

BRUM GROUP NEWS

June
1991

Issue
No. 237

The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1991 Committee: Group Chairman – Chris Chivers Secretary – Helena Bowles
Treasurer – Richard Standage Newsletter Editor – Martin Tudor Reviews Editor –
Mick Evans Publicity Officer – Al Johnston Novacon 21 Chairman – Nick Mills

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

Friday 21st June at 7.45pm
in the Ivy Bush, Hagley Road,

PAUL J McAULEY



This month's speaker is Paul J McAuley, the first British writer to win the prestigious Philip K Dick Memorial Award. Paul was born in Gloucestershire in 1955. His doctorate in botany has enabled him to work as a research scientist in both California and at Oxford (investigating the cell biology of symbiotic associations). Currently he is working at St Andrews in Scotland.

In addition to his award winning first novel, *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS*, Paul is a frequent contributor to both American magazines and the British magazine *INTERZONE*. His second novel *SECRET HARMONIES*, (which first appeared in the USA as *OF THE FALL*) is published this month in paperback by Orbit (£3.99). Also published this month is the hardback of his 'sequel' to *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS*, *ETERNAL LIGHT* (Gollancz, £14.99). Earlier this year Gollancz also published the acclaimed *THE KING OF THE HILL*, Paul's first short story collection, in hardback (£13.99). (See reviews on pages 7 and 8.)

The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at **THE IVY BUSH**, Hagley Road/Monument Road, Birmingham at 7.45pm.

Subscription Rates: £6.00 per person, or £9.00 for two members at same address.

Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer, **Richard Standage**, at meetings, or by post c/o **Mick Evans** (address below).

Book Reviews to **Mick Evans** at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley B66 4SH (021 558 0997)

All other contributions and enquiries to: **Martin Tudor**, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2AG

**NEXT MONTH'S MEETING IS
TWENTYCON
19 - 21 July 1991
The Holiday Inn,
Central Square, Birmingham**

Guests of Honour
HARRY HARRISON & ANNE GAY

Twentycon will feature a programme with a fairly high emphasis on audience participation, whilst not actually forcing anyone to take part who doesn't want to. Highlights include a publishers and writers panel discussing how the genre has changed over the last twenty years; a "University Challenge" style quiz (volunteers for teams are required, call Andy Wright at the number below if you're interested); "Create a World" (not world-building exactly, more of a game show); "Everybody's Equal" (aversion of the Chris Tarrant TV game, only less hi-tech and more active!); a Saturday night disco (where everyone attending will wear 1970s fancy dress -- this is of course optional, but anyone not so attired will have to pay a nominal fine, the proceeds of which will go to Twentycon's chosen charity the RNIB's "Books for the Blind" project); a Rog Peyton auction of books, comics, artwork and anything else that Rog can manage to auction (and lets face it this includes most things!) all proceeds from this will again be going to the RNIB (if you have any auction material to donate please contact Richard Standage or Andy Wright); Rog Peyton and Vernon Brown will be taking on the "fringe fans" (with representatives from the filking, gaming and costuming fraternities) in what promises to be a lively, if somewhat partisan, discussion about what fandom "should" be about; and, of course, Andromeda's Twentieth Anniversary Party and Multi-Author Signing Session (with the booze paid for by Andromeda!)

Add to this a few films and the odd party game, items featuring our Guests of Honour Anne Gay and Harry Harrison. All this plus the presence of such "celebs" as Dave Langford, Freda Warrington, Graham Joyce and Dr Jack Cohen. There should be something for everyone! (If you have any queries about the programme or wish to volunteer to help or take part contact: Andy Wright, 7 Grove Ave., Birmingham, B27 7UY, (tel: 021 707 6606).

If you are quick you can still take advantage of Twentycon's specially reduced hotel room prices. It's not often that you will be offered the chance to stay in a hotel

of the calibre of the Holiday Inn for as little as £22.50 per person, per night (including full English breakfast).

As this newsletter went to press we still had 20-30 beds left of our allocation. It is worth noting that attendees who are resident in the hotel will have use of both the Free Car Parking Facilities and the extensive Leisure Facilities, including gym, indoor swimming pool and sauna.

The Twentycon Committee is Helena Bowles (Chair), Carol Morton (registrations & hotel bookings), Richard Standage (treasurer), Andy Wright (programme), and Martin Tudor (Programme Book & Hotel Liaison). Attending membership costs just £15.00, supporting is £6.00, postal memberships to be received by Carol Morton, on or before the 12th July, hotel booking should be in ASAP. Carol can be contacted at 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, (tel: 0384 897206, before 8pm only).

After the 12th of July the cost will be £20.00 per person on the door, although day memberships will be available pro rata. Please note that entry to Andromeda's Party on the Friday night will be free of charge even to those too tight fisted to join Twentycon.

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The best laid plans of... Many apologies for the fact that this newsletter is arriving later than usual. An unfortunate combination of circumstances lead to me being out of town most of the time I would normally have been working on it. I hope you are reading this on the Thursday, the day before the meeting, if not I'm afraid that will be down to the illustrious Post Office.

This month's meeting will be our last at the Ivy Bush. Our July meeting will be in the form of the Andromeda Party and Twentycon, where guest speakers will include Harry Harrison and Anne Gay. Don't forget to register! I was astounded to discover last week that almost 50 Brum Group members have yet to register for the convention..

As mentioned last time, from August, the BSFG is once again on the move. We will be holding our monthly meetings at the Australian Bar, on the corner of Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street, in Birmingham city centre. (See map on page 15).

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The Jophan Report

by Martin Tudor

The 42nd Jophan Report
by Martin Tudor.
News, as usual, courtesy
of *CRITICAL WAVE*
(unless otherwise indicated)

The Friends of the Foundation will present a Science Fiction Day at Charing Cross Library, Charing Cross Road, London (opposite the Fantasy Inn) on Saturday 22 June 1991 from 1pm-5pm. The aim of the day is to help promote the work of the Friends and to raise money for the SF Foundation. There will be several guest speakers, second hand books on sale and most likely people will retire to a local hostelry after the event.

There has been some confusion regarding the nominations for the Hugo Awards this year. In the list that follows, which may or may not be the final list of nominees, the latest nominees to be announced are indicated by parentheses.

The Chicon V committee initially released a "preliminary listing of the 1991 Hugo nominees" which was still in the process of being validated", promising that the "Official 1991 Hugo Ballot" would appear in Progress Report 6 of Chicon V, the 1991 World SF Convention. A short time after releasing this they expanded the ballot. According to a "late note" in the June edition of *LOCUS* these new nominees have "not been checked."

BEST NOVEL: *EARTH*, David Brin; *THE VOR GAME*, Lois McMaster Bujold; *THE FALL OF HYPERION*, Dan Simmons. (*QUEEN OF ANGELS*, Greg Bear; *THE QUIET POOLS*, Michael P Kube-McDowell.) **BEST NOVELLA:** "Fool to Believe", Pat Cadigan; "The Hemingway Hoax", Joe Haldeman; "Bones", Pat Murphy; "Bully", Mike Resnick; "A Short, Sharp Shock", Kim Stanley Robinson. **BEST NOVELETTE:** "Dr. Pak's Preschool", David Brin; "Tower of Babylon", Ted Chiang; "The Manamouki", Mike Resnick. ("A Braver Thing", Charles Sheffield; "The Coon Rolled Down and Ruptured His Larinks, A Squeezed Novel by Mr. Skunk", Daffyd ad Hugh; "Over the Long Haul", Martha Soukup.) **BEST SHORT STORY:** "Bears Discover Fire", Terry Bisson; "Godspeed", Charles Sheffield; "Cibola", Connie Willis. ("The Utility Man", Robert Reed; "VRM-547", W.R. Thompson. **BEST NON-FICTION BOOK:** *BURY MY HEART AT W.H. SMITH'S*, Brian W Aldiss; *HOW TO WRITE*

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, Orson Scott Card; *SFWA HANDBOOK: THE PROFESSIONAL WRITER'S GUIDE TO WRITING PROFESSIONALLY*, Kristine Kathryn Rusch & Dean Wesley Smiths, editors; *HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC*, David J Skal; *SCIENCE FICTION IN THE REAL WORLD*, Norman Spinrad. **BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION:** *BACK TO THE FUTURE III*; *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*; *GHOST*; *TOTAL RECALL*. (*THE WITCHES*.) **BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR:** Ellen Datlow; Gardner Dozois; Edward L Ferman; Kristine Kathryn Rusch; Stanley Schmidt. **BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST:** Thomas Canty; David Cherry; Bob Eggleton; Don Maitz; Michael Whelan. **BEST SEMIPROZINE:** *INTERZONE*; *LOCUS*; *THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION*; *QUANTUM*; *SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE*. **BEST FANZINE:** *FILE 770*; *FOSEX*; *LAN'S LANTERN*. (*MAINSTREAM*; *MIMOSA*.) **BEST FANWRITER:** Mike Glycer; David Langford; Evelyn C Leeper. (Avedon Carol; Arthur Hlavaty; Teresa Nielsen Hayden.) **BEST FANARTIST:** Teddy Harvia, Merle Insinga, Peggy Ranson. (Stu Shiffman; Diana Stein.)

JOHN W CAMPBELL AWARD (not a Hugo): Nancy A Collins; John Cramer; Scott Cupp; Michael Kandel. (Julia Ecklar.)

The full story regarding this latest Hugo controversy will, hopefully, appear in *CRITICAL WAVE* #23 which will be on sale at Twentycon. (*CRITICAL WAVE*, Britain's only independent science fiction news and review magazine is currently available for £6 for six issues from 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG, cheques should be made payable to "CRITICAL WAVE PUBLICATIONS". The price of a six issue subscription will be going up to £7.50 on the 1st August 1991.)

A group of interested individuals, including John Dowie, Paul Williams, Geoff Ryman, Ken Campbell and Malcolm Edwards, are currently planning a weekend dedicated to "exploring the influence of Philip K Dick". The plan, at this time, is to aim the first day at those who are either new to the work of PKD and/or those who know it only through the *BLADE RUNNER* and *TOTAL RECALL* movies.

The second day, for the benefit of his more ardent followers, would take a more in depth look at some of the current issues surrounding his works.

The event will be held at "Connections", the community part of Epping Forest College, in Loughton, Essex on Saturday and Sunday, 19-20 October, 1991. The venue is on the Central Line out of London and the organizers feel it "has the right sort of facilities for a convention of this nature."

If you feel you could make a contribution to the weekend please write to the address below outlining your proposal. If you would like further details about attending it, contact Jeff Merrifield, Connections, Epping Forest College, Borders Lane, Loughton, Essex, IG10 3SA.

Pam Wells was a clear winner of the 1991 TAFF Race with 132 first place votes out of a possible 227 (58% of the total). She will be traveling to the World SF Convention in Chicago at the end of August.

According to *TWO-TIMES TAFF #5*, the final newsletter from out-going administrators Christina Lake and Lilian Edwards, the race raced £349 on this side of the Atlantic, which means that approximately £2,000 will be handed over to Pam Wells. Complete voting details appear below.

Candidate	N. A.	EUR	DOWN UNDER	TOTALS
ABIGAIL FROST:				
1st Place	20	37	1	58
2nd Place	36	46	2	84
3rd Place	23	22	4	49
4th Place	2	13	1	16
BRUNO OGORELEC:				
1st Place	21	11	1	33
2nd Place	18	24	4	46
3rd Place	38	64	3	105
4th Place	6	13	0	19
PAM WELLS:				
1st Place	42	84	6	132
2nd Place	26	34	1	61
3rd Place	13	10	1	24
4th Place	1	1	0	2
HOLD OVER FUNDS:				
1st Place	2	1	0	3
2nd Place	2	17	1	20
3rd Place	8	18	0	26
4th Place	38	57	3	98
5th Place	1	0	0	1

David Piper received a write-in vote in the first position.

The forthcoming 1992 TAFF Race will select a North American fan to attend Illumination, the 43rd British National SF Convention, at Easter in 1992.

According to *TAFF DOOR #3*, the newsletter which I have just received from US Administrator Robert Lichtman, the schedule of the TAFF race in 1992, is as follows:

Nominations open: 15 June 1991
 Nominations close: 15 August 1991
 Ballots available: 6 September 1991
 Voting deadline: 31 December 1991
 Eastercon: 17-20 April 1992

Nominations may be sent to either administrator, but the candidate's bonds and platforms must be sent to the North American Administrator (addresses below).

To be eligible, a prospective candidate must obtain five nominators (three from North America, two from Europe), provide a platform for the ballot (of not more than 100 words), furnish a \$20 bond, agree to take the trip if elected and finally administer the North American half of the fund through two elections until a successor is selected.

The address of the North American Administrator is: Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA. The address of the new British Administrator is: Pam Wells, 24A Beech Road, Bowes Park, London, N11 2DA.

The third Drabble, is even as I type being prepared, this time it will be a *DR WHO SPECIAL*. David Wake is interested in receiving Drabbles using the Time Lord's series for inspiration. Contact him at 160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 1NY.

Mick Evans, having quickly become disenchanted with the dole queue, is setting up a small painting & decorating business with an old work mate, Terry Jordan. Call Mick on (021) 558 0997 for details.

The recently revived *NEW WORLDS* paperback magazine, which will be released by Gollancz in August, have announced that the first issue will feature: "Immaculate", Storm Constantine; "Any Major Dude", Paul Di Filippo; "Heat", J D Gresham; "Floating Dogs", Ian McDonald; "Übermensch, Kim Newman; "Indeterminancy, Jay Summers; "Colour", Michael Moorcock; "The Descent of Man", Matthew Dickens; "Something Sweet", Simon Ings and Charles Stross; "FOAM" by Brian W Aldiss; "SF Novels of the Year", John Clute; "Past, Present and Future", David Garnett, along with an introduction by Michael Moorcock.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

22 JUNE - PAUL J McAULEY will be signing books at Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham. Amongst his available books will be copies of his new novel in paperback *SECRET HARMONIES*, (£3.99), his hardback short story collection *THE KING OF THE HILL* (£13.99) and the sequel to *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS*, *ETERNAL LIGHT* (£14.99 also in hardback).

22 JUNE - The Friends of the Foundation will present a Science Fiction Day at Charing Cross Library, Charing Cross Road, London (opposite the Fantasy Inn, near Leicester Square tube station) on Saturday 22 June 1991 from 1pm-5pm. The aim of the day is to help promote the work of the Friends and to raise money for the SF Foundation. There will be several guest speakers, second hand books on sale and most likely people will retire to a local hostelry after the event.

29 JUNE - Birmingham Comic Mart at the Carrs Lane Church Centre, just off High Street near Marks & Spencers in the city centre. "A huge

selection of comics, film/tv magazines, books, posters, models, games and sf/fantasy material." Opens midday. Details: Golden Orbit, 18 Nelson Street, York, YO3 7NJ.

19-21 JULY - TWENTYCON, the 20th anniversary party of the BSFG at the Holiday Inn, Birmingham. Guests of Honour are Harry Harrison and Anne Gay. Attending membership is £15.00, supporting is £6.00. Cheques and postal orders made payable to "Twentycon", should be sent (or handed to) CAROL MORTON, 14 Park St., Lye, Stourbridge, DY9 8SS.

23-26 AUGUST - MASQUERADE '91, the first major *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* con. Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Attending £25.00. For details send a SAE to: Jacqui Clarke, 12 Jessop Close, Leasingham, Sleaford, Lincs., NG34 8LJ.

1-3 NOVEMBER - NOVACON 21, annual convention organized by the BSFG at the Excelsior Hotel. (by the Cargo Airport). GoH Colin Greenland. Attending £15.00, contact Bernie Evans or (021) 558 0997.

All text by Martin Tudor unless otherwise stated. Produced on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier. Thank you to all contributors, especially Dave Hardy for the DTP headings.

Have you ever dreamed of other worlds?

NASS '91



It's Out of This World!

These people have - and they'll show you how to reach out to other worlds through amateur and professional astronomy and spaceflight - even from your comfy armchair! They're all exhibiting at **NASS '91** - the first ever **National Astronomy & Spaceflight Show** in the **Paradise Circus Complex, off Chamberlain Square, Birmingham City Centre on Saturday 7th September 1991!**

BROADHURST CLARKSON & FULLER, ASTRO PROMOTIONS, ASTRONOMY NOW, CRITICAL WAVE MAGAZINE, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, STEWART AVIATION, SPACETECH, DILLONS, SHERWOODS, DAVID A. HARDY, MIDLAND COUNTIES PUBLICATIONS, PETER DREW TELESCOPES, JUNO PROJECT, THE PLANETARY SOCIETY, BRUNEL UNIVERSITY, OXFORD UNIVERSITY, OPEN UNIVERSITY, JODRELL BANK, BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY, ASTRONOMY CENTRE, JUNIOR ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY, I.A.A.P., B.A.A., F.A.S., ASSOC. IN SCOTLAND FOR RESEARCH INTO ASTRONAUTICS, BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP, PLUS A HOST OF LOCAL SOCIETIES!

☆LECTURES BY ADVANCE TICKET ONLY - BOOK NOW TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT!

NASS '91 is the first professionally organised astronomy and spaceflight show open to the public to be held in the UK, and includes a superb exhibition open 10am - 4pm plus a programme of lectures from top scientists from the world of astronomy and spaceflight, running 11am - 10pm! Find out everything from which telescope to buy to how to enter a career in professional astronomy!



● Lecture Tickets £5 (club discount on group bookings) include admission to all lectures plus the Exhibition.
● Exhibition Only £2 - pay on the day to see the Exhibition only
Telephone Stuart Williams on (0922) 406411 after 7pm to reserve your Lecture Tickets now!

See them at the National Astronomy and Spaceflight Show in Birmingham on Saturday 7th September!

MEXICON IV
the Cairn Hotel, Harrogate
3-6 May 1991
a report by Mick Evans

Mexicon IV was a great success and renewed my faith in congoing after the rather disappointing Eastercon in Glasgow. I have some sympathy for the Eastercon committee, as with first time hotels there is always an element of risk involved. But despite the fact that the Cairn was also virginal as far as SF conventions go they were absolutely brilliant. The hotel is perfect for cons and the staff were great from day one, (I suppose it's typical to find out at the end that it will probably be under new owners shortly).

The programme, of which I saw a reasonable amount, was pretty good. It mainly featured Special Guests Paul Williams (PKD newsletter editor, Dylan biographer and all round SF fan), American writer Howard Waldrop (wonderful Texan drawl which clashed quite alarmingly with Iain Banks' Scottish brogue, an interpreter was needed when these two got together!) and writer Ian Sinclair.

I unfortunately missed "The Unauthorised Sex Company" (Ryman, Ings, Greenland and McKean) as it started early on Friday night (a quibble about timing here) but reports were enthusiastic. I did however catch a quite remarkable performance of Philip K Dick's "Metz" speech performed by actor John Joyce, about overlapping parallel universes, which was seriously weird! (Yes, I know that those which are parallel can't overlap, but remember who wrote this speech!).

I think the impression I'll retain, though, is of a wonderfully friendly atmosphere which prevailed throughout. The bigger conventions seem to lose their intimacy as the size increases. Anyway, great con, thanks to all concerned.

In this issue of the BRUM GROUP NEWS we have printed all the book reviews we have on hand. In future we will be making every effort to ensure that book reviews appear within three months of publication. To this end we should like to remind reviewers that their reviews should be given/posted to Mick Evans within one month of picking up their review copy/ies. NO LATER THAN THE MEETING AFTER THEY PICKED UP THEIR REVIEW COPY. Please bear this deadline in mind when choosing the books you wish to review, ie, please don't take more books than you can comfortably review within four weeks.

-- Martin Tudor.

DRABBLES

As mentioned last time we ran some Drabbles all you have to do is write a short story
EXACTLY 100 words long
(excluding the title)

I look forward to receiving your efforts shortly.

THE LATEST MODEL

by Chris Murphy

"It's so convincing", she said, "how can you justify selling such a product?"

"Very easily. It's only another Simulated Pet. Designed, like all the rest, for those who want the real thing for the wrong reasons. Or who want one but couldn't take good care of it."

"Replica pit bulls that don't bite are fine, but this... this is different."

"No. Our simulated dogs are ideal for irresponsible people. So is this. When they get tired of it..."

He groped for the 'off' switch and she impulsively seized his wrist, sickened. The artificial baby chortled and smiled up at them.

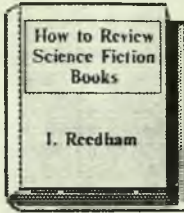
OOOO

Merry-go-round

by Stan Eling

The Sun shone from a cloudless sky as Reverend Ernest Wisecracker made his way across the common to open the village Time Reclamation Centre for Octogenarians, which had been designed by their most distinguished resident Professor Hamsting, based on one of his recent discoveries. The device was set for a two minute demonstration period, over a circular area of one mile radius from the Centre, on severance of the ribbon. The smiling cleric, brandished an already lighted blowlamp as he mounted the rostrum and to gentle applause proceeded to divide that purple tape.

The Sun shone from a cloudless sky



Book Reviews

All books reviewed here by members were provided by the publishers, who receive a copy of this Newsletter. Members may keep review copies (or may donate them as Raffle or Auction items. . .)

Please keep reviews to under 150 words unless instructed otherwise. Deadline for reviews: at least two weeks before next Group meeting.

SECRET HARMONIES by Paul McAuley
Orbit, 333 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Paul J McAuley, who's first novel *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS* won the prestigious Philip K Dick Memorial Award, has produced another impressive work with *SECRET HARMONIES*. All three of McAuley's novels to date, along with many of his short stories, are set in the same "Golden" universe. This is a beautifully developed setting, at least as exciting and full of potential as that of Iain Banks' "Culture" universe.

Although the human characters are not as well developed or as believable as those in his first novel, McAuley more than makes up for this with an abundance of mind-boggling ideas and the creation of the wonderful, totally alien, "aboriginals". These factors combined with the novel's breakneck pace sweeps the reader across the galaxy to Tau Ceti into the minds of the colonists on the planet Elysium.

SECRET HARMONIES although set in the same universe as his other two novels takes place a long time before them in the early days of the colonization of space.

The planet Elysium is still in many ways an unspoilt paradise. But the first colonists, who are based in the planet's only city, Port of Plenty, govern the later colonists with an iron hand.

The city dwellers (the first colonists), having kept all the new technology brought by later ships to themselves, are able to control "the settlers" (the later colonists). They refuse to allow the settlers to spread out across the planet -- where they would be beyond the control of Port of Plenty. Although the settlers are on the verge of revolution they are reluctant to move against the city while Port of Plenty is their only contact with Earth, "the Wombworld". Instead they merely complain about the restrictive laws and campaign for separate government.

All this changes, however, when the regular colonyboat fails to arrive and rumours

are rife that the Wombworld has abandoned Elysium. In the midst of the panic which ensues the revolution begins.

This is a tightly plotted, well-written novel. I found McAuley's depiction of the Aborigines, the native inhabitants of Elysium, fascinating, and was pleased that he resisted the temptation to supply pat explanations of their obviously alien nature and behaviour.

Despite the fact that I found *SECRET HARMONIES* disappointing, and think it is the weakest of McAuley's novels to date, it still has much to commend it. Elysium and its native inhabitants are beautifully portrayed, and, in my opinion, below average McAuley is far superior to most genre writing these days. Well worth reading.



ETERNAL LIGHT by Paul McAuley

Gollancz, 384 pp, £14.99 h/b

THE KING OF THE HILL by Paul McAuley

Gollancz, 216 pp, £13.99 h/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

In his first novel *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS*, McAuley told the story of an astronomer, Dorothy Yoshida, whose "Talent" is telepathy. As a "Talent" she is drafted by the Federation Navy and sent to a small planet orbiting a red dwarf star. Her job is to help solve the mystery of a planofomed world, where the only advanced life-forms, are the "herders" and the slug-like herbivores they live off. The "herders" appear to possess only a primitive level of intelligence and their 'cattle' merely a rudimentary nervous system. So who planofomed the planet P'thrsn? And why?

The Navy is convinced that it probably has something to do with "the Enemy", which the Federation encountered near a star designated BD Twenty... They know nothing about this "Enemy" as there has been no communication, merely violent attacks on any shipping that attempts to pass near the system. They hope that Dorothy can supply some answers regarding the motives of the enemy. If you intend to buy *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS* (£3.50, Orbit) you had better skip the next paragraph.



By the conclusion of his first novel McAuley has revealed that "the Enemy" is a race from the galactic centre, known to themselves as the Alea. The race is comprised of many families ruled by intelligent, neuter females, who, after their home world was destroyed, wandered through the galaxy. Until one of the families discovered an ancient and powerful technology and began to destroy the other families and anyone else who stood in their way. Because of their fear of these "Marauders", the other families scattered to the far edges of the galaxy and hid. The Enemy at BD Twenty was

an off-shoot of the family still based on P'thrsn, and had attacked the Federation ships because they feared that they were the "Marauders". This, very basic, synopsis does not, obviously do justice to *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS*, which is a superb novel, thought-provoking, exciting and innovative.

Although you could probably read and enjoy *ETERNAL LIGHT* without first reading *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS* you would not be doing yourself any favours. *ETERNAL LIGHT* begins shortly after McAuley's first novel ends. Again we see Dorothy Yoshida being sent by the Navy to investigate another phenomenon which they believe could be the work of the Alea. But Dorothy is abducted from the site and eventually finds herself involved in a plot to capture advanced alien technology and overthrow the Federation.

I really do not want to reveal anymore of the plot. *ETERNAL LIGHT* contains much 'seriously hard science', McAuley, as the blurb so accurately declares "fuses cutting-edge cosmological speculation about the nature and fate of intelligent life in the universe with a richly atmospheric portrayal of an interstellar society in the throes of enormous political and cultural turmoil." He also spins a damn, fine, yarn!

If having read his novels you find yourself yearning to learn more about the exciting setting treat yourself to *THE KING OF THE HILL*. Although this short story collection contains some works which are not clearly set in the standard McAuley universe, most of them are.

So we are able to learn more about the fanatic "Witnesses", who come to inherit the spent power of Earth, in "the Heirs of the Earth".

We are introduced, for the first time, to one of the key characters from *ETERNAL LIGHT*, Talbeck, Duke Barlstilkin V, a renegade director of the Fountain of Youth Combine and one of the "Golden". The Fountain of Youth Combine controls the supply of "agatherin", a drug which grants virtual immortality to those who can afford it. (Agatherin, incidently, was discovered on Elysium some time after the period covered in *SECRET HARMONIES*.) The "Golden" are those who can afford the drug and live for hundreds of years, and in "the Airs of Earth" we see them 'at play'.

In "Exiles" McAuley describes life at the poorer end of the inter-planetary spectrum, in a story about the foolhardy "freespacers".

This is an impressive and varied collection, which I would urge anyone who enjoys McAuley's work to rush out and buy.

PEGASUS IN FLIGHT by Anne McCaffrey

Bantam, 316 pp, £13.95 h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the sequel to *RIDE PEGASUS* and, as it turns out, a prequel to *THE ROWAN*. It concerns the Talents, in particular two young children -- a streetwise girl and a young boy whose body is broken beyond repair by an accident. Rhyssa Owen, the granddaughter of Daffyd op Owen, is now director of the Centre and is in desperate need of new Talents as the government wants to draft the majority of Talents to work on the space platform which will be the launching point for the colonization ships. This, it is hoped will help reduce the teeming masses of humanity on an overstretched world. But an organized gang is kidnapping young children for either forcible adoption, spare parts for surgery or vivisection. Rhyssa and her depleted group of Talents have to find the two youngsters before they are taken.

In this novel Anne draws on elements from *THE ROWAN* and tells us just how the gestalt with power generators was developed. The characterization, as always, is excellent, especially that of Tirla the young girl, and the plot flows smoothly, is fast-paced and very entertaining. Wonderful stuff.

USE OF WEAPONS by Iain M Banks

Orbit, 371 pp, £7.99 'C' format p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

In this novel Banks once again returns to the universe of the Culture. Those familiar with his previous novels *CONSIDER PHLEBAS* and *THE PLAYER OF GAMES* will recognize it; those not, should READ them. This, to me, is better than his previous "visits" although this could be, at least partially, due to the now familiar background. The story itself is not only original it transcends the SF genre. There are few writers who can hope to equal what Banks has to offer. His imagination and vision provide the reader with a wealth of ideas and, with the addition of Banks' humour, surrealism.

This particular novel follows Cheradine Zakalwe, an agent of Special Circumstances, through his escapades as a military expert-advisor-leader, and his personal nightmares. The story unfolds through the interplay between Zakalwe, Diziet Sma (the woman who recruited him) and Skaffen-Amtiskaw (AI drone and Sma's "protector"). Complex war manoeuvres from Zakalwe are interspersed with personal flashbacks which appear to highlight his motives. Sma drops in to offer new positions and conflicts, Zakalwe responds for

payment in a way that Sma cannot fathom. All finally becomes clear as Banks provides a climax so original and surprising that the reader is left in awe.

Brilliant, this will become a classic. Read and enjoy.

DRACULA UNBOUND by Brian Aldiss

Grafton, 199 pp, £13.99 h/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

With this novel Brian Aldiss returns to the borderlands of fact and fiction he explored in *FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND*. This time it is Bram Stoker's horror story that acquires a science fictional background.

The story itself weaves together a fairly standard time-travel plot, complete with various paradoxes; and the evolution of the Vampires, from humble parasites to rulers of the Earth. Some knowledge of palaeontology and Chaos theory is useful but not essential.

The story starts with Joe Borderland, inventor of a time stasis machine which he hopes will solve the toxic waste storage problem. A friend of his discovers two humanoid fossils 65 million years older than they ought to be. This discovery heralds the appearance of the Ghost Train, which Joe hijacks. Borderland recruits Stoker to help destroy the Undead and save Mankind from future annihilation. This is done at a conclave of Vampires in the Mesozoic Era with an F-bomb that ends the Carbonaceous Period. Shame about the Dinosaurs.

All in all a gently paced and intriguing book, with interesting sidelines on the nature of intelligence and insanity. An enjoyable read.

THE GOLD COAST by Kim Stanley Robinson

Orbit, 389 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Peter Day.

Orange County, California, in the 21st century has become a vast, teeming concrete hell. Tangled freeways that glide, soar and loop through the landscape; gigantic, soulless shopping malls; huge tacky apartment blocks and not much else. There is no clear-cut plot as such, merely a relentless unfolding of events as the story follows the fortunes of a few of the inhabitants: Abe Bernard, a paramedic on the overstretched rescue teams who attend the constant freeway crashes; Sandy Chapman, manic dealer in designer drugs; Dennis McPherson, an aerospace engineer in military research; his son Jim who is involved with a terrorist organization engaged in sabotage and many, many, more.

This is a colourful, multi-layered picture of a hideous, all too probable future. It is not an easy book to get into at first, and requires quite a bit of hard work, but it does reward any reader who is prepared to make the effort.

OUT OF PHAZE by Piers Anthony
NEL, 288 pp, £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Lynne M Edwards.

Two parallel worlds, Phaze and Proton. No one can move between them -- except the Adepts of Phaze who can sometimes swap places with their Proton counterparts.

Bane, Apprentice Adept, swaps with Mach, his robot/human Proton equivalent. Both are fascinated by the others physical body and female companion and from there the problems become predictable. Quite easily remembered, as a tale, but not one I'd rush out to buy or get the sequels to. One for the collectors.

THE RENEGADES OF PERN by Anne McCaffrey
Corgi, 384 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book does not work unless you have just read THE WHITE DRAGON. The events in the two volumes run concurrently and it is assumed that the reader is very familiar with the characters and storyline of THE WHITE DRAGON. The story of the renegades (a group of holdless people) would have made a perfectly acceptable tale without the intermingling. This tells of Jayge Lilcamp, a trader, and Aramina, a girl who can hear dragons. They fall foul of Thella, the leader of the renegades who in her warped way wishes to misuse Aramina's talents and to kill Jayge. The book also continues the narrative of THE WHITE DRAGON and so is in part a sequel. It would have been far better to disentangle the two parts. The plus side however is that the story is told with all McCaffrey's usual competence.

THIS ISLAND EARTH by Raymond F Jones
Grafton, 191 pp, £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the novel that the 1954 film was based on, concerns Cal Meacham, a research engineer who is intrigued by a catalogue that is delivered to him, describing a technology that seems far in advance of our own. He orders parts from the catalogue to build an "interocitor", which turns out to be a sophisticated communication device. The originators of this technology contact Cal and offer him a job. His new employers turn out to be the "Peace Engineers", a loose federation of planets allied

in war against a common enemy. They are losing this war and need to use planets like Earth to secretly build their weapons. Cal willingly joins in their fight until the enemy places Earth next on the list for destruction.

In retrospect the film wasn't worthy of note, but the novel is better, if rather naïve by today's standards. It has the feel of an extended short story where the plot has been stretched a fraction too thin. Interesting but not particularly edifying.

GYPSIES by Robert Charles Wilson
Orbit, 311 pp. £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Described on the cover as SF, some dogmatic readers would call this book fantasy. The chief characters are Karen and Michael White, second and third generation offspring of a genetic engineering programme in another dimension where holy war rages and magic works. They, and Karen's brother and sister, are able to travel between dimensions, although only Michael's ability is unwarped by his upbringing. They remain in our dimension after the escape of their parents and are hunted by a mysterious "Gray Man" for use as a secret weapon.

This book has a good premise and an interesting background, but the pace is very slow at the beginning, and some ideas are not developed as well as they could be. Overall though, a good read.

SCARED STIFF by Ramsey Campbell
Futura, 177 pp, £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Subtitled "Tales of Sex and Death", in case any potential reader overlooks the double entendre of the main title, this is a collection of seven stories into which Ramsey Campbell integrates sexual themes. However, anyone looking for nothing more than a new kind of pornography will be disappointed, as the fundamental eroticism which gives porn its *raison d'être* is here conspicuously absent for most of the time. Instead various perversions are used to bring about unpleasant endings which could as easily been reached without the graphic descriptions which we are led to believe were a fundamental component of the writer's objectives.

This I think is where the basic idea has failed -- I looked for tales of sexual death and found only sex and death occurring seperately. There is plenty of room for unpleasantness in ordinary sexual relations without introducing elements of genre horror and, to my mind,

"horror sex" needs to be approached from the demonic side to succeed. For example, James Blish touched briefly on it in *BLACK EASTER*, although there it was only incidental to the main storyline. I have to admit that Ramsey Campbell writes these stories with consummate ability and subtle craft, but I am afraid that he either missed the target or aimed at the wrong one.

RIMRUNNERS by C J Cherryh
NEL, 288 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Maureen Speller.

Given her astonishing prolificity, it's all too easy to dismiss Cherryh as just another hack. This would be a mistake. Okay, so I'm a fan of hers, and alright, some of her books haven't been as good as others, but what this woman can do is write absorbing and satisfying space opera of a particularly dense texture. This novel set in the universe of *DOWNBELOW STATION* and *MERCHANTER'S LUCK* is a sharply observed study in ship-board paranoia, as Elizabeth Yeager, a spacer down on her luck, ships out on "the Loki", a ship beset with problems and mysteries, and befriends NG, its resident misfit. Admittedly the story drifts at times, and one is left with a sense of having missed something, but the sketches of the tensions and close confinement of ship life couldn't be bettered. This definitely rates as 'unputdownable'.

HIDDEN TURNINGS edited by Diana Wynne Jones
Mandarin Teens, 183 pp, £2.99 p/b

Reviewed by Lynne M Edwards.

Parents should get into the habit of reading through any books their children are given. That way, they wouldn't miss gems like *HIDDEN TURNINGS*. Twelve stories, each specially written for the anthology, each with a twist near the end, lurk inside the covers, none of them "written down" for the market. Instead, there are twelve highly enjoyable meanderings on the borders of horror and fantasy, supplied by Terry Pratchett, Roger Zelazny, Lisa Tuttle, Garry Kilworth and Tanith Lee, amongst others, each of them so good that choosing a favourite becomes impossible. Buy it for your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews - but make sure you read it first!

HERMETECH by Storm Constantine
Headline, 372 pp, £14.95 h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Constantine has given us another tale of a world that is suffering from pollution on a

vast scale, so bad that most people live in domed cities, leaving only a few to scrape a meagre living in either relatively unpolluted zones, or try their luck against the pollution.

Tech-Green is an environmental movement with some political influence, that is trying to repair the damage. Ewan Famber, a founding member of Tech-Green experimented genetically on his unborn daughter Ari, with the intent of giving her the power to in some way restore the Earth or at least save mankind. But this power is triggered by orgasm and Ari is now a sexually confused fourteen year-old whose father is dead. Leila Saatchi, Ewan's one time assistant and lover, has promised to find Ari and try to guide her to her potential, but what chance of that when Ari herself knows nothing of her father's experiments?

Constantine has most definitely "come of age" as a writer with this story, a gripping tale of the near future. Her stories are so credible and the characters so believable, that one feels that they could actually happen, and that does not bear thinking about. Wonderful stuff. Highly recommended.

THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR by Tad Williams
Legend, 930 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Peter Day.

In the castle of Haynolt, the wizard Morgenes takes an interest in young Simon, a scullion, and accepts him as his apprentice. Later, the old King dies, and an age of tyranny begins as the new King allies himself with dark, sinister powers. Morgenes, is killed while rescuing Josua, the King's brother, from captivity, and Simon is forced to flee the castle for Josua's stronghold, Naglimund. This rather over-wordy volume, the first of three, leans heavily on the influence of Tolkien, becoming somewhat tedious in the process, but on those occasions when the author does strike out on his own the book suddenly springs to life, original and imaginative. Despite its numerous faults this is an impressive book, and not altogether on account of its length.

SCHRODINGER'S CAT TRILOGY by Robert Anton Wilson
Orbit, 545 pp, £5.99 p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones;

PART ONE: This is a very strange book. Unlike most novels, it has no beginning, middle or end. It is composed of three separate books: *THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR*, *THE TRICK TOP HAT* and *THE HOMING PIGEONS*, each of which is Book One of the trilogy.

PART ONE: From a co-author of the *ILLUMINATUS* trilogy comes this novel about the weirder implications of quantum mechanics. Random chance is an illusion; everything is possible in an infinity of alternative universes. Book One is about the worst possibilities, Book One is about the best of all possible worlds, and Book One confuses me but I am working on it.

PART ONE: Your attention please! for your comfort and convenience this universe is about to split into two; one in which you will read the *SCHRODINGER'S CAT TRILOGY* and one in which you will not. Please choose where you wish to live. Make your decision. Now.

CLARKE COUNTY. SPACE by Allen Steele
Arrow/Legend, 302 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by David T Cooper.

Like many soap operas this is named after the place in which it is set. Clarke County, Space (named after Guess Who?) is a mile long habitat orbiting the Earth at a distance of, on average 150,000 miles. It is a combined agriculture/Las Vegas-type tourist attraction which leads to conflict between powers that govern the colony. Add to the mix, the Mafia, a reincarnation of Elvis Presley, an AI that thinks it's Bob Dylan, a Declaration of Independence, plus a nuclear missile and you have an action packed episode from a soap opera. The book is an easy read but seems a bit shallow -- a combination of East Enders and Miami Vice. Enjoyable but forgettable. The time travel element has no bearing on the story.

THE SHEEP LOOK UP by John Brunner
Legend, 461 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

A staggering novel of the way we live or perhaps the way we're told to live. Brunner expounds the failings of "the American Dream" -- where profit and moneymaking is "right" and environmental and social issues "wrong". Put in this context who votes for pollution?

Austin Train, has attempted to alter the conscience of a nation and has been branded a "traitor". Ecology and the preservation of the Earth don't rate in this USA, so Train's ideas are ridiculed. However, some listen, notice the effects of the pollutants in their lives and begin to take their own action to correct the wrongs. "Trainites", as they become known, veer from Train's concept of ecological reform into demonstration and even out and out warfare.

The concept of the novel, that of the dangers of pollution, is a strong one that everybody can grasp. A world where filter

masks must be worn outdoors, where crops fail due to overdoses of chemicals, and water is often undrinkable and it could be just around the corner. Perhaps it's this reality that makes the story so gripping. The addition of the documentary style serves to enforce the image. Stunning. BUY IT.

CITY by Clifford Simak
Mandarin, 255 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Written as an escape from the disappointment of WWII and the atomic bomb, *CITY* is a story presenting a pacific future history in which the Earth literally goes to the Dogs. They then leave it to the Ants. Mankind, meanwhile has transformed itself and is having a really good time on Jupiter.

The format collects eight stories from *ATOUNDING* and an epilogue presenting them as legends from Doggy folklore, complete with notes in which eminent Canine historians theorise and dispute their meaning.

The result is an inventive, episodic narrative woven around successive central figures; the Webster family, Jenkins the robot, Joe the Mutant and of course the Dogs.

A compelling SF novel with a powerful mythic feel, this is great Simak.

THE BARSOOM PROJECT
by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes
Pan, 340 pp, £4.50 p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a sequel to *DREAM PARK*, and follows the same formula of mixing a "gameworld" adventure with a "realworld" mystery. Despite what the title might suggest, it does not take place on Mars, nor is the game in it based on Edgar Rice Burroughs' *PRINCESS OF MARS* (which would have made an excellent background). Instead the title comes from the task of persuading a group of rich industrialists to finance the terraforming of Mars, while preventing various terrorist organisations from killing them.

The gameworld plot is set in Eskimo mythology, a welcome departure from standard fantasy traditions. Evil shamans have imprisoned the creator god, Raven, and extinguished the heat of the sun. Unless the brave band of heroes can stop them, the world will freeze in Fimbulwinter. Unfortunately one of the players has taken part in this game before, when the blanks in her gun were replaced with real bullets and an actor died. *THE BARSOOM PROJECT* is better than the original *DREAM PARK*.

SHADOWFANE by Janny Wurts
Grafton, 351 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

SHADOWFANE completes the trilogy that began with STORMWARDEN. An understanding of the world has evolved as the story has unfolded. From a pure fantasy setting it has become apparent that these humans are gifted refugees of spacefaring humankind. They are marooned with their enemies, reptilian creatures with great mind-powers (especially when they work as a cohesive unit). Whoever wins the conflict within these pages is likely to triumph in the greater scenario. The Vaere trained Dream-weaver, Taen, and the Firelord, Jaric, are ranged against Maelgrim, who was once Taen's brother, and an entire alien race. In the first volume the SF element jarred with the fantasy but by now the blending is much smoother and the overall effect is pleasing. Don't read the book by itself -- try the whole trilogy.

VOYAGERS III by Ben Bova
Methuen, 341 pp, £14.95 h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

After 12 years in suspended animation on board an alien star ship, Kevin Stoner is a changed man, and in the three years since his recovery he has worked tirelessly for world peace. The Star Brother that entered his body almost by osmosis whilst he was in space, also provided the ultimate in anatomical maintenance, "Nanotechnology", a myriad of microscopic "machines" that renew and repair body cells, and can be passed on by the transfusion of minute amounts of blood. Stoner believes his secret has been discovered by others when a virulent plague breaks out, and the only hope is a world-wide inoculation scheme. This has been an excellent series eminently readable and hugely entertaining. "Nanotechnology" deserves further exploration. Recommended.

DARK NIGHT IN TOYLAND by Bob Shaw
Orbit, 190 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

An excellent collection of 15 short stories, illustrating a wide range of Bob Shaw's talents; from the poignancy of the title story to the terrible pun of "Dissolute Diplomat".

As the main title suggests black, if not mordant, humour is a theme throughout the collection; with arrogant, stupid or even quite normal men getting their comeuppance

from life, devils, witches, computers and various well-meaning aliens. The humour combines with vivid imagery; New Sicilians in over their heads when they try to "lean" on an alien from a high gravity world; a priest appalled by a toy for playing God; why babies howl so much; robot soccer hooligans and a lot more. A slim volume, but well worth investing in.

MYTH-ING PERSONS by Robert Asprin
Legend, 172 pp, £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Maureen Speller.

In common with Piers Anthony's "Xanth" novels, one was a fairly good idea, two was okay, but as we stagger to the sixth "Myth" novel, I do begin to wonder why both Anthony and Asprin can't find something better to do with their collective time, though it has to be admitted that Asprin wins out by confining his puns to titles.

What can one say that hasn't been said before? This is another bog-standard humorous adventure in a conventional fantasy universe, this one enlivened by a flight of vampires. I half entertained the hope that they would do something suitably ooh-nasty to the ever-so-smug Skeeve, "hero" of this series, but alas it looks fairly certain that he'll live to fight another four or five titles. If you loved the other five you'll love this. If you didn't you won't. Local note; the cover is by Chris "Fangorn" Baker.

DRENAI TALES by David Gemmell
Legend, 756 pp, £9.99 "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The first three DRENAI novels combined into one volume, plus a never before seen short story -- "Druss the Legend", a prequel to LEGEND explaining the events at Skeln. As followers of the series will know the three main stories are set about one hundred years apart and explain the problems facing the Drenai at these times. Each gives a brief update of recent history before detailing what happens next.

The stories themselves are excellent and the addition of the "Druss" section, though brief, complements the series. If you like your fantasy realistic, well characterized and well written, this is for you. However, for the fan like me, who already has all three novels separate editions, the cost for a short story to "complete the set" is a little steep.

As an omnibus edition it is a must for those not possessing single copies and will provide a good read for anyone who's missed

Bemmel's work previously. He does have an excellent writing style and can conjure up the most believable scenarios within his stories. Better fantasy is hard to find.

GOOD OMENS by Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman
Dorgi, 383 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Despite being around 100 pages too long this is actually a very amusing read. Borrowing heavily from such disparate works as Genesis, JUST WILLIAM, THE OMEN movies, Revelations and HUCKLEBERRY FINN this novel relates the story of Armageddon as predicted by the NICE AND ACCURATE PROPHECIES OF AGNES NUTTER -- the worlds most unsuccessful (and accurate) prophet. It combines the surreal humour of Pratchett with the sick imaginings of Gaiman to superb effect, highly recommended.

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE by Andrew Neiderman
Legend, 312 pp, £13.95 h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

If the Devil's human minions are about his work they will eventually fall foul of the law and how will the Devil help them? By setting up in law practice! Kevin Taylor is a young lawyer in a law firm in a small town. After he takes on and wins the controversial case of a teacher accused of sexually abusing a 10-year old girl, he is offered a job in a big New York firm, with double salary, rent-free apartment and chauffeur-driven limousine. He jumps at the chance, initially. But his suspicions grow when he finds that the firm has never lost a case -- even when the clients are obviously guilty, but who will believe his tale?

A wonderful story, the brash young lawyer changing into a worried and concerned citizen is well written. In fact the whole tale is so plausibly told that you can't help but wonder! Recommended.

THE PARATWA by Christopher Hinz
Mandarin, 436 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

In the third and final part of the story the true facts behind the origin of the deadly Paratwa and their return to Earth are at last revealed. Unfortunately, author Hinz seems to have lost his way a little and has tried to get too much explanation into a massive book, so that nuggets of action, drama and suspense are embedded in tedious prose like currants in a bun. Not to say this is a bad book, it is very good, but it does lack the freshness

of new ideas and the well paced structure that made LIEGE KILLER such a riveting read. Nevertheless, I would recommend anyone who has followed the story through LIEGE KILLER and ASH OAK to pursue its conclusion in this volume. On the other hand, a newcomer would miss too much by starting here and might be put off the author's work in general and this series in particular, which would be a great pity. The Paratwa Trilogy is a formidable accomplishment by an author who is probably on the threshold of an impressive career.

DARK ASHRAM by Leo Giroux Jr.
Grafton, 408 pp, £4.50 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book represents all that is dire in horror fiction. It has cardboard characters with tissue paper emotions. It is incompetently written and the plot creaks. It is the sequel to THE RISHI and is set about three years afterwards. The leader of the cult of Thuggee is not dead (surprise, surprise) but has become god-like. (He is also an American with a German name.) And he still wants to capture Satha Wrench and use her as a vessel for the evil goddess Kali -- amongst other things. Santha's father, Stephen, and his friend, Rama Shastri, run around like headless chickens while her lover George hovers in the background like a wet drip. Preserve trees and keep your money in your pockets.

MAZE IN THE MIRROR by Jack L Chalker
NEL, 403 pp, £4.50 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The third, and for the time being the last, in this series that is half SF, half detective. This time Sam Horowitz, G.O.D. Inc's private detective is "hired" by the opposition to find out who killed one of THEIR council. He is coerced into doing this after Dash (his son) is kidnapped and Brandy (his wife) is paralysed in the attack. There are plots and counterplots, murder and mayhem, doppelgangers and all manner of red herrings in the true tradition of a good detective novel. The science fiction is almost superfluous in this story, but the idea of the labyrinth, a thoroughfare between parallel worlds, continues to fascinate. This latest volume is easily the best and I hope that Chalker will, as he has indicated, write some more "Labyrinth" stories.

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