos™ Collection, 1895 Francisco Blvd. East, San Rafael, CA 94901-5506, USA

Dark Matter Chronicles pays \$5 per 500-750 word review. If you are interested in writing reviews or if you are interested in getting your site reviewed, send an e-mail to darkmatter@eggplant-productions.com

Dark Matter Chronicles is open to submissions of speculative fiction up to 3,000 words. Submit stories in the body of an e-mail to darkmatter@eggplant-productions.com Payment for stories is 1/4 cent (US) per word for One Time Rights.

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The next issue of **Dark Matter Chronicles** comes out June 10, 2000. More reviews, more fiction, more contests!

Contest! Contest! Contest!

Congratulations to **Jose Ignacio Cordeu**, who won last issue's contest. The question was: Which Ursula K. LeGuin short story deals with a dragon, wizard and a tiny island named Sattins? And what series is this story the precursor for? The answer: The Rule of Names and The Earthsea series. Jose won a year's subscription to Spellbound Magazine.

Now this issue's question (supplied once again by Barry of [Baryon](#)): What series of books featured Sir Richard Burton and Samuel Clemens as the lead characters? (Include the name of the author.)

The prize: a hardback copy of *The First Chronicles of Amber* by Roger Zelazny (this collection includes *Nine Princes in Amber*, *The Guns of Avalon*, *Signs of the Unicorn*, *The Hand of Oberon*, and *The Courts of Chaos*). Send your answers to darkmatter@eggplant-productions.com by midnight June 23, 2000. The winner will be drawn from the pool of correct answers and be announced in the next issue of **Dark Matter Chronicles**. (Fine Print -our lawyer made us do it - Sorry Wisconsin residents, you aren't eligible.)