

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

September
1991

Issue
240

The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1991 Committee: Group Chairman - Chris Chivers Secretary & Twentycon Chair - Helena Bowles
Treasurer - Richard Standage Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor Reviews Editor - Mick Evans
Ordinary Committee Member - Bernie Evans Publicity Officer - Al Johnston
Novacon 21 Chairman - Nick Mills

Our guest speaker this month is
ANNE GAY

Although Anne Gay originally comes from Leicester she has been living in Birmingham for some time and regularly attends BSFG meetings. Despite teaching three languages, bringing up her daughter, Marianne, and working on a new style of Spanish textbook with Luz Serrano Kettle Anne has found time to write and sell a handful of short stories and three novels.

Her first novel, *MINDSAIL*, appears in paperback this month (Orbit, £4.99) while her second novel *THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT* is available in hardback (Orbit, £13.95). Her third novel, entitled *DANCING ON A VOLCANO*, will be published by Macdonald next year.

VENUE: THE AUSTRALIAN BAR

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at *THE AUSTRALIAN BAR*, corner of Hurst Street & Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham city centre. Subscription rates: £5.00 per person, or £9.00 for two members at the 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, West Midlands, B66 4SH (021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries to: **MARTIN TUDOR**, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG (021 327 3023).

THIS MONTH'S MEETING

Anne Gay's publishers, Macdonald & Co / Orbit Books, in order to promote the paperback release of *MINDSAIL* and the hardback publication of *THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT*, have kindly donated a sizeable amount of money to be used for free drinks at this month's meeting.

After careful consideration and consultation with Les Husband, the manager of the Australian Bar, the committee have decided that the most practical, and the fairest, way in which to distribute this money will be through a voucher system.

On arrival at this month's meeting you will be given a number of vouchers worth £1.00 each. These vouchers will be exchangeable only as payment or part payment of drinks at the downstairs bar of the Australian during the evening of Friday the 20th September.

Please note that *no change will be given by the staff for these vouchers*,

In addition if you purchase a copy of one, or more, of Anne Gay's books at the meeting you will receive additional vouchers (one with each paperback and two with each hardback). As the evening draws to a close any remaining vouchers will be distributed as fairly as possible.

The decision of the BSFG committee and/or the management and staff of the Australian Bar will be final in any dispute regarding this voucher system.

The committee hope that you will enjoy the meeting and that you agree that this system ensures a more equitable distribution of the money.

The committee would also like to extend their thanks to Macdonald & Co / Orbit Books for their generosity.

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[Apologies for the quality of print on the newsletter this month, unfortunately the 'copier has been misbehaving slightly more than usual this time around. Eight visits from the service engineer within the last three weeks, fourteen parts replaced and all this just four weeks after it had had its annual service!

[I must also apologize to TONY MORTON who I forgot to credit for his review of *THE BONE FOREST* by Robert Holdstock last month (pages 5 & 6 of *BRUM GROUP NEWS #239*).

[Thanks this time to DAVE HARDY for the DTP headings, MICK EVANS for typing up the book reviews, BERNIE EVANS for the labels and editing the book reviews, STUART WILLIAMS for his map and to all of our book reviewers.

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CONNECTIONS presents a WORLD FIRST

PHILIP K. DICK CELEBRATION

featuring contributions from

Paul Williams (Dick's literary executor) Brian Aldiss Ken Campbell
John Dowie Lawrence Sutin & Gregg Rickman (biographers)
Geoff Ryman Brian Stableford John Joyce Dr Ernesto Spinelli
John Constable Jack Cohen Philip Strick (on Dickian films)
and much much more

This will be the first open gathering of Philip K. Dick fans from all over the world and promises to be a stimulating and thought-provoking weekend. There are major speakers from America, including three of Dick's biographers. There will be previews of books just about to be released, by the people who have written them. Gregg Rickman in particular will be making some startling revelations about Dick and the F.B.I whilst Lawrence Sutin will be exploring the unpublished *Exegesis*, the first excerpts from which he has just edited for his American publisher. No one knew Philip Dick better than Paul Williams and he will be the guest of honour at the weekend. There will be theatrical performances based on Dick's work from Brian Aldiss, John Dowie, John Joyce and the Geoff Ryman Company. There will be all manner of fringe events.

19 - 20 October - Epping Forest College - Loughton - Essex

Weekend tickets cost £20. To book your place send cheque (made out to Connections) to:

Connections, Epping Forest College, Borders Lane, Loughton, Essex IG10 3SA, UK.

Luxury accommodation at affordable prices - or you might want to camp - full details will be sent.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

20 SEPTEMBER - ANNE GAY, author of *MINDSAIL*, talks to the BSFG in the month that her second novel, *THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT* is published (Orbit hardback, £13.95). Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./ Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre's "China Town" area.

18 OCTOBER - KEN CAMPBELL, renowned theatrical director and bit part actor, will (hopefully) be talking to the BSFG (still to be confirmed). Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./ Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre.

1-3 NOVEMBER - NOVACON 21, the annual convention organized by the BSFG at the Excelsior Hotel, Coventry Road (by the Cargo Airport). GoH COLIN GREENLAND. Attending £15.00 BEFORE 19th OCTOBER, membership is FREE to anyone who has attended ALL of the first 20 Novacons. Cheques made payable to "Novacon 21" should be sent to: BERNIE EVANS, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

2 NOVEMBER - Between noon and 2pm there will be a joint signing session at Andromeda Bookshop: LOUISE COOPER will be signing copies of *AVATAR*, the latest book in her "Indigo" series and COLIN GREENLAND will be signing copies of his award winning novel *TAKE BACK PLENTY*.

11 or 12 NOVEMBER - Possible special meeting of the BSFG and/or Signing Session at Andromeda Bookshop featuring DAN SIMMONS. Watch this space for further details as they are confirmed.

15 NOVEMBER - The BSFG's annual debate with a team from the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./ Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre.

16 NOVEMBER - TERRY PRATCHETT will be signing at Andromeda Bookshop from 10.30am. Also sometime in November it is hoped that JOSH KIRBY will be signing copies of his new book from Paper Tiger. Call 643 1999 to confirm details of these and other signing sessions.

20 DECEMBER - No "formal" BSFG meeting this month, although there will be a Christmas meal at the Wagon & Horses in Oldbury. Space is limited so you will need to book early. Contact Martin Tudor ASAP if you are interested, it will be a set meal at around £12 to £16 per head.

17 JANUARY 1992 - BSFG AGM and Auction to raise money for the Group. If you have any Auction material please contact a committee member.

FEBRUARY 1992 - GREG BEAR has been in touch to say that he would like to speak to us this month. Further details as they are confirmed.



The 45th Jophan Report

Dave Langford was again the sole British recipient of a Hugo Award picking up his fifth Hugo for Best Fan Writer (making six Hugos in total as he received a Hugo for editing the Best Fanzine in 1987). His award was collected on his behalf by TAFF winner Pam Wells at Chicon V, the 49th World SF Con, at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago over the weekend of the 29 August to 2 September 1991.

The Hugo Award for Best Novel went to Lois McMaster Bujold's *THE VOR GAME* (Baen), Best Novella to "The Hemingway Hoax" by Joe Haldeman (*ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE*, April 1990), Best Novelette went to "The Manamouki" by Mike Resnick (*IASFM*, July 1990), and Terry Bisson's "Bears Discover Fire" (*IASFM*, July 1990) picked up the award for Best Short Story. The Best Non-Fiction Book was *HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY* by Orson Scott Card (Writer's Digest Books), Best Dramatic Presentation went to *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*, Best Professional Editor to Gardner Dozois and Best Professional Artist to Michael Whelan.

George Laskowski's *LAN'S LANTERN* won Best Fanzine, Teddy Harvia picked up Best Fan Artist and Best Semi-Prozine went to *LOCUS*, edited by Charles N Brown. A special award was presented by the convention committee to Andrew Porter for *SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE*

immediately after the presentation of Brown's sixteenth Hugo, with Porter announcing that everyone should read his editorial in the next *SFC* to see what he thinks of the Hugo Awards system. The John W Campbell Award went to Julia Ecklar. A full list of all of this years Hugo nominees appeared in the June edition of *BRUM GROUP NEWS*. [Many thanks to Pam Wells for supplying me with the above results.]

The 1992 Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) Race which will select a North American fan to attend Illumination, the 43rd British National SF Convention, at Easter in 1992 has begun. The race is between fan writer Jeanne Bowman from San Francisco and fan editor and con runner Richard Brandt from Texas. Ballot forms and voting fees should be returned to the relevant administrator by 15 January 1992. The address of the North American Administrator is: Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA, the British Administrator is: Pam Wells, 24A Beech Road, Bowes Park, London, N11 2DA.

Production of Francis Ford Coppola's version of *DRACULA* will finally start in October. The original designer Dante Ferretti has left due to "budgetary differences" and has been replaced by Tom Sanders (designer on *HOOK*).

On the set of *HOOK* Steven Spielberg is reportedly so concerned about the behaviour and lacklustre performance of Julia Roberts that he has been lining up potential replacements. The names of Meg Ryan and Michelle Pfeiffer have been mentioned, the latter having already been smuggled in to wardrobe for a Tinkerbell costume fitting.

Featuring Robin Williams as Peter Pan and Dustin Hoffman in the title role, *HOOK* was originally scheduled for completion in July, delayed until August and rumour has it is still in production.

Mark Frost has dispelled rumours that he and David Lynch are working on a movie version of the cult television series *TWIN PEAKS*, which faded out with more loose ends than a bowl of spaghetti.

Leonard Nimoy will receive more than £1 million for his appearance in a one-off episode of *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* in November, British viewers will see it sometime next year.

Godzilla fans will be pleased to hear that *GODZILLA VERSUS KING GHIDRA* started

shooting in Tokyo in May, despite the fact that we have yet to see *GODZILLA VERSUS BIOLLANTE* - reportedly completed, and originally scheduled for release, in 1989.

Michelle Pfeiffer will play Catwoman in *BATMAN II*, beating tough competition from the likes of Annette Bening (a front runner until she became pregnant with Warren Beatty's baby), Ellen Barkin, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Lena Olin.

The classic Anderson tv puppet show *THUNDERBIRDS* returns to our screens on Friday 20 September, BBC2 at 6pm. The first time in 20 years that the 32, weekly, 50 minute episodes have been repeated.

Co-creator Gerry Anderson, 62, recently revealed that the show's catchphrase "FAB" didn't mean anything, "It was just a trendy word at the time and we decided to use it. Everyone has been trying to work it out ever since."

SANDY BROWN, 49, long-time membership secretary of the British SF Association died of a heart attack while on holiday in France on 18 July.

Publisher of the popular fanzine *INDIAN SCOUT* and a well known and well loved attendee at numerous conventions, Sandy was instrumental in creating the first two Scottish conventions, the Faircons, in the 1970s. He leaves a wife, Helen, and daughter, Elspeth, to whom we offer our condolences.

The Seventh Birmingham International Film and Television Festival will held at several sites throughout the city from 20 September to 5 October.

Amongst the items which might be of interest to Brum Group members are screenings of *ROBIN HOOD* at 3pm on Wednesday 25 September and *DEATHWATCH* at 3pm on Friday 27th September at the Triangle, and the MAC Writer's Workshop's "Scripting a Feature Film" with Hugh Stoddart, between 10am and 6pm on Saturday 5 October.

Call the Festival Office on (021) 766 6707 for further information.

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As usual news for the Jophan Report has been supplied by *CRITICAL WAVE* except where otherwise stated. *CRITICAL WAVE*, Britain's only independent sf, fantasy and horror news and reviews magazine, is available for £1.95 per copy or 6 issues for £7.50 from: 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.



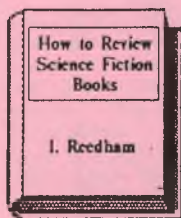
KEY TO CAR PARKS

*Multi-Storey
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|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Brindley Drive* | 7. Brunel Street* | 12. Moat Lane* | 18. Gt. Charles Street |
| 2. Civic Centre | 8. Royal Mail/Street | 13. Albert Street | 19. Ludgate Hill |
| 3. Holliday Street* | 9. Dudley Street | 14. Masshouse Circus | 20. Lionel Street |
| 4. Blucher Street | 10. Hurst Street | 15. Newhall Hill | 21. St. Chads Circus |
| 5. Irving Street | 11. Pershore Street* | 16. Snow Hill | 22. Bath Street |
| 6. Navigation Street | | 17. Livery Street* | 23. Cregoe Street |

**THE AUSTRALIAN BAR,
ON THE CORNER OF
HURST STREET &
BROMSGROVE STREET.**

Entering through the Lounge Bar you walk through to the stairs, past the bar on your right, our Function Room is Upstairs.



Book Reviews

MINDSAIL by Anne Gay
Orbit, 378pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

Anne Gay's first novel MINDSAIL is set on the planet Rosaria and tells the story of Tohalla, an apparently barren woman and thus a failure in the community of the Green. It tells of her escape from the Green with her lover, Ain Tsui and his friend Edrach, and their subsequent search for the Ship which brought the planet's inhabitants from 'Erth'.

This is a fascinating novel which presents the development of several societies after the crash landing of the Ship and the subsequent fragmentation of those societies. In MINDSAIL Gay examines the ways in which the corruption of language can easily obscure knowledge. She has adopted an interesting style of writing to illustrate this point, which although off-putting at first is by no means indigestible and serves to emphasize the difficulties faced by the protagonists in understanding their own recent history and the world where they live.

Large numbers of the descendants of the crew and officers of the Ship have developed a nomadic hunter and gatherer society, roaming Rosaria in search of the Ship with only the corrupted logs of the first officers to lead them, these are 'the True Crew'. Those who don't want to continue this search split off into smaller groups known as 'mutinas'. The descendants of the other survivors of the crash have split into two groups. The Greens - who are attempting to destroy the native red plantation of the planet and replace it with the green vegetation of Erth. We are told little of the other society, the Iron Men, other than the fact that their society is probably the most barbaric and they have retained the knowledge of how to use metal.

However, I do have reservations about the final third of the novel, unless I'm missing some subtle point it does not appear to belong with the first two thirds of the novel. Tohalla, hearing about a second ship called 'the Drone Ship', sets out to find it on her own. Her adventures with the survivors

of the Drone Ship, which include her introduction to the dubious benefits of the the 'Mindsails' of the title, read like an almost totally unconnected story. I found this change in pace and style quite jarring and while I recognize that the central theme of communication is still being examined here, albeit in a different way, I remain unconvinced that it is a at home here.

But despite the weak ending and the questions which remain unresolved (there is ample opportunity for a sequel), MINDSAIL is on the whole a mature, powerful and fascinating, beautifully written work, exhibiting an extraordinary verve and confidence for a first novel.

THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT by Anne Gay
Orbit, 455pp, £13.95, h/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

I imagine everyone has been in situations when they have thought "Now if I had just known he/she was going to do/say that I would've been able to handle it..." Well, in Gay's Spiderglass universe it is possible to have such "imminence", the ability to analyse innumerable signals and factors instantly and thus predict accurately what will happen next. Unfortunately there is a price to be paid...

Gay's second novel is at once a taut, tightly plotted sf thriller and an interesting examination of the nature of free will. THE BROOCH OF AZURE MIDNIGHT is set in a near-future universe after the discovery of "spiderglass" has revolutionized life in the solar system.

Spiderglass is produced by genetically changing the bodies and conditions of spiders so that they produce fibres like glass, "monofilament, but with logarithmic progressions of possibilities of strength and flexibility, and the ability to resonate light-particles or sound-waves undistorted, scarcely weakened over thousands of miles. Who said the arachnids had to be totally organic? Who said their glassy strands should be wholly of what was called silk? Alter gravity and you could lose the limitations of size. A single thread that could tower to the silver eye of the moon - if you could convince the spider of its need to do it."

So, with control of spiderglass which is as "hard as steel, ductile as silk, proof against corrosion or the endless cold of space", the interplanetary Spiderglass Combine becomes the most influential of the incredibly powerful conglomerates which rule the solar system. But make no mistake the future which Gay presents is truly horrific.

On Mars starving, disfigured students struggle to meet impossible quotas to pay for their studies or face a lifetime of servitude as 'towers' to one of the corporations. 'Towers' are mind-controlling devices surgically implanted into the skulls of employees to enhance their performance by linking them with the super-computers of the corporations.

On distant virtually abandoned colonies, whole populations are scratching a living trying to grow food in barren and hostile alien soil. Ignoring the plight of most of mankind the corporations battle each other for control of the solar system, while within the boardrooms of these inter-planetary corporations the directors plot against each other. Until eventually the increasingly ruthless and vicious boardroom battles threaten to cause all out war.

BROOCH concerns itself with the stories of three people caught up in this chaos. Karel Tjerssen, the youngest member of the Board of Spiderglass and two of his pawns, Jezrael and Chesarynth Brown. This is a fascinating, gripping novel, as beautifully written as Gay's first but with far tighter plotting. The story rips along at a tremendous pace, with mind-boggling ideas appearing on every page. I intend to re-read it at the earliest opportunity and eagerly await Gay's next work.

HIDE & SEEK by Paul Preuss
Pan, 274pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

In this third instalment of Arthur C Clarke's "Venus Prime" series Paul Preuss takes the reader to Mars. To Ellen Troy, aka Sparta of the Board of Space Control. Mars is the start of a puzzle concerning two murders and the disappearance of the enigmatic Martian plaque. The following cat and mouse struggle between Sparta and the Athanasians, a quasi religious group, over the Culture X artifact leads from the Martian landscape to the moon of Phobos.

HIDE & SEEK is a workmanlike story from Paul Preuss, but it is definitely a lightweight novel which lacks any real fire; even with the 16 pages of computer graphics inserted in the middle. How much Arthur C Clarke contributed to this novel is open to question, but it is a readable story nevertheless.

CHUNG KUO - BOOK TWO: THE BROKEN WHEEL by David Wingrove
NEL, 520pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by David A Hardy.

If you read and enjoyed Book One, then you will most probably want to read this volume - but bear in mind this is no trilogy, there are

another six volumes to go! David Wingrove has amazed me with this epic. I have known for years that he was a good writer, but to take on a fictional project with such scope, knowing that he has to commit himself for many years ahead, is remarkable.

The scene is Earth just after the turn of the 22nd century. "Chung Kuo" means "The Middle Kingdom", or China, and the Chinese (or Han) rule the Earth. Put baldly, the theme is familiar; there is stagnation, all progress has stopped, but a few people want to change all that. There is terrorism, violence, murder and a lot of politics (and some confusing Chinese names), but the author portrays a believable future. I'm glad I shan't be there.

WULF by Steve Harris
Headline, 440pp, £14.95, h/b

Reviewed by Lynne M Edwards.

"Make your protagonist a sympathetic character" is the advice given to writers, but Steve Harris fails to do this when he introduces us to James "Heater" Heatley in the second chapter of WULF. After an intriguing first chapter I felt like putting the book down, irritated by unnecessary foul language and gratuitous descriptions of vomiting and drunkenness. This chapter is one of the poorest in a mainly well-written tale of ancient evil affecting modern Britain by making BSE infect humans. Local legends, old and new, creep in to take their part in this mainly psychological horror. The characters are well drawn, although many of them seem to share the same limited vocabulary, and the tale moves swiftly enough, despite the flashbacks and wealth of detail that all too often isn't really needed by intelligent readers. An interesting book, it kept me awake - reading it! If you like horror, buy it; if you're not sure, borrow it first.

WAY OF THE CLANS by Robert Thurston
ROC, 284pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

This is the first volume in a series entitled "Legend of the Jade Phoenix" set in a universe based on the best selling game from FASA, BATTLETECH. The setting is the 31st century where BattleMechs, the ultimate war machines, and the Clans, the ultimate warriors, rampage through the universe.

The story, such as it is, details the trials and tribulations of Aidan in his attempt to become a warrior of the Clan Jade Falcon. A below average adventure story.

GALEN BEKNIGHTED by Michael Williams

Penguin/TSR, 317pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is Dragonlance Heroes II Volume Three, (from which I guess these books are still selling). I quite enjoyed the first of them, *WEASEL'S LUCK*, in which renowned coward, lion and thief Weasel is confronted with the noble ideals of the Salambric Knights. Unfortunately the "reformed" Weasel is a far less interesting character. Yet another crazed wizard threatens the land, and Weasel reluctantly sets out to stop him. The story is too bloodthirsty to be funny, and not funny enough to be... erm.

Let's put it another way. If you stop buying these books, the publishers will stop printing them.

PHASES OF GRAVITY by Dan Simmons

Headline, 344 pp, £4.50 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

The praise for Dan Simmons' latest opus is long and loud, I'm sorry that I cannot join in the universal congratulations for the author of this piece of CRAP. *PHASES OF GRAVITY* is a total hodgepodge of disjointed flashbacks and mystic mumbojumbo, that occur in the life of the central character Richard Baedecker, ex-astronaut and seeker after the "places of power". Maybe Dan Simmons knows what he is trying to say, but he is not saying it in this novel. The book is virtually unreadable and incomprehensible. This is not recommended.

CREED by James Herbert

NEL, 364pp, £4.50, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Not many authors can get away with informing the reader on the first page that the hero of their novel is a thoroughly unsavoury piece of work - a sleaze of the First Order. James Herbert does. Joseph Creed is a paparazzo. This is the type of photographer that the celebrated go to great lengths to avoid. His stock in trade is the compromising picture, the shot of the ungainly side of royalty, the stars at their worst.

Creed is one of the best of his kind - a fact that makes him despised by the famous and colleagues alike - and this time it leads him into trouble. Secreted in a mausoleum in a cemetery he takes pictures of the funeral of Lily Nevertheless, a great star in her time. He expects well-known theatre and film personalities to be there. What he doesn't expect is the late-arriving mourner who

appears to carry out obscene acts over the newly filled-in grave. His curiosity roused, Creed attempts to identify the man and finds himself the target of various attacks. Someone wants the film. Creed is a sceptic. He does not believe in the supernatural and at first he finds plausible, rational explanations for what is happening to him. Only later does he begin to suspect that there is more involved.

Creed is an extremely realistic character. He is unscrupulous, but we were warned of that. He is thoroughly unlikeable, and it is a measure of Herbert's story-telling skill that our sympathies remain with him to the end. It also raises *CREED* well above the usual level of dross that pollutes the bookshops under the label of horror.

DRAGONSPELL IV: THE SOUTHERN SEA by Katharine Kerr

Grafton, 495pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the fourth and last book in the "Deverry" series. Rhodry is given sorcerous amnesia and sold into slavery in the Bardekian Archipelago. His lover Jill and half-brother Salamander go searching for him, while the secret rulers of Bardek, the Dark Brotherhood of evil magicians, prepare their fatal plots.

As always Kerr's realistic depiction of Celtic feudalism is absorbing, and the "dweomer" is a spiritual force, rather than a substitute for technology. The only jarring point is where she describes the dweomer in modern "new Age" terminology. Apart from that, this is a series to be highly recommended.

TEKWAR by William Shatner

Corgi, 300pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by David B Wake.

When I mentioned to a friend, also a Dave, that I was reviewing this book, he asked me what it was like. "It's alright", I replied, but you can't really write that as a review.

This is a cyber-nice-person book, concerning a "computer" drug called "Tek" and a detective versus drug barons saga. (There's a bit more to it than that, of course.) Tek is the silicon chips which produce a fantasy when "read", using a brainbox. However, for some reason, they only work once. Tek addicts are called "tekkies", which makes it impossible to forget that the author is Captain Kirk, even if you can get past the blurb on the front cover and attempt to judge the book on its own merits. Especially when tekkies are

described as, well, addicts "There was a gaunt young woman, her skin pale and bluish and her eyes staring and deeply underscored with shadows." What is the subtext here?

The hero of the book thinks in "quotes"; it's as if the character is talking out loud all the time. Very disturbing when he's sneaking up on some baddies. It has got some nice touches though, especially the double meetings, first with an android copy and then with the real person.

The adverts at the back mention *TEK LORDS*. I'd read it, so that's got to be a recommendation for this. I hope William Shatner is given a chance to make it as an author, and isn't used up by the grey suits trying to rip us all off for a few fast bucks.

ALEPH by Storm Constantine
Orbit, 314pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the sequel to *THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT* but can be easily read in isolation, the pertinent facts from the first volume being skillfully blended with the narrative. The world is Artemis, colonised three hundred years previously by women who were tired of being treated as inferior. As a result the men become the subjugated sex. The rebellion at the end of *THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT* ended the total domination of the women's hereditary leader, the Dominatrix, and the planet's isolationism. Part of *ALEPH* continues the story of Corinna Trogtarden, her family and friends and the others that followed them away from the influence of Silven Crescent, the power centre of Artemis. They have set up a democratic community which they call Freespace. Many of them still have problems that are a legacy of their lives under the dominion of the Dominatrix. The way they seek solutions is governed by Corinna's discovery of a cave, the ambience of which seems to provide her with visions of the history of an intelligent species that may have once occupied the planet.

To Artemis comes Zy Larrigan. His job is to check out the planet as a potential tourist resort for the rich of the rest of the inhabited galaxy. This is his last chance as he has messed up his previous jobs. He is at a disadvantage because he is male. But whatever Corinna has awoken in the cave causes his survey craft to crash near Freespace, introducing a further element to the plot.

The story is slickly told, and the world of Artemis intricately imagined. Slowly, the true nature of the Greylids, mythical natives

of the planet, is revealed. The book contains some of the mysticism that characterized parts of Constantine's "Wraethu" trilogy, and although it does not have the same power which that had, it is still worth reading as a good example of creative science fiction.

A TIME OF EXILE by Katharine Kerr
Grafton, 353pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Thirty years after the events in the "Deverry" series comes the "Westlands Cycle". As a half-elf Rhodry has not aged, and his subjects are getting suspicious. He decides to fake his death, and leave ruling Aberwyn to his eldest son.

As in the "Deverry" series, much of the story is told in flashbacks to the characters' previous lives. Aderyn the Dweomerman is in love with the elf Dallandra, who is obsessed with the mystery of the Guardians, powerful but incomplete spirits. Kerr explains in the introduction to *DRAGONSPPELL* (oddly the only book that does not have flashbacks) that telling the story in a non-linear fashion reflects the magical tradition that you don't necessarily have to move in a straight line to reach your destination.

Overall this is good solid adventure fiction with more depth of characterization and background than usual in fantasy. Highly recommended

THE PEOPLE COLLECTION by Zenna Henderson
Corgi, 594 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The "People" of the title are aliens, human to all outward appearance, but possessing superhuman mental powers - levitation, teleportation, telepathy and other more subtle abilities. They have come to Earth in flight from the destruction (unexplained) of their home planet and these stories tell of their attempts to live undetected in rural mid-western America.

As well as their mental powers, they have a more than ordinary share of such qualities as love, compassion, helpfulness and general all-round goodness - in fact they are almost too good to be true. The stories have been criticized as being too sentimental, but there is surely a place for sentiment in SF as in other literature, and as much so now as when they were originally written. Above all, what we have here is a superb example of the real function of sf in holding up an alien mirror in which we can see a better reflection of our own humanity.

This is the first time that every one of the sixteen stories about the People have been collected together in book form. In this form they tend toward repetition and become rather heavy going, but the publishers have nevertheless done a great service in making this collection available. It should be on every fan's shelf.

THE HEIRS OF HAMMERFELL by Marion Zimmer Bradley
Legend, 300 pp, £3.99, p/b
Reviewed by Steve Jones.

The first all-new "Darkover" novel for quite a few years turns out to be a less momentous event than it should have been. It tells how a feud between mountain dukedoms leaves twin boys orphaned and separated, so that they grow up each believing himself to be the only heir. It goes without saying that they get together again, resolve the feud and live happily ever after. The first three quarters of the book is well written, as is only to be expected from an author of Bradley's stature, and holds the attention, but the ending issudden and anti-climatic. Even so, this doesn't detract from a book which is quite good in itself as a work of fantasy rather than sf. However, it adds virtually nothing to the history of Darkover which was so dramatically recounted twenty and more years ago. Perhaps it is time the Darkover series was pronounced complete.

RATS AND GARGOYLES by Mary Gentle
Corgi, 507 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Peter Day.

When reviewing this book, several reviewers took it on themselves to remark that, for some time now, we've all been awaiting the arrival of a new kind of fantasy novel, and then went on to announce that RATS AND GARGOYLES was the book in question. Well, in all honesty I can't say that I, personally, have ever spent any time waiting for any particular type of book to come along, and I'm quite certain I never shall - that's all, to my mind, just a load of pretentious hogwash.

However, after reading this volume, I'm forced to confess that something of the sort has indeed occurred, because this is a deeply strange novel. Set in a vast, labyrinthine city where Rats are lords and humans are the underclass - and, above all of these, the thirty-six Gods who lurk out of sight within the Fane, an enormous temple-fortress forever under further construction. It is a highly complex, eruditely-written novel with a multi-stranded plot whose storylines and subplots

interweave and interconnect seemingly without end. The politics of this city are Byzantine beyond belief, and tension mounts unbearably as the various schemes of the many factions simultaneously come to a head.

But it's enormous fun to read. Full of strangeness, but with never a dull moment, this is a teeming, bustling, earthy world, with its own bizarre natural laws - and yet, always giving one an odd sense of familiarity that's hard to pin down. It's packed with larger-than-life characters, some only slightly so, others gloriously, grotesquely over the top, and the author never fails to deliver the totally unexpected at every juncture. If this is the result when Mary Gentle turns her already formidable talents to the writing of fantasy novels, then I want more of it. And more.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE by Mary Gentle
Bantam, 192 pp, £13.99 h/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

At first glance this might be taken as a sequel to RATS AND GARGOYLES, featuring as it does Valentine White Crow and the Lord Architect Casaubon. They have left The City At The Heart Of The World to live in England at the Roseveare family estate, which Valentine left some eighteen years previously, and the story opens with a summons to London, where Casaubon's engineering experience is required.

It gradually becomes apparent that what should be familiar ground - England under the Protectorate - is not familiar at all. Magical spells and devices work on an everyday basis and the heads of traitors spiked on poles on Southwark Bridge are maintained alive to confess their crimes to passers-by. Meanwhile famous figures like Isaac Newton and William Harvey turn up in unfamiliar contexts of astrology and stranger arts, and a werewolf prowls the night-time streets before changing into a priest to participate in a scientific meeting.

More conspicuously, King Charles has become Queen Carola and Oliver Cromwell has become Olivia. So, an alternative universe?, almost certainly, but a feminist one? Perhaps not, despite these and other hints, although one could never doubt that this was written by a woman. Rather than science fiction or fantasy per se it is a story of personal relationships and conflicts set against a fabulist background.

It is Valentine's story, as her life is shaped and developed through interaction with people and situations. She has to weigh her

status as a wealthy landowner, her love for her husband and children and her situation as a Master Physician of the Invisible College against her obvious preference for her previous life as a Scholar-Soldier. Her choice has little connection with events in *RATS AND GARGOYLES* and this is not really a sequel, except insofar as the previous novel, plus the stories "Beggars in Satin" and "The Knot Garden", help to illumine who White Crow is and where she is coming from. Less laced with arcane and obscure symbols than the earlier work *THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE* is a much more accessible novel, but nevertheless not at all a simple one, leaving the reader remembering and pondering long after closing the covers for the last time. "The story is ended but the mystery lingers on". Except of course that the story, like life, is not ended - Valentine steps from the bottom of the last page into whatever her future holds and we shall have to follow if we can.

AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE by James Blish
Legend, 730 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This presents for the first time in one volume Blish's trilogy concerning the moral use of knowledge and the dilemma therein. Citing an ancient philosophical question regarding possession and use of knowledge as in itself evil, Blish undertakes to dramatize its different aspects in three locales.

In *DOCTOR MIRABILIS* he pursues this dilemma by dealing with the life of Roger Bacon. The conditions and restrictions under which Bacon worked provide an exact analogy of the question. Thirteenth century ideas and the influences of the Church prove an interesting background for Blish's historical novel, his creativity bringing Bacon's work into perspective to the extent he seems, as the title suggests, a miracle worker.

The second novel contains two separate elements. *BLACK EASTER* and *THE DAY AFTER JUDGEMENT* explore the concept of black magic within a contemporary setting. A powerful man, using a black magician, brings about Armageddon - not, in fact, his aim but (for him) an unexpected bonus. *BLACK EASTER* closes with the war going in favour of Hell. However not all is as it seems and in *THE DAY AFTER JUDGEMENT* we see Strategic Air Command in Denver fighting back - once they realise (and believe) who the Enemy is. An exceptional interpretation of man's reaction to such events.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE completes the trilogy. Set in the future and dealing with

the discovery of sentient alien life, the dilemma follows two tracks - the argument of the integration of the planet/aliens into Earth's influence, and a priest's fear that the aliens are "bait" from evil to disprove the existence of God. The first part, on the planet itself (Lithia), explains the fauna and flora, concluding with the individual research team members' efforts to sway Earth by their reasons to open up or quarantine the planet. The clever rearranging of several pages within this section fails to mar the story or its continuity. Part two follows the team back to Earth, with the "specimen" alien presented to them to "study". This alien, Egtverchi, proves both a quandary and an enigma; firstly by not conforming outside of his natural habitat, and secondly by inciting the peoples of Earth to rebel.

Superbly written and reasoned, Blish often produced stories of enviable depth and character, and this trilogy has all his hallmarks, providing an entertaining, thought provoking and enjoyable read.

STAR WARS: HEIR TO THE EMPIRE by Timothy Zahn
Bantam, 361pp, £9.99, h/b
Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Although initially I found this book a little hard to get into, perhaps because the characters have become icons of today's SF, I found this less intrusive as the story unfolded.

The tale begins five years after the events in *RETURN OF THE JEDI*. Luke is a Jedi Master, Han and Leia married (to each other) and Leia pregnant, carrying twins with Jedi powers. The leaders of the rebellion are now in government, and trying to bring stability to the Galaxy after the fall of the Emperor.

However, one of the old warlords, Grand Admiral Thrawn, has gathered about him what is left of the Imperial fleet and is forming a rebellion of his own against the Alliance. Thrawn allies himself with a Jedi Master of the dark side of the force, promising to deliver Luke, Leia and company to the dark side of the force.

The old familiar characters are dealing with the unfamiliar situation of being in legal government, but they use their old familiar methods. Han is still a pirate at heart, Lando a rogue, Luke an introspective loner and Leia is still the feisty token female, and I'm not too sure that it works anymore. *STAR WARS* did give popular SF a shot in the arm, but the genre has moved on since 1977 and I don't think this story has. Perhaps it would have been best to let *STAR WARS* rest in peace rather than resurrect it.

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